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To
A Pair Of Bright Eyes
Laughing Under A Green Hat

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

"**THERE'S** the mission," said the Rev. Ainsley Simon, briskly waving his hand at the middle distance. Having said which he slowly came to a stop, and began mopping his forehead with a coarse white handkerchief which he took from his baggy pockets.

"Oh," ejaculated young Mr. Hancock a little doubtfully in response. He gazed long and carefully. "Oh," he said a second time more slowly, as if, on reflection, he had really found that that exclamation fitly summarized his entire impressions.

The prospect was perhaps a little curious for a young man, who had been bundled so fast from England to this distant up-country station, that he had not had time to sort out and arrange his general impressions—let alone make up his mind quite definitely about any one specific fact. Everything was new to him here; for eight quick weeks he had been confronted with nothing but novelties, and in this land the novelties were more arresting than any he had ever seen.

Their rapid walk — for the Rev. Ainsley Simon was full of physical energy—had carried them far inland from the lazy river which now lay in the distant background, a winding streak of yellow, dotted with brownish-white junk sails, which stood out clearly against the green-clad banks of the opposite shore. The little hill, which they had just breasted, was surrounded by far-spreading paddy-grounds, in which the young green rice was beginning to sprout in

a still mirror-like water. Just below the hill lay an untidy mud-coloured village, teeming with pigs and chickens and naked children, and ending as suddenly and as confusedly as it had commenced. Beyond were some clumps of irresolute-looking trees, together with a few grave-mounds, in which lay venerable ancestors. And then—perhaps half a mile away as the crow flies — was the mission to which the Rev. Ainsley Simon had just invited attention.

The mission was new — brand new—and perhaps that was just why it seemed so singularly ugly, so out of place in this very old and lackadaisical world. The mission was also palpably unfinished, and that was another reason why even from a distance it produced a peculiar first impression. The high compound-wall, which should have completely enclosed the mission lands, terminated abruptly on the side nearest the two men in a great, yawning, untidy, menacing gap; and of the four tall mission houses—tall because everything here was flat and as if built into the landscape—only one was completely finished, the rest being surrounded by shiftless scaffolding. The little mission chapel was also palpably a mere makeshift barn of a church, with its corrugated iron roof

crowned by a melancholy and unconvincing cross—surely a dolorous enough place of worship. The mission clearly proclaimed itself an invader — an alien —a very foreign thing. It was possible to imagine all sorts of things when one looked at the mission; but most of all did a curious sense of its moral oppression, of its unfitness, overweigh one.

As he surveyed the scene, young Paul Hancock instinctively grasped something of this without really understanding what it might be that disconcerted him; and that is why his comment had been so laconic. In any case there appeared to him to be something dreadfully incongruous between the ideal which the Rev. Ainsley Simon's brisk,

cheerful voice seemed to postulate and the unlovely reality. The Rev. Ainsley Simon's voice implied, "You have arrived. Here is our dear little haven of rest; here is the place which will soon become your alma mater. From here you may easily proceed to the conquest of the seemingly impossible." Yet, frankly, the mission was hideous and totally unimpressive. So Paul Hancock leaned heavily on his stick and breathed deeply, trying to persuade himself that he was merely a little surprised. For this was to be his home for a long time — perhaps for many years—and his heart had suddenly become sad within him. Here he was to labour and have his being—here— here — just here. It would be well to accustom himself to the idea at once.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Hancock?" continued the Rev. Ainsley Simon when he had mopped away all the humidity which his physical exertions had deposited on his furrowed brow. There was now something oddly jarring to the young man in this briskness. It was out of place, optimistic, absurd. "Let me have your opinion—your frank opinion. I am a great believer in frankness. Frankness is splendid — almost a virtue one might say."

The Rev. Ainsley Simon, having delivered himself of this dubious pronouncement, turned his keen eyes on his companion and studied his face as if to surprise his innermost thoughts. There was a certain irony in the action which did not escape the young man. It was just what his companion's appearance might have led him to expect. The Rev. Ainsley Simon looked short because he was so thick-set — he was a burly man, in fact ; and yet his brown beard set off a face on which was stamped a curious mixture of resolution, overcast by the spirit of compromise. Standing there in his white duck trousers, his semi-clerical coat of black alpaca, and his heavy sun-helmet, he seemed the personification of many negative virtues.

"I think," said Paul Hancock, trying hard to be frank and yet severely diplomatic, "that the mission is very well situated, but a little — well, just a little unfinished."

"Really," replied the Rev. Ainsley Simon shortly, as if he were oddly surprised with such a commonplace summary of the manifest. He took his eyes from the young man and fixed them once more on the distant mission. Then he gave a deep sigh: "I find your description singularly correct, Mr. Hancock. All would be well, perfectly well, were it not for the lack

of funds — this sad, never-ending lack of funds."

Young Mr. Hancock had apparently exhausted all his small talk; for now he stood alternately observing the mission and the man who was talking about it in resigned silence.

"The land is well-raised high above the paddy-fields," continued the Rev. Ainsley Simon presently, pitching his voice as if he were delivering an extemporized address, "and, of course, that cost us a pretty penny. But it had to be done or else there would have been no health in us. Nothing but fever in fact, and when one has fever even the Great Cause seems a profitless thing." He paused and once more applied his coarse handkerchief to his forehead. Then he resumed more gravely, "I fear fever and all it means is not understood in the home lands. Though I explained the matter fully—most fully—in long, careful letters, the Board has been much vexed with me and has not troubled to hide its vexation. I have been told that I must wait my turn for further moneys to complete the buildings. Yet what could I do in the first instance? Had I not raised the land high above the paddy-fields life would have been unbearable, quite unbearable. Have you ever had fever, Mr. Hancock?"

The Rev. Ainsley Simon asked the question so sharply

and unexpectedly at the end of his rambling delivery, that the young man coloured with sudden embarrassment.

"Well," he said, "I have had fever as a boy; but nothing much, of course—nothing like what you must have out here."

The Rev. Ainsley Simon sighed and suddenly grasped his stick in both his hands with a movement full of supplication.

"Fever is terrible. In a few hours it can turn the man of iron into the queerest person in the world; it can fill the brain with hideous thoughts; make one bestial, brutal, homocidal. Oh, how well I know it! And then, all at once, just to show its strange potency, its vile mastery, it can make one weep like a woman all through the day and night because one is so weak — so very weak and frail … Oh, how I hate it!"

He turned passionately and suddenly realized the distress on the younger man's face. Like magic he changed his tone.

"What am I doing, what am I saying?" he exclaimed briskly as if he were chiding himself. "Tut, tut, tut, I sometimes let my tongue and my imagination run away with me, I very much fear — a state of affairs doubtless arising from our somewhat solitary existence in these parts. Forget what I have said, Mr. Hancock, about the fever; it is not good to remember. I trust you may never have it. Nowadays we take care of our men; it is not like

in the old days, when lives were carelessly thrown away. Come, come, let us to home." And once more the Rev. Ainsley Simon, abandoning his moralizing, set off at his fast pace.

They entered the village beneath the hill, talking only in snatches about the serious things, as if they were both on their guard. "There was much to do in China," said the Rev. Ainsley Simon. "An Augean stable had to be cleaned; the people raised, uplifted; taught independent faith in God.

It was a great task; yet there were amusing things to be noted." He branched off into some anecdotes, returning to the main subject, as if it were a vague something in the background which it was best to step gingerly round. Only occasionally did he glance at his companion to see how he was taking it all. But the younger man was now on his guard and his face conveyed nothing.

As they passed through the village, the little naked children, abandoning their mud and their improvised playthings, ran into doorways, shouting their terror at these strange comers, because the white man has been christened "devil," and by the very ignorant and the very young this apellation is held to be well deserved. The pigs and the fowls joined in this wild stampede, not because they were frightened, but because they had grown up as brothers and sisters to the little naked ones and were accustomed to do exactly as they did. Only the dogs stood their ground after an initial period of doubt. Yet, barking and snarling, they viewed the two intruders in the self-same spirit of hostility.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon had walked so often through the village that he quite failed to notice this customary commotion. It had become part of his environment, as natural to him as the paddy-fields and the isolation and the pensive landscape. Not so, however, young Mr. Hancock. It was all new to him — very new; and as he sniffed the sudden stenches from the village cesspools, and stumbled over the piles of things carelessly thrown down wherever there was a free space, and caught glimpses of the timid women and girls peeping from their narrow paper windows, for some reason his heart grew less sad within him.

Everything was so human, so close to nature. Here was work, a great deal of work, at the very mission gates, he thought, because he was very young and could not see his

lack of logic. What could not be done with energy and sympathy when he knew a little of the language! He wondered how he would feel about it in a month, in a year. In all truth, Mr. Simon was right; this first village was nothing but a stable. It needed to be swept clean to commence with, and then, when that had been done, perhaps the mothers and the children, and the rude tillers of the soil now returning from their fields with their backs bared and their hands mud-stained, would not look upon him as an enemy to be held at arm's length, if not actually to be destroyed.

“Yes,” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon, just then going on with his conversation undisturbed by any such thoughts, “the seasons are quite different from what you have been accustomed to, my young friend, in our far-off England. Summer and spring between them take about nine months, and there are only three months of autumn and winter at the most. Mark me well — only ninety days of really cool weather — not cold but only cool weather; and then the beginning of the dog-days once more. Ah, here we are at the end of this singularly dirty village.”

The road, which had been quite broad enough through the village, suddenly narrowed once more to a winding foot-path, hardened as if it had been metalled by the endless passage of sandalled feet. On either side of the pathway, dug deep down so as to hold the water, lay the paddy-fields, each little oblong patch divided off from its neighbour by a thick rim of earthwork, which permitted a different water-level to be maintained as the state of each crop necessitated. A group of mud-splashed men in the middle distance were even now lifting a small wooden water-wheel which they had just been using and carrying it farther on. Immediately they had it in position they sluiced the water rapidly into the next field. The Rev. Ainsley Simon explained this

in short sentences which he flung over his shoulder, for they could no longer walk abreast with comfort.

“It is curious to trace customs by reference to environment,” he continued after he had exhausted the subject of paddy-fields. “You will notice that Indian file is also Chinese file; it has become ingrained in the habits of this people from the mere fact that for a goodly number of centuries they have walked thus between their rice-fields. Even on broad roads you will observe that a party of Chinamen walk by preference one behind the other and shout their conversation backwards and forwards. That is conclusive proof. By the bye, do you know why far more than ninety-nine per cent of the people in this world are right-handed?”

Paul Hancock confessed that he did not, noticing once more this trick of sudden questions.

“Because of the position of the heart,” rejoined the Rev. Ainsley Simon triumphantly, stopping and turning round to talk at his ease. It was his delight to be didactic. “Stand close to me so that I can explain. When our remote ancestors first fought one another, the positions of the spear and shield — the two primitive weapons of offence and defence — were matters of individual choice. But it was soon found that those who held the shield in the right hand, leaving the heart exposed, were more frequently killed, so that by natural selection the right-handed spear-holders ultimately survived and propagated their peculiarity. You see” — he lunged with his stick, using his sun-helmet as a shield.

“That is quite curious,” said Mr. Hancock. “I have never heard that explanation before. And it is specially interesting to me because I am left-handed.”

“What,” cried the Rev. Ainsley Simon, delaying their progress once more just as he was going on, so as to display the full measure of his surprise, “you are left-handed? “

This time young Paul Hancock openly blushed. What he had hitherto considered as a small peculiarity suddenly became charged with a special and almost ominous significance.

“Yes,” he confessed haltingly, “I am absolutely left-handed in everything.”

The Rev. Ainsley Simon suddenly shook a finger at him waggishly.

“Oh, oh, oh, my young friend,” he exclaimed, “you will have to take care; for your heart is left dangerously exposed, and think of the arrows that may pierce it.” And with that, much delighted with his nimble wit, he turned and went gaily on.

The path, winding its way like a light-brown snake amidst the tiny green rice-fields, brought them quickly to the mission wall, and Paul Hancock could observe more closely the aspect of shiftlessness which had first impressed him. He saw that he had been right — even the wall was wretchedly built. The Rev. Ainsley Simon promptly walked along under the protecting shadow of this wall, making for the gap instead of for the gate. He began to tiptoe as he reached the opening.

“We will surprise Mrs. Simon,” he explained in a stage whisper, which seemed wholly unnecessary as there was not a soul in sight. “Yes, we will surprise her. She has been waiting for your arrival anxiously for many days, and so now we will just creep in on her, slowly, cautiously.”

They had entered the compound and were making their way very silently towards the group of houses, when suddenly from the chapel — which lay across the compound in a corner by itself — came the sounds of a harmonium. The Rev. Ainsley Simon immediately stopped, and disappointment was clearly marked on all his features. The harmonium sounded louder and louder, and presently a chorus of

plaintive voices rose to the measured singing of a hymn. In the midst of the deserted compound, with these alien unfinished houses towering up, there was something infinitely sad about it — something which brought the tears very near to young Paul Hancock’s eyes. In England the hymn would have been beautiful, natural. There it would have been the expression of a people that has found happiness in songs of praise to an anthropomorphic God. Here — yes — it sounded in his ears like the intoning of a Gospel of Despair — a gospel against which his young soul instinctively revolted. It was so sad, so hopeless, so resigned … .

He wrestled with the impression in vain. His mood had been receptive to it and it would not be effaced. Perhaps it was the voices — oh, he hoped it was the voices. For the voices were curious voices, half-man, half-woman voices; voices half-bass, half-treble; voices plainly not made to sing these things as dear God must know. He listened in almost apprehensive silence, as if he feared something which he could not even imagine. He was a very impressionable youth.

“Too bad,” murmured the Rev. Ainsley Simon quite unemotionally after the first verse had been sung, not so much as even suspecting the turmoil in the young man’s heart. “We are just too late, and I know my wife will be disappointed.” He paused and listened for a while to the second verse. “It will not be meet to surprise her after this; we should have arrived earlier. Let us sit down quietly and wait her. Our Evensong is very short — just enough to give the right turn to the thoughts at the closing of the day.”

He sighed, and seating himself on a block of building-stone invited Mr. Hancock to join him. And thus the two men sat together in silence, each with his thoughts, listening and watching the shadows grow.

The little service ended very soon, and presently a door opened, and out of the distant chapel came slowly a sober blue-coated congregation. There was something in their downcast march recalling the Puritans of the seventeenth century — something in their resigned aspect which Paul Hancock could not yet analyze. Mechanically he tried to count their numbers, as if to measure what success this mission had attained. Then suddenly he stopped, because it seemed to him an ignominious thing to do. The rear was brought up by a tall, thin bespectacled Englishman, and a short, stout woman.

“Maria, Maria!” called the Rev. Ainsley Simon starting to his feet and pulling Mr. Hancock along by the hand. “Our young man has at last arrived. Here is Mr. Hancock, my dear. Maria, Maria!”

As she heard him call, Mrs. Simon gave a start of surprise and then came rapidly forward.

“Why, Ainsley,” she exclaimed, “how you startled me. I was becoming quite sad with the idea that Mr. Hancock had not arrived; I certainly thought he had missed the last river-steamer and that he would not be here for another week. You are so late. My sadness was wearying me. How do you do, Mr. Hancock, and welcome to our home.” She shook his hand warmly.

“We have all been waiting for you and wondering what was delaying your arrival,” solemnly said the tall bespectacled man whom Mrs. Ainsley Simon introduced as Mr. Grey. These two new members of the mission stood studying him closely, as if they were trying to discover in a few glances what manner of young man he might be.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon could not restrain himself, the occasion seemed so suitable. Since

his surprise had been spoilt, he must have something else. He stepped back a little, doffed his hat, bowed, and began declaiming to the

three people, and possibly also to the building-stones littering the ground because his audience was so small.

"Believe me, sir, had I such venture forth,
The better part of my affections would
Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still
Plucking the grass to know where sits the wind,
Peering in maps for ports and piers and roads;
And every object that might make me fear
Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt,
Would make me sad."

Mrs. Simon smiled indulgently at the embarrassed young man as he concluded, but Mr. Grey remained as solemn as ever.

" That was really apt on your part, Ainsley," she said, "and I am sure Mr. Hancock feels the compliment." She paused and looked at Mr. Grey, who was watching her closely. Then she continued a little hesitatingly, as if she were speaking for the two men as well as for herself, " You see we are so far from the world that a newcomer is a great joy to us; for he brings us tidings from home, and he makes us realize that we are not really forgotten. Somehow that thought is a great comfort to us. You will know what it means very soon. But I am sure you are tired, Mr. Hancock; shall we go over to the house?"

She led the way with him, the other two men beginning to talk together on some mission business. As she walked Mrs. Simon asked Mr. Hancock innumerable questions regarding the trip up the river; and the people at home and what his first impressions of China had been; and how he thought he would like it — talking so fast that there was but little time for him to answer. And when they reached the front door it was somehow plain to the young man that Mrs. Simon was put out to find standing there in a group most of the little congregation who had been with her in the chapel.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon had been waiting for this. Now he hurried up.

"But we must introduce Mr. Hancock to our little flock," he cried. "Maria, Maria, do your duty as the lady of the house."

Thus adjured Mrs. Simon slowly introduced the pale faced flock — the native preachers being trained for work In the field, those who had been admitted to the full fellowship of the church, and those who were still catechumens. There were some twenty in all present just then; and as young Mr. Hancock acknowledged their greetings he realized why, when

they sang, their voices sounded in that peculiar emasculated way. They seemed to him repressed into a strange meekness, to be reduced to a peculiar contrition. It was on their faces, on their persons. It was very odd for him to trace the origin of his priceless first impressions, to find that his suppositions had been correct. He could see now how all this fitted in with the environment. The men were like the houses; the scaffolding about them was very manifest.

“Well, that will do, Mr. Chang,” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon at last, addressing the senior of the party. “I fear our young friend is tired and we must have our evening meal. Good evening, good evening.”

Slowly the blue-gowned congregation melted away to the cluster of Chinese buildings that stood by themselves.

Seated at table, the conversation of Paul’s new companions quickly turned to local affairs, as if everyone was anxious that he should understand and adopt their point of view.

“We live very much by ourselves,” said Mrs. Simon, “for we find that the best way to attend to our work.”

“Is there no other mission near by?” inquired Paul presently, after listening how the day was spent.

“Oh, yes,” began Mrs. Simon.

“The nearest to us,” interposed Mr. Grey solemnly, “are the Romanists. They are only two and a half miles distant.”

“Is it a big mission?” responded Paul, wondering why Roman Catholics should be called Romanists in these en-lightened days.

“I do not know,” replied Mr. Grey severely, helping himself to cold meat.

“I think, Mr. Hancock,” broke in the Rev. Ainsley Simon, “that it would be well if I explained that it is necessary for us to maintain a very guarded attitude towards the French missions on account of the radical difference in our tenets — a difference which is confusing to the native mind and is by no means conducive to the spread of the gospel. For this reason it has been our custom in the past to have little or nothing to do with them, and indeed to discourage all intercourse. Do you follow me, Mr. Hancock?”

The young man murmured that he had no difficulty in doing so.

“The Baptists are only five miles off across the water,” said Mrs. Simon, somehow as if she were speaking of a sea-side resort. “They are American, you know.”

“They baptize in the muddy river,” filled in Mr. Grey with a chuckle as he replenished his plate once more. There was something particularly arresting about the manner in which Mr. Grey concentrated himself on his food; something which made one resent his remarks very acutely.

“There is a good precedent for that,” Paul Hancock said suddenly, feeling that it would take little to make him hate Mr. Grey. He wondered why likes and dislikes should be such instinctive things.

“Ha, ha, ha, ha!” laughed the Rev. Ainsley Simon; “I fear that was well deserved, friend Grey, and somewhat neatly administered.”

At this the tall bespectacled man looked up sourly, made as if he would answer, and then stopped short. Instead of speaking, Mr. Hancock caught a stealthy glance of intelligence pass between him and Mrs. Simon. It took him so by surprise that it was some minutes before he put his next question.

“Do you ever see anything of the Americans?” he asked. “Yes,” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon.

“No,” said Mr. Grey.

“Oh, dear me!” said Mrs. Simon.

Mr. Hancock looked from one to the other in frank wonderment. It was the Rev. Ainsley Simon who again came to the rescue.

“I must explain again, Mr. Hancock,” he said, “for the position of rival missions is a little curious out here. The fact is that I see something of the Americans, Mr. Grey nothing, and as for my wife, she exchanges calls twice or thrice a year. You see there are certain matters in which we cooperate — in stores, in boats, and as head of the mission it is my duty to attend to these. With Mr. Grey it is different; it is a question of personal like or dislike. And as Mr. Grey does not care to walk five miles and cross the river in a cockleshell sampan, his attitude is easily explained.”

Thus did the good man pour oil on troubled waters.

“Oh,” said Mr. Hancock, hiding a half smile in his tea-cup because Mr. Grey appeared so resentful.

“Of course, there is the community in the settlement,” said Mrs. Simon; “but they are not much in sympathy with mission work, I fear.”

Mr. Grey's opportunity had come.

"They look upon the Heathen World," he proclaimed —

capitalizing the last two words by means of the harsh emphasis he placed on them — "as a region in which to make rapid profits by fair means or foul, and the spread of the gospel is to them a matter of the most profound indifference."

"They are not all godless," objected the Rev. Ainsley Simon, frowning a little. His old manner had now entirely disappeared and in its place was something which showed more than ever why his face had acquired its peculiar mixed expression.

"There is the Commissioner."

"Ah, yes," confessed the Rev. Ainsley Simon; "he, I fear, is godless."

"There is the consul," continued Mr. Grey ominously. "No, no, he is only young and thoughtless."

"Well, there is the mercantile community, one and all godless; grant me that."

The Rev. Ainsley Simon did not answer. He only sighed as if these discussions perplexed him.

Mr. Hancock did not hesitate long; this idea of all-pervasive wickedness also surely belonged to forgotten days.

"What does the mercantile community do that is so bad?" he inquired in a manner not entirely artless. He was soon to find that the mission was always talking of the people in the settlement, just because they looked upon the settlement as forbidden fruit.

"They drink," answered Mr. Grey solemnly and slowly. He allowed a minute to go by so that an appreciation of this hideous sin might sink in, whilst he himself audibly masticated. Presently he resumed: "At all hours of the day and night, I am told, it is nothing but whiskies and sodas, and cocktails—drink, drink, drink. And drink leads to other evils which I may not mention in the presence of ladies. It is terrible to think of the sinful lives young men live in these

parts. They embrace sin just as they do — ahem … You will be well advised, Mr. Hancock, to keep far away from this mercantile community."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Simon.

Fortunately the modest repast was ended, and as they rose the growing chanting of coolies struck their ears. The Rev. Ainsley Simon became cheerful at once.

“Aha! your luggage; now you will see some fun,” he cried, leading the way quickly out, manifestly relieved that the meal was over.

A line of coolies stripped to the waist, their bare backs glistening with sweat, were advancing to a subdued chanting, with Mr. Hancock’s various boxes and packages slung from their stout bamboo carrying-poles. They came at their rapid jog-trot right up to the door; and then, with a sharp shout repeated from man after man, they halted almost simultaneously, and with a jerk transferred the poles from their shoulders to their arms, thus grounding their loads.

For a while they and the mission inmates exchanged a rapid fire of words; then with the same call the men lifted up their heavy loads again, and led by a servant they stamped their way up the narrow staircase.

“I thought it best to utilize them,” explained the Rev. Ainsley Simon to Paul, “for our own people are not much good at carrying boxes, and what you don’t need you can send down again when you are quite settled. Now for the payment and the inevitable fight which money calls forth in this country!” He rubbed his hands and laughed.

Later, when the young man had left them, the three sat for some time together silently. The evening air was very pleasant, and it seemed good to them, after the unusual excitement, merely to be alive.

“He has quite a little money of his own and large

expectations, I believe,” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon so suddenly that his wife sat up sharply.

“Will he use any of it for the mission, I wonder?” she inquired.

“He ought to be made to,” said Mr. Grey sternly.

“That is going a little too far,” protested the Rev. Ainsley Simon. “He may be induced to, but we must take care not to be ungodly in our attitude, friend Grey.”

He laughed in a curious manner at his jest; but the other man only frowned. A second later both yielding to a common impulse glanced stealthily at Mrs. Simon.

But Mrs. Simon, with her hands folded in her lap, was looking straight ahead of her into the coming night.

CHAPTER II

IN his room upstairs young Paul Hancock had quickly shut his door. Then he pulled off his coat to advertise to himself the energy which he would display. He must get things more or less shipshape at once, so that on the morrow he would be fully prepared for work.

Impressed with these ideas, he drew his keys from his pocket, unlocked one box, took out a tray, and then, before he had taken count of what had happened, he had seated himself, with the tray on his knees and his thoughts suddenly gone ten thousand miles away. His fingers, mechanically engaged in sorting some ties and collars, faltered and at last stopped. His eyes saw nothing of that which was around him. He had fallen into a brown study, and all idea of unpacking had vanished.

Only as a sort of background to his thoughts did even his recent conversation with his future companions remain. Yet what remained was sufficient to fill him with a vague impression that things were very different from what he had pictured — different not so much perhaps in strictly material points as in apparently immaterial shades. The atmosphere was wrong — he was quite sure of that — but there were other things as well. He could not entirely explain it, for he was not trying to explain it; he was only thinking how unbelievable that recent conversation would have sounded in far-away England, not entirely because of what had been said but because of what had not been said. He suddenly realized that Christianity had here become a business, and now he wondered whether, in a sense, it had not always been that. Yet surely not, surely not; there had been other historic

methods. But how could these methods be translated into modern terms — for he saw that that was the point, the whole point. It was hugely difficult.

In sudden irritation he shook his head, and that movement attracted him to the texts hung on the walls. As he looked, fragments of lost phrases came back to him. “The millions and hundreds of millions are waiting to be saved,” chanted the people in public addresses in the far-away land, perhaps believing what they said to be true. And yet what did he find on the spot? Sectarianism of the crudest kind — there was no other word for it; and sectarianism has always been an ugly thing. Of course he knew that the fervid language in which enthusiasts painted possibilities in far-off lands was seldom justified. But that was not the point. It was the wrong outlook of these people on the spot which had already disillusioned him — it was so palpably wrong. Now he almost shuddered as he thought of Mr. Grey being accepted as an instrument to save souls. His Heaven was surely one to be carefully avoided —

A door slamming below suddenly aroused him, and with a sigh he at last got up, replaced

the tray, and resolutely made as if he would unlock another box. But as he bent down to fit in a key, a sudden and absolute distaste for any unpacking came over him. He would do it tomorrow — tonight he did not possess the spirit.

So now he went to his window, and, leaning his elbows on the sill, allowed his memory to leap back to and dwell on the reason, the real strange reason, why he had thus exiled himself. It was a curious story, a somewhat unbelievable story excepting to those who know how often antecedents, the reasons for all impulses, are the most curious things in the world. Briefly in his case, going back to the very first cause of all, a mad dog had been responsible.

He had been a very little boy at the time, a boy of ten or eleven, as commonplace and apparently as unemotional as all boys of ten or eleven are erroneously supposed to be. One evening, at his preparatory school, a frantic stampede from the direction of the front door had caused him to spring up and abandon the book he was reading. “Mad dog, mad dog!” had shouted his affrighted schoolmates, rushing into the classroom and jumping on top of the desks in an ecstasy of fear; and, in truth, following hard on their footsteps had come a mad dog, a savage creature, foaming at the mouth and howling and barking most distressfully in its agony. School books and ink-pots had been hurled at the wretched animal as it rushed frantically round the room snapping and barking; and then, just when the confusion was at its worst, the headmaster — one Morris by name—had suddenly appeared. Without a moment’s hesitation he had grasped the situation, and had rushed on the animal with a black school-ruler in his hand.

But the beast had been too quick for him, and like a flash it had leapt up at him and its dripping teeth had become locked in his fingers. The terror of this act …

How they had all rushed to the rescue then! With common valour they fell on the animal and beat and kicked it to death. And yet it was all too late. Half an hour passed before a doctor could be found and their master’s wound properly cauterized. And so it was no great surprise to those who were not boy that less than three weeks afterwards this devoted champion had died raving mad. And those three weeks had been three awful weeks in which weird, vague tales of what hydrophobia did to men in its grip had finally crystallized into one terrible story of their own man raving and fighting like a madman before the poison had finally killed him out.

Young Paul Hancock had never forgotten the impression

that tremendous and dramatic event had made on him; for tremendous and dramatic are all the startling events of childhood. He had been inconsolable, nothing consoled him, until one day the young clergyman who ministered to their spiritual welfare had taken him and some of his classmates aside and spoken to them long and seriously. He explained to them, in words which are so worn that their poor over-worked sound inclines the philosophic

mind to tears, that it was a lesson, a visitation, which the youngest, like the oldest, should endeavour to understand. Instead of grieving blindly for the dear master who had laid down his life to save theirs, they should allow themselves to be gathered into the fold and become true followers of Christ. It was these things which were the great things of life, he insisted sternly, his reason clouded by his own emotion; only such as were really sinful would not take heed. Thus he spoke again and again, and his words were impressed with authority.

Well, it seemed to Paul now the story of another human being; but it was his story, and the miracle had been duly accomplished. As a child of eleven he had understood in a flash what it was to believe with fanatic fervour in Christ — to feel unalterably happy in the spiritual exaltation which blind faith produces, to be tearfully willing to be sacrificed at once in any way which might be ordered, to wish ardently to lay down his life so that he might gain life eternal. Briefly, brutally, yet sanely, he was an emotional convert, which is the only kind of convert that has ever been made or ever will be made. And such a little thing had done it! Yet little things do everything — if that were only known — even when we are big and coarse and grown up and have lost the soft fancies of tender youth. I love you and you love me — why? Perhaps because your eye was soft when I told you how cruel the world had been and how truly I had suffered; or because, when I showed you how, with the odds

very great, I had carved my way and won success, you frantically applauded… .

And yet how small are all these things! Still thus does the world spin round, and atom act on atom. A blow, a laugh, a gasp, a twinkle in the eyes, a sob — each trifle in its appointed place becomes a mighty force, a lever, changing the whole current of a life and carrying in its train glowing victory or ignominious defeat. And the younger the subject the greater the effect. The noble army of martyrs has ever found its best recruits in children’s ranks, and long before the days of the Children’s Crusade, when a hundred thousand babies started for the Holy Sepulchre and perished in Hungary, boys and girls in widely scattered legions were always dreaming and attempting impossible things. It is very wonderful and somewhat sad. Among the mature religious revivalism is merely mental intoxication in which all reason and self-control are lost ; and our happiest hosannas, when properly analyzed, are found to be only echoes of the wine-engendered shoutings of celebrants who reeled through orgies long ago. Only with children is it eternally different — theirs is truly the spiritual age. Let us remember that.

This mental phase of Paul Hancock, the lad, had lasted all through his schooldays, though he had sometimes wondered why it was that the boy of eleven had been so much more in earnest than the boy of sixteen. As his reason expanded, as he became an adolescent, many doubts had crossed his mind, misgiving had often filled him. And yet when he had left school and had attempted to follow his father’s calling, he had confessed to himself that something dragged him hack to his early convictions, something made him wish really to test them.

At last he determined to try a bold experiment; he would go abroad to some mission — that was what he would do.

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Amazement, amusement, anger — all had been unavailing when he had finally announced his desire to go to some distant land and become a missionary. His father could not believe his ears, and categorically refused to hear of such a thing. And then, just when he himself had begun to wonder whether his boyish idea was not wholly unreasonable, some strange chance had made his father die.

His father's sudden death had altered everything, altered it marvelously, miraculously, for the strangest of reasons — for a reason which he himself did not completely understand, but which he ever afterwards associated intimately with his every action.

Briefly it had seemed that the passing of the spirit of life from one who had created him had in some unaccountable way not only added to his own strength, but had imposed on him the necessity of changing from a dreamer into a real man of action. Just now, in the light of the new life dawning for him, it all came back with added poignancy, and once more the ready tears filled his eyes.

The removal of a dominant will is in itself a tragedy almost sublime, if even a portion of its total effect could be properly understood. People are always saying that no man is indispensable, since he can be easily replaced — that, in brief, a man is only one among countless millions of his species, and that every place made empty is very soon filled. People are perhaps totally right just because they are totally wrong, right and wrong being the two halves of a circle which must constantly meet in their extreme expression. For in more than a spiritual sense every person is essential insomuch as every removal means an infinitesimal modification in a vast general scheme. Such minute modifications are hard to express in terms that carry meaning; for, in spite of the labours of metaphysicians, ontology can never be a real

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science, and transcendentalism will always remain a delusion and a snare because it concerns itself with that which escapes complete capture by the powers of reasoning. Philosopher may succeed philosopher, system may succeed system, but in the end one is exactly where Voltaire's little metaphysician Zadig found himself in that fine phrase, "Il en savait ce qu'on a su dans tous les âges, c'est à dire, fort peu de chose."

It was, however, with no such obscure considerations that Paul Hancock busied himself at this crisis. At first it was the tragedy of the commonplace which enveloped and crushed him, and only later did he begin to ponder. Everything had become so different: it was queer, quaint, grotesque, because, by contrast, the world had never before seemed so beautiful or nature so smiling and content. Though it seared his soul to do so, how many countless times had he not revived each phase of the scaturient emotion which had

overwhelmed him on that fatal day! That emotion was to him a kind of theurgy possessing a vast power not to be estimated in mere human terms.

He had been away at the time, sunning himself on a sunlit coast, and the day had seemed too beautiful to be really true. It was not merely that there were no clouds in the heavens, that the air was balmy, that the clean, restless sea should now be resting, making the prospect from the tall cliff where he was seated one of immense peace. There was something else; for as he gazed at the sea something had seemed to allow him at last to understand the meaning of those tremendous words, “the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Yes, he could understand it; it was the real ether of space, invisible, imponderable, the medium through which all life is transmitted.

A foot striking against a stone snapped the thread of his thoughts. He turned. A boy handed him a telegram. The

telegram merely said that his father was ill, and no chill struck his heart. And as he could not conveniently leave until the morrow, he decided to stay on on the cliff and think on in the midst of this profound peace.

The day had worn on and the sun was setting majestically when they found him with another telegram. His father was dead, it said — that was all. As his heart leaped and he caught his breath and closed his lips, so laughing was the world that he almost smiled in his cruel agony. He must master this thing, he must master it, before he spoke to a soul. That was necessary, supreme …

Dead.

In stony silence he went, quickly gathered his things, and awaited a slow-lumbering night-train.

Dead.

That single crushing fact, so remorseless, so cruel, so final, was yet full of other things. It seemed stained with a hundred colours, all gay and none black. It was in the air; it flung itself up to the very clouds, and it fell back to earth, not as a stone falls, but as a rainbow descends, in giant graceful curves that are stained with beauty. As it sped up to the sky his mind followed it; and as it swept back he sought vainly to embrace it and make it his own …

Oh, terror …

All humanity was so good-humoured that day, too; never before had he noticed it so much. Humanity was happy, contented, polite, overflowing with a milk of kindness. There might be sin or evil about, but today it was hidden and abashed.

Dead.

The fact beat on him now like a giant pulse, beating on the top of his head and trying to knock him down. Yet it could not distract his attention from his surroundings; never had his senses been so keen, so alive to every passing circumstance.

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He noted every look, every smile, every petulant movement of fellow-travellers; and yet he was whirling on through space at ten thousand miles an hour, whilst they were calmly seated travelling at the same old lumbering pace. He was quick — and they seemed dead.

"Yes, *dead*," he said to himself, upbraiding himself in stony silence at his strange attitude — "dead, dead" . . " But that is what *you* have to understand."

Then, as if to beat him down, as if to conquer him, as night came on the electric lights on the train suddenly went out, and because there were no lamps, candles had to be requisitioned. Roughly planted here and there, they hardly served to lighten the gloom, and their flickering flames became nothing but lights set on a giant, rocking, remorseless bier … The very thought of that journey would always remain an anguish to him.

Well, finally it was over. He had arrived. He was driven to the house. He was led to his mother, and together they went …

Still in stony silence he knelt, refusing his permission to his tears, and his powerful will held them back …

Left alone at last, he studied the features of the marble face in great anxiety, as if seeking to see behind — seeking for something he knew not what — seeking quietly, persistently; revolting at the egoism of the act, yet enthralled by it. Hours—or minutes—passed; and then something prompted him to rise and go to a table on which stood a pile of books. He opened one, not knowing why he did so, and found therein a piece of paper.

He turned it over with sudden fear, and because his eyes were dimmed, at first he could not read. Then, as the mist cleared, the bold handwriting became distinct and he read:

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"While the Light lasts I will remember
And in the Darkness I shall not forget."

Only that—nothing more. Yet how much! Was it written on purpose — was it a sign? He tried to remember some other quotation about voices from the grave, but it was in vain.

He looked at the paper again. When was it written? There was nothing to show. No clue. Just a dying man's fancy — that vague grasping after something which was slipping,

slipping, slipping …

Yet — he stopped short in his thoughts and mentally and physically steadied himself.

That was a projection of the will from the grave. He became convinced of it. It was for him. It could be for no one else. Carefully he hid the paper on his person.

At the graveside, as he knelt, it was not the clergyman's voice, solemnly repeating the Office for the Dead, which caught his ear — that seemed to have become an empty, bloodless formality associated with the wood of the casket about to be lowered into the earth. How could he give his attention to that triviality, how could he think of it? It was then in a flash that he understood occamism, and he saw how the old-time nominalists had really stumbled across the border-line of truth. How could general terms have any corresponding reality either in or out of the mind, being mere words—how could they hope to he anything but empty, bloodless formality, used to enforce disciplinary submission?

"No, no, no," he repeated to himself half aloud, making people turn, "that is the wrong note. I shall remain with my own " …

His ear, dully receiving the sounds of the solemn voice, was keenly alive to every distant sound. Near by was a

football field, and just then came a roar of cheers which made him start. "Go on, go on!" shouted lusty voices above the cheers; then another voice, taking up the cry, made it echo even louder, "Go on, go on!"

The solemn crowd about him moved nervously—this noise of joyous athleticism was so unseemly. Yet everyone instinctively listened. Now in the distance the crowd moaned in acute disappointment, and then they became suddenly quiet. The attack they had applauded had failed; and the failure, mixing with his thoughts, seemed to sound for him a warning note. Yet he would go on—this must be his watchword ; he would make it his watchword. Given to him at such a solemn hour and place, this too, like the message of that piece of paper, became suddenly invested with a peculiar meaning. And now there came over him a sudden desire that this ceremony might end, that this crowd might go away, that he might be left alone with his thoughts. He did not want the cold comfort of their presence, he did not want the discredited small-coin of their words. Full of a new miserliness, he wanted to be alone with the pure gold of his thoughts …

Yet, before he could win the peace which he so ardently desired, there was something more for him to endure.

His mother, now that all was over, must talk to him, and revive, for the solace of her sickened heart, the distant tender memories of her early courtship. It was his duty to let her

speak, though very word stabbed him through and through. And yet he knew those wounds would heal and of that new flesh armour would be made …

She told him how and when it was that they first had met; she confided to him little intimate details that only a woman carefully treasures and sometimes never repeats. It was his duty to let her speak, a hundred times his duty, for he knew

by instinct that at the end of the long and pitiful *via dolorosa* which she was now travelling there is a happier land, to be peacefully entered over a bridge of sighs, where, if there is none of the mirth and song of childhood, there is at least a brooding calm …

So he let her speak, never interrupting her — by his very silence always urging her to talk and tell him all. Yet in the midst of this tearful confession he never forgot; he was only waiting. And so in the end, when the stream of recollections had run dry, when days and weeks had passed away and he saw resignation growing, he told his plan.

At last he had gone to the clergyman of his boyish days, and with his aid it was all soon arranged. He had been given some papers to sign which he did not even read, and almost at once he had started. That was his story.

And thus having retraced this whole curious chain of antecedents, as he leaned out of the window and looked into this Chinese night, with its ceaseless noise of bull-frogs, its whispering gentle breeze, its faint odours of something strange, he felt at once calmed and alarmed — wondering what the morrow would bring, and yet always hoping against hope because he was very young.

CHAPTER III

HIS first meeting next morning was with Mrs. Simon. When he came down at nine o'clock, that lady was seated alone at a breakfast-table which was littered in no graceful manner. It was quite evident to him that Mr. Grey had already been most actively engaged. The previous evening he had been too tired and too preoccupied to pay much attention to trifling matters, though even then his eyes had vaguely noted a certain disregard for that virtue which is correctly placed next to godliness. But this morning this new expression of general shiftlessness smote him with disagreeable force. Suddenly he felt once more the odd heart-sinking he had experienced on his first distant view of the mission, when the Rev. Ainsley Simon had been so expansive to him on the hilltop. It was not what he had expected.

"Good morning, Mr. Hancock," said Mrs. Simon, looking at him in a way which made him suspect that he had already been the subject of much discussion that morning. "I trust you slept well. The first night in a strange house is often an unrestful one."

"I slept not badly, thank you," replied the young man reservedly, because he was so full of his own thoughts. He applied himself with a newly acquired eclecticism to the fare spread before him.

"My husband asked me to tell you," went on Mrs. Simon, with no eyes for his concern as to what he should eat, "that he would see you as soon as you were ready in the schoolroom. He has found the very man for you as a Chinese teacher."

"Really," replied Paul, suddenly becoming interested, "I am very glad of that."

"Yes," she continued unemotionally, "it has been very fortunate. We had no one in the mission really qualified to teach you the best kind of Chinese — mandarin Chinese — but my husband had been making inquiries in anticipation of your coming, and yesterday he heard that it might be possible to secure an old teacher whose granddaughter comes to our girls' school. This morning, having heard that you had arrived, the old man came of his own accord at eight o'clock. Being poor, he is very willing to teach. He is with my husband now at the Bible class."

"I must hurry up," said the young man, chipping an egg hastily.

Mrs. Simon observed him thoughtfully as she added hot water to a teapot that had been standing there for no inconsiderable period.

"There is no reason to hurry," she remarked finally. "There is really never any reason to

hurry here. There is all day long to do what one has to do, with no fear of interruption. I am afraid, Mr. Hancock, that you will find some of the days very long indeed."

"I trust not," he replied shortly.

"I hope not, too, for. your sake," rejoined Mrs. Simon, now opening and staring into the teapot as if she expected something unusual of it. "No day should be too long for us if we could only understand how short and fleeting is this life. Will you have some more tea?"

The young man murmured his thanks.

"I wonder," he said presently, allowing his conversation to branch out to an unexplored field, "if it would look strange if I called in the settlement in a day or two."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Simon suddenly, as if she had

burnt her hand. A very worldly look had come over her face.

"Perhaps I ought to explain," continued Paul Hancock, unconsciously using the Rev. Ainsley Simon's apologetic mannerism, possibly owing to that queer mental assimilation to which we are all subject — "I ought to explain that I have a letter of credit for a rather large sum I want to see about. By some mistake I do not think I arranged about it properly before I started up the river."

"Really," said Mrs. Simon in tones which sounded almost awestruck. "You might see the consul about it."

Mrs. Simon, in common with many of her class, possessed a deep-rooted conviction which nothing could eradicate that consuls had been specially supplied by act of Parliament for use in all possible emergencies.

"No, I think not," replied the young man with sudden firmness, his business experience coming to the fore, "the consul is only for other matters. The people I have got to see are the correspondents of the Bank. The Bank must have correspondents here, even in this small place."

"The correspondents? I dare say my husband will be able to tell you. He has a wonderful head for affairs," answered Mrs. Simon, evidently greatly impressed by this businesslike attitude.

"I would really like to know," said the young man reflectively. Already he saw uses for his money, many uses. He looked out of the window; a tall form crowned by a sun-helmet was rapidly approaching. "Ah, there is Mr. Grey coming. I shall ask him about it."

“I don’t think Mr. Grey is coming here,” replied Mrs. Simon a little hastily, “and about this business I am sure he can tell you nothing, as he never goes into the settlement. Oh dear, no!”

“I dare say you are right,” said Paul, calmly watching

Mr. Grey coming straight to the house. Mr. Grey could be seen and yet not see; and thus it happened that he marched straight in through the front door and into the dining-room evidently without so much as suspecting the young man’s presence. Paul caught his start of surprise and smiled to himself as he heard him say with all his customary ugliness of manner:

“I came for a glass of water, Mrs. Simon. My throat is excessively parched for some strange reason this morning, and I found myself unable to attend to my class duties. Good morning, Mr. Hancock “— this past Mrs. Simon, as if he had only just observed the young man.

“Good morning, Mr. Grey. I trust you have not got fever.”

“Fever ” — Mr. Grey gave a start — “fever — dear me, no. What do you mean?”

He looked suspiciously at the young man, who had already risen from the breakfast-table.

“I only mean that yesterday Mr. Simon warned me about the fever out here.” He stopped and looked at the older man indifferently. “Mr. Simon said it was a hideous thing and unmanned one completely.”

“I was wondering how that idea came into your head; I have certainly not got fever.”

Mr. Grey drank the glass of water Mrs. Simon proffered him very rapidly, inclined his head, and left without another word.

“I think I shall go across to Mr. Simon,” said Paul.

As he made his way to the other side of the compound, where a long, low-lying school-building in the Chinese style had been erected, he could not get Mr. Grey out of his head. There was something suspicious about the man, something which repelled him, something which somehow both alarmed and fascinated him.

And Mrs. Simon?

Involuntarily- the young man started and coloured. She seemed to be shielding him, at least to be constantly on her guard. A few minutes in the morning had confirmed his

impressions of the previous night. What did it all mean?

CHAPTER IV

THE scene which met his eyes in the schoolroom filled him with curiosity. Here was the method, the measure, the great thing he had come so far to help forward; so almost breathlessly he surveyed the room. He felt like an inquisitor who is given the rare chance to see how those he is shortly to examine accept the tutelage of others.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon, standing with his back to the class, was explaining in the vernacular something he had written on the blackboard. Beside him stood an enormous globe; next to the globe a table littered with papers; and next to the table was a venerable old Chinese, with a vastly long but very thin grey beard, peacefully dozing under the soporific influence of Mr. Simon's voice. The rough white-washed walls would have been quite bare had it not been for a few Chinese scrolls adorned with great sprawling characters; and the only sign that this schoolroom had a special character was a small text on the wall behind Mr. Simon, above which was a diminutive black wooden cross.

These things quickly slipped from Paul Hancock's attention as he stood quietly waiting for Mr. Simon to finish. His eyes, keenly studying the aspect of the scholars, sought to extract there from some index to their minds. Paul had long practised the art of looking below the surface, of using his keen vision. Now he wanted very much to understand at once something of matters which no words could explain — what the true spirit, the inner inclination, of these lads might be; that is, whether they were really impressed or at heart indifferent. Somehow he knew it would have an important bearing on his immediate future.

The thirty or forty boys, ranging in age perhaps from twelve to twenty, who were sitting there on their rough wooden benches, had not been quick enough in their sudden stiffening to disguise from him the fact that they were half asleep or at least very somnolent. Like dogs, which are reputed to sleep with one eye open, their rapid blinking now served to conceal something of their real state; and Paul tried vainly to decide if it would be wrong to attribute to them complete indifference to their instructor's tuition. Had they been almost asleep?

There was nothing so very different in this from the ordinary attitude of boys, and he would not have been at all impressed had Mr. Simon not told him that these were voluntary pupils who had come to the mission to seek tuition of their own accord, pupils who were classed as catechumens, pupils who might soon be classed as church members. As he looked at them, almost leaning against one another because the effort of sitting up seemed excessive, their sleepy eyes and their loose mouths proclaimed not so much their moral as their physical indifference to anything that was new and strenuous. Their attitudes, even their features, seemed to say that anything demanding a departure from modes of thought, from an outlook on life, which had triumphed in this very ancient world

by virtue of a law as decisive in its operation as that tremendous first-truth of physical science called the survival of the fittest, was absurd and destined to fail of attainment. Into such brains might be driven a modicum of foreign matter; you might make real believers of a few of such men by a policy of segregation and constant tuition and guidance. But more than that, much more than that, seemed just then an impossible consummation. Hardly breathing, Paul stood there and watched.

Meanwhile the Rev. Ainsley Simon was running on easily in the vernacular from sentence to sentence, saying things

with all that facility which comes from constant repetition, his sense of duty gratified by the purely physical act of speaking, his natural critical faculties nullified by that destroyer of intelligence, monotonous system. The old grey-beard sitting by him nodded and nodded more and more deeply; he was almost an illustration of the eternal figure of Buddha — that figure more eloquent than a hundred Sphinxes, since he passes down through the ages not cryptically smiling, but peacefully absorbed in a single, never-ending eternal act of meditation in which all mortal things are fused. Outside sparrows fluttered against the bamboo blinds which shut out the glare of sunlight, and, nothing daunted by the voice which went on and on like the brook, these little intruders twittered and chirped and even tried to force their way in. From somewhere near by came a faint sound of hammering, but apart from this there reigned a sense of a most profound peace.

“Why, Mr. Hancock,” exclaimed the Rev. Ainsley Simon at last, stopping and turning sharply, as if he had become suddenly aware of a strange influence, “I had no idea that you were there. Have you been listening to me for long?”

There was a certain embarrassment in his manner, as if he was busy wondering how his well-worn schoolroom eloquence had sounded.

“I have been here a few minutes,” replied the young man, reddening a little, as he always did when first spoken to. Something prompted him to speak further. “But I found it very interesting, Mr. Simon, I assure you. It is wonderful to think that anyone can attain such fluency in such a strange language.”

Mr. Simon coloured with pleasure as if he had been a woman, and suddenly Paul Hancock felt strangely sorry for him. He could not explain why he should feel so, save perhaps that somehow this strong bearded man seemed engaged

in a task which was ill suited to his ideals and to his dignity.

“I fear, Mr. Hancock,” Mr. Simon continued, “that in a very short while you will not have such a high opinion of my speaking powers. Frankly my accent is not good, whatever my fluency may be. Now there is one man belonging to our mission I would like you to hear

— Gowan — but he is hundreds of miles away. He can make extempore sermons in the vernacular, and his accent is so good that the crowds are delighted to hear him merely because of the beautiful manner in which he uses his voice. You see, I came out when I was too old. My voice had lost the flexibility of youth, and without that flexibility one can effect little. Then for foreign languages one needs to be musical, to have a good ear. Frankly I am not at all musical, so you see my disabilities are great."

The Rev. Ainsley Simon had been so elated at the uncustomary compliment paid him that he talked on and on; and it was some minutes before he remembered the old Chinese scholar, who had now risen and was courteously standing aside till his attention should be requested.

"Ah, but I am forgetting old Li *Hsien-sheng*," he exclaimed at last. He turned and laid a kindly hand on the old man's long loose sleeve. "Now, Mr. Hancock, I will present you formally. Bow and shake your own hands! Li *Hsien Sheng*, Mr. Hancock. Now let me see. We shall have to call you, I think, 'Han-ko' — that is the nearest we can get phonetically to your name. Generally you will be known as the 'Teacher Han.' Now let us see which 'Han — that is the difficulty, the rub."

Now he consulted rapidly in the vernacular with the polite old Chinaman. Behind, Paul felt rather than saw that the class had stiffened with interest. This concerned them mightily, because it was other people's business. They almost held their breath so as not to miss a word.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon at last turned, shaking his head somewhat ruefully.

"Alas, what a sad day! Our old friend opposes my motion utterly — he raises a dozen objections, each one more subtle than the last. Dear, dear, how they argue, these good folk! I wish you could have understood it all. Briefly, Mr. Hancock, I wanted to make you the real and only Han, a man of Han — that is, a Chinaman. You see thus — " He wrote one, two, three — a maze of lines. "I fear, however, I cannot carry my point; my arguments have been beaten, sadly beaten. Is it all Greek to you, Mr. Hancock? Well, let me explain that Han is the name of one of the most famous dynasties in Chinese annals, the great Han dynasty which won immense regions in the north and captured all the south. Consequently it has passed into the language of the people that a Chinaman is a 'man of Han.' Well, had you been called Mr. Han, it would have been the equivalent of calling you Mr. Chinaman — a good opening for you, in all truth. But see how subtle are Eastern objections. By adopting that particular character as your private name, you would be guilty of a grave crime. You would be taking in vain the name of a dynasty, giving yourself almost dynastic rank." He scrawled a hieroglyphic on a piece of paper, splashed it out, and wrote another. "See, thus do I change you; Mr. Han the 'dynast ' becomes Mr. Han the 'thick.' Now it becomes a question of our mission cooking, whether we can fatten you up to look your part! Ha, ha, ha, poor Mr. Hancock, puzzled, I am afraid, by our little pleasantries!"

The Rev. Ainsley Simon laughed so heartily that the old Chinaman awoke and smiled broadly too. His lips babbled words; his hand expressed in an old-world courtly manner an interest in a conversation which was quite incomprehensible.

“Now to the torture-room. You must lose no time!”

said Mr. Simon with boyish enthusiasm. Briskly he walked back to a little door which gave entrance to a small study; and, pausing there, with a broad gesture he addressed himself after his wont to the whole listening world rather than to any particular person. “Here you will sit and have your ears tortured by the strange sounds your mouth will soon be making, unless I am very much mistaken. Here you will learn with sudden surprise that *he-baw* or something very like it is not necessarily the sound of a rejoicing donkey, but a tonic exercise in the most difficult language in the world. Here you will sing-song like the ragged little boys in the temples who are taught a thousand characters without understanding a single one. I assure you, you will soon be astonishing yourself in many ways. Now, I must not keep you. Like at the dentist’s, rush in and seat yourself. Quick! *Ching, Ching,*” he concluded to the old Chinaman, pushing him along.

As the old man followed Paul Hancock in, Mr. Simon, who was broadly smiling, tightly shut the door. He could not have done it more neatly, he thought, as he took a deep breath and sighed his approval.

The class behind him was now plainly interested. The unaccustomed scene had given a fillip to their languid energies, and manifestly they were now alive. The Rev. Ainsley Simon, a little intoxicated as he always became with the eloquence of his own voice whenever he had a chance of straying away for a few minutes like some errant schoolboy into fanciful fields, caught the new spirit. He gave a sharp exclamation, as does a man who sees his quarry. With masterly decision he swept his chalk into a drawer, closed his books, wiped out the blackboard, folded his arms. *Now, now, now* was the seeding time.

So he commenced to talk, ungracefully at first, with awkward

strides up and down the room and sudden halts. But soon his periods flowed more easily; he disengaged his hands; he boldly waved them, beckoning as it were each listening boy after him, bidding them quickly to follow, urging them, exhorting them, chiding them, imploring them. The heat of his voice added to the heat of the room, the magnetism which he wrested from his person and flung recklessly about him, made them responsive, for there are none so subject to the laws of hypnotism as the children of the East. He felt it, he saw it. Lips and eyes opened wider and wider, hands and knees trembled, interest became quite breathless as he told them what they might easily gain if they followed the one and only path.

Here it is meet to leave him, as with his own fire kindled anew and burning fiercely he talks on, — feeling, hoping, believing, *convinced* that the conquest of the impossible is today, henceforth, and ever shall be, just a mere matter of faith.

CHAPTER V

THE light sedan-chair, swinging on the shoulders of the two lithe yet powerful bearers, sped along at the unvarying pace of five miles an hour to the unceasing wonder of Paul Hancock, who sat there a little as if he were sitting on pins, or as if, by assuming this superior position, he was most improperly elevating himself and thereby preparing his own fall.

When he had first mounted the chair, it had seemed to him peculiarly reprehensible that he, young and able-bodied, should allow two men to carry him several miles in this wise as if he had been a mere invalid. But the manner in which the bearers had first swung the chair up with a jerk, as if it had been a mere plaything with which to make muscular sport, had commenced his disillusionment; and then the manner in which they had swiftly marched along the narrow winding footpaths, only momentarily decreasing their speed as they swung round sharp corners and left him suddenly suspended sheer over deep rice-fields, had shown him that this work was easier for such than it would have been for him to run half a mile in this enervating climate. Physically, then, there could be no sin; it was the other aspect which soon solely engaged him. Somehow he thought that this dependence was not good; it seemed like a prompt surrender to the peculiar environment, a surrender which he guessed rather than knew must be the chief danger to be guarded against.

It is true the men sweated as he had never seen men sweat before — sweated until their shoulder-cloths dripped perspiration, and streams ran down their brown backs as if buckets of water had been dashed over them — sweated so much

that during their one brief halt, when they had changed ends, they passed cloths over themselves and wrung them out as if they had been dipped in a stream. They dripped water — they were nothing but water — they would seemingly melt away.

But he understood that that was only because their pores had been properly opened by sharp exercise in the hot damp air. The men attested their singular health in their hard muscles, in their clean limbs, in their bright eyes. It was, in fact, the healthiest thing they could do — to rid their systems of malarial taint. And so Paul Hancock silently argued away his last objections, because there seemed nothing for it; in Rome to attempt to do otherwise than the Romans is worse than absurd. Clad in nothing but short loose trousers, with cool, stiff straw hats rising to a sharp point on their heads and shielding off the sun, with comfortable straw sandals on their feet, he realized that he was in the presence of athletes in the truest sense of the word. Now, filled with silent admiration, he wonderingly watched them lay mile after mile behind them. Their marching powers were indeed immense.

The great river, which had been quite hidden from the mission, was at length beside him; and as his bearers now travelled parallel to it with unabating speed, the native city, in which was wedged the narrow foreign settlement to which he was journeying, grew up quickly in front of him. Yet he could not look at anything but the river. For the river was all-absorbing. It gave a sense of freedom, of escape from a landscape which was too monotonous, too covered with utilitarian ends, to he really attractive.

The river was also a link, a road. For though it was in the very heart of the vast country, though it led inland to the end of nowhere, actually it flowed into the sea — the sea on which he had journeyed so many days and which met the

seas of Mother England. This was the roadway up which he had travelled, and so he was delighted to see it again. A great fleet of brown junks, with their clumsy yet picturesque sails spread to the breeze, were speeding down-river in the very centre of the stream, keeping close together as for company; whilst hugging the banks, with their tall masts looking like giant sticks stuck in carelessly, were other single junks being slowly tracked up-stream by long lines of brown trackers stripped naked for the combat with the tugging current. The trackers, as they tracked, chanted long choruses which were borne to him in bursts of sound, strangely romantic yet strangely in keeping with their surroundings. Those choruses became at once in his ears indissolubly associated with the river and the river traffic. They were the threnodies and the rhapsodies of a population which was born on the river and worked on the river and died on the river. They seemed to tell the endless story of human endeavour in combat with unknown natural forces; their songs were a species of Nibelungenlied sung to guard a treasure which might be cruelly wrested from them because they were poor toiling men. Far away on the horizon line a thick cloud of smoke hung heavily in the air, and showed where a solitary steamer, unseen and unwished, was approaching this distant inland mart, itself winning its victory over the stubborn current only with an excess of energy. The vista enclosed by the river seemed endless ; it began and ended nowhere. It was vast, unfinished, uncouth, untamed.

He took off his sun-helmet and breathed deeply. Now he almost regretted the rapid march of the chair-bearers, which a moment before he had silently applauded. For he liked the scene and would willingly have contemplated it for many minutes. But the chair-bearers were inexorable. They stamped distances into nothing; they swung him rhythmically forward; and at last, bringing back his

wandering attention, before he would have thought it possible, they had reached the first fringe of miserable hovels which served as introduction to the crumbling city-wall.

How miserable the hovels looked! Oh, how miserable! he thought.

He was too new to the country to understand that these habitations were really less sordid than they appeared, and that the race of men and women who were content to live in them

were not the abandoned wretches one might at first suppose. They lived there because their standard of living was low, because over-breeding makes over-poverty; it had nothing to do with their morals. And yet, as he smelt the foul smells and saw the tattered folk moving shiftlessly to and fro, a sudden feeling of revulsion against this country overcame him. How repellent in a sense it all was, he thought, how could people be content to drag out such an existence? Physically it affected him; a sense of nausea oppressed him, and he hung his head in sudden despair.

A band of dirty children chasing a wretched dog limping on three legs now made him look up; deliberately they paused in their cruel sport, as his chair passed, so as to shout scornfully after him in shrill voices. He was an enemy because he was different; that was their primitive plea. “Foreign devil, foreign devil!” they called; already he knew the words. Then the chair-bearers swung round a corner, and they passed under a gateway which led through the ruined city-wall.

Inside, though the streets were narrow and the blocks of paving-stone glistened with the peculiar slime of the damp East, it was much cleaner, and he breathed more freely. The shops were handsome and very bizarre in appearance. Instantly they engaged his attention; whilst the lively crowds of people picking their way here and there added to his pleasure. Hawkers too, those inseparable elements of Chinese

life, loitered in great numbers, making the air ring with their calls; and the chair-bearers now were forced to shout continually in short, sharp shouts to clear the road. At those calls people turned their heads and stared a little with the sheep-like stare of the East; for he was a stranger within the gates, and strangers have always been providentially made to beguile the passing hour. Then, just as there had been a rapid transition from the straggling hovels to this ordered city, so did they suddenly pass a tall wicket-gate, and there, standing apart, clean and well swept, was the little European settlement.

A dozing native policeman, leaning against a wall with his hat over his eyes and a half-burnt cigarette in his hand, started up guiltily as the chair and its occupant passed by and remained rigidly erect. But almost at once he relapsed into his old attitude of fatigue. How long would the hours be were it not for that supporting whitewashed wall!

The chair gained the river-front, and now Paul could measure the prospect clearly.

On the broad embankment, lined with weeping willow trees, were a score or so of European houses, each standing within its own compound, each shrouded in bamboo-blinds, each almost haughtily bent on preserving its own individuality. To complete the view, moored close inshore, were the few big, curious-looking hulks, connected with the shore by means of long gangways built across chained pontoons. These were very necessary accessories to steam-shipping on a mud-encased stream. Save that on one of these hulks a number of coolies were moving cargo to the sound of spasmodic chanting, the whole European settlement seemed sunk in sleep. Thick lines of brown sampans,

looking like partially submerged beetles taking refuge all together, were tied to the pontoon-chains ; but of the sampan-men there was not a trace. Several junks, their sails lowered, swung gently up

and down on the lapping current, having anchored preparatory to discharging. But, save perhaps for a boy or two idly fly-fishing over their sterns, they too appeared bereft of all life.

Paul became a little perturbed. It was really as if he had entered a Sleepy Hollow from which he might never emerge. Where were all the people who lived here? What were they doing? It seemed impossible that any place could look so deserted. He gazed anxiously at the houses, wondering whether the Rev. Ainsley Simon had given directions to his bearers. He noted that they had ceased their fast striding; now they were walking easily, as if they were no longer sure of themselves. Then, just as he was abandoning hope, with a short call the men swung the chair into a gateway and quickly rushed it up to a bungalow building. They had wheeled and grounded the chair almost before he was aware of what they were doing.

He got out and walked in. Yes, undoubtedly it was an office. There were Chinese clerks writing busily in one room; in another others were clicking the abacus. Having surveyed the scene a little timidly from the hall, Paul went by instinct into the counting-office.

“Is this the office of Messrs. Stoddart and Power?” he politely inquired.

The quick sharp click of the abacus instantly ceased, the pens stopped scratching. He was oddly conscious that every almond eye was busy scrutinizing his person as if he were an astonishing phenomenon not often to be met.

“Is this the office of Messrs. Stoddart and Power?” he again inquired, wondering at the speaking silence.

An old clerk, with great horn spectacles on his nose and a bulky green jade ring on his thumb, rose very deliberately and came towards him, removing his spectacles as he advanced.“All right,” he said, and that was all he said.

“I wish to see the firm on a matter of business,” resumed Paul Hancock, suddenly reassured.

“All right,” said the old man again. “Import or export? ” He turned and reached for some forms.

In spite of himself, in spite of his anxiety and preoccupation, Paul smiled. The old fellow’s outlook was so manifestly commercial, so unemotionally matter-of-fact, that he deserved a

meed of praise. So he leaned forward over the counter and beckoned him beside him.

“It ‘s neither,” he explained earnestly. “It’s about a letter of credit.”

“Oh,” said the old clerk. He peered at him benevolently with his rheumish eyes and began slowly and meditatively scratching his ribs with his jade-adorned thumb. “No use,” he added finally, with tragic abruptness.

“No use? But surely — you are the agents of the Bank? Here are my papers, I need some money.” Paul laid his documents on the dollar-worn counter.

The silk-clad clerks, about to resume their labours, suddenly paused at this mention. They looked at one another with smiles at the Great God’s name. Money — he spoke of money?

“No bank here,” said the old man, “only import and export.” He folded his arms and leaned on the counter with speaking finality.

“But I was told —” began Paul Hancock. He did not finish, the futility of any argument had become too amazingly apparent. In the person of the old man the *vis inertia* of forty centuries suddenly confronted him, and he knew that all protest was in vain.

Then a flash of intelligence came to him.

“Where are Messrs. Stoddart and Power?” he asked, coming to where he should have started from.

“Stoddart and Power? ” The old man paused, whilst a beautiful smile passed over his face. “Dead,” he said shortly.

“Dead,” repeated Paul Hancock blankly, wondering what tragedy had occurred.

“Mr. Thompson sole partner now,” ventured the old man, in his strange dipped English, after a pause. He was grinning broadly now; the humour of the interview had at length completely seized him.

Young Hancock laughed too.

“I am afraid I have been unwittingly stupid from the very beginning,” he commented, speaking an idiom which was as Greek to the old man; “now I realize that these two names are merely part of the goodwill of the firm, and that these gentlemen have long been dust. But where is your Mr. Thompson?”

“Gone shooting,” said the old man reprovingly, “always shooting.”

“Gone shooting,” repeated Paul Hancock once more blankly, as a new difficulty rose up like a wall and barred his way. “And when will he come back, may I inquire?”

“Next week, perhaps.”

“Oh! ” murmured the young man ruefully, as he looked back at the glaring sunshine. “I was right. This indeed is a Sleepy Hollow where nothing matters. And all my long trip into the settlement has been in vain.”

Perhaps the old clerk was by nature especially kindly; perhaps something about Paul Hancock attracted him. For suddenly he began rubbing his chin in open perplexity, as if seeking for the solution of a thing he did not completely understand.

“How about see Commissioner? ” he said finally.

“The Commissioner,” exclaimed Paul Hancock, thinking of what Mr. Grey said of him.

“Commissioner good man,” went on the old clerk. “Always help. Come.”

He walked out of the office to the verandah and called to the chair-bearers. They pushed their heads between the bamboo blinds and listened as he volleyed at them with strange words. When he finished, their heads disappeared again as if they were automatons. They had understood.

“Good-bye,” said the old clerk, nodding kindly and going back slowly.

“Good-bye,” said Paul very thankfully; and this is precisely the way he was so unexpectedly launched on his real voyage of discovery.

The chair-bearers picked up the chair smartly, and this time travelled with it to the very end of the waterfront. There they came to a compound where there was some animation in spite of the hot midday hour. Many junks and cargo-boats and sampans were massed round broad landing-stages, and cargo-coolies were working with whole-hearted energy, to much shouting and chanting. A European in a white duck uniform looked at Paul inquiringly as he got out of his chair.

“The Commissioner?” asked the man in white duck at once.

“Yes, please,” he answered, a little as if he had been offered something to eat. Yet he was the one who would be eaten, he feared.

The man in white duck called; a native servant in a red-tasselled hat came forth from some hiding-place; words passed; the European threw a forefinger up to his cap; and then Paul Hancock found that hard on the heels of the red-tasselled one he was entering a building

full of People working silently on veritable stacks and mountains of paper.

The servant knocked on a door.

“Come in,” said a deep voice. The man bearing his card disappeared for a moment. When he returned, it was to throw the door wide open. Paul Hancock cleared his throat and went forward, confessedly in fear and trembling.

CHAPTER VI

HIS eyes eagerly sought this dread Commissioner, and he felt anew that he wished he had not come. Then, like a flash, he was relieved. The vision conjured up by Mr. Grey's stern judgment had miraculously faded. Instantly he was sure Mr. Grey was wrong.

"Good morning, Mr. Hancock," said the Commissioner, glancing at his card and bowing slightly in his chair but not rising. "If you will excuse me for one short moment and sit down, I will give you my complete attention almost immediately." He waved his pen at a chair, and forthwith bent his head once more over his desk. Paul had therefore a perfect opportunity for studying him closely.

He was perhaps somewhat remarkable-looking, yet he was nothing else. That is to say, he was not fierce or hateful-looking or ominous in any way, as Paul Hancock had been led to expect; he was, in point of fact, the very reverse of any of these. An immense frame, awkward yet powerful, was crowned by a small head covered with curly brown hair shot with much grey, which, as the punkah slowly swung, waved to and fro in gentle disarray. The reddish-bronzed face was undistinguished by any feature, save for the small blue eyes which glanced very sharply indeed through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles set on a commonplace nose. The eyes seemed to be peeping at everything with the strange power of the microscope, which makes a mountain out of a mole-hill, and which therefore magnifies a nothing into an every-thing. But the mouth was kind; and the straggling, straw-coloured moustache, which scarcely covered the upper lip, bespoke a careless and easy-going disposition. Any other

details there might be were sunk in the fact that the man was just very big. He was tremendous, in fact, for as he leaned over he seemed to cover his desk. All the energies of this mountain of a man were concentrated on a small piece of red paper, which Paul could see out of the tail of his eye was covered with closely written Chinese hieroglyphics. Wonderful eyes that could pick quick meaning from such stuff …

The Commissioner suddenly threw down his pen, grasped a blue pencil, scrawled his initials, let his heavy hand drop on a handbell, then stretched out his red paper to the servant who instantly appeared.

"Now," he said genially, swinging himself round, "I am entirely at your disposal — until my next interruption."

Paul Hancock drew his feet up under him and sat a little further forward on the edge of his chair.

"I am afraid you will think me foolish," he began very formally, "but I have no business to

trespass on your time. The fact is, I don't really know why I am here at all. I must crave your pardon." He began recounting the peculiar circumstances of his morning's work.

The Commissioner listened, openly amused. Paul did not spare himself. From the tragedy of the dead partners to the tragedy of his own ignorance, he passed with a light and laughable touch.

"Dear old Wong!" commented the Commissioner finally, when he had finished. "Do you know that that old clerk is quite historic? He was with Gordon and the Ever-Victorious Army in the sixties — I think he was once Gordon's servant, if I am not mistaken. Anyway he knows all about that fable of Gordon chasing Li Hung Chang with a revolver because he massacred the Taiping prisoners; and as he fairly worshipped Gordon, in common with all other Chinamen, he tells the story with great relish. In me he has

a sort of infallible belief because I once got a relative of his out of prison and saved him thereby a good many dollars."

The Commissioner talked on, piling reminiscence on top of reminiscence, and not recurring to the subject on hand a single time.

Paul had not yet got into the way of the East, where one assumes as self-evident all those things which it takes days of intercourse in Europe to accept and where no man stops talking because he does not know another man. And so, more and more surprised at the developments which the day had brought, he timidly sat on the edge of his chair and listened as if enchanted.

"I do not know what I should really do about that letter of credit," he ventured finally, after many minutes had sped away.

"Have you got it with you?" asked the Commissioner, coming back reluctantly to the point, as if it was a very unimportant affair.

"Yes." His hands hastily sought his inner pocket.

"That is very simple," said the big man as soon as he had glanced at it; "you can just send it down-river to the nearest branch of the Bank and tell them how much money you want by draft." He explained a few necessary details in the same careless manner. "But perhaps you have not time; perhaps you want to travel on farther up-river. If so, I can play banker and send you on the documents wherever you wish. They should have correspondents here, but the fact is, another bank holds the local monopoly for the time being. And young Thompson is such a trifler that they could not possibly leave the agency in his hands. Do you want money at once — are you going on?"

Paul Hancock blushed. He must confess, and now once more he thought of Mr. Grey.

“Thank you,” he said. “No — I live here. The fact

is”— this a little desperately — “I am in the English mission here.”

The Commissioner tilted his massive body suddenly up in his chair and then leaned forward. He was so very much surprised that he did not trouble to hide it.

“*You* in that mission,” he exclaimed at last, almost unbelievingly. Then he began laughing softly to the ceiling, whilst the swish of the punkah filled the air and drove the buzzing flies in protest to the walls. The peace in the office seemed to increase the Commissioner’s capacity for enjoying the joke: he seemed to be considering it in every possible aspect. “I trust you have become friends with the estimable Mr. Grey,” he said, suddenly fixing his sharp eyes for a moment on the young man.

Paul murmured something unintelligible. He had not reckoned for this; and yet he ought to have guessed that if Mr. Grey hated Mr. Denning, Mr. Denning probably despised Mr. Grey. Well, he did not wish to make anything of this his business, so he sought refuge in silence.

“When did you arrive?” said the Commissioner, now speaking seriously, as if he understood the young man’s position. There was no doubt now that his genial manner had changed.

“Less than a week ago.”

“So you are quite new. How is Ainsley Simon getting on with his building?”

“Nothing more is being done just now; nothing has been done for several months, I understand.”

The Commissioner pursed up his lips pensively, and at the same time twisted the letter of credit between his fingers. Then he began smiling, and it was plain that unconsciously he was reverting to his earlier manner.

“Poor Ainsley Simon,” he reflected aloud, entirely oblivious of his visitor’s feelings. “That man has much good in

him - a great deal of good, in fact — but I am afraid that in spite of his energy he is really weak — he is twisted this way and that. Yes, yes, I am quite sure of it.”

Paul Hancock coloured and nervously moved his feet. But loyalty demanded it, and so he spoke.

“I do not think,” he said slowly, “that you are justified in making that remark to me.”

The Commissioner sat up in his astonishment. But after a moment he began laughing softly to himself in the way he had done before. Perhaps it was the idea of being taken to task by such a young man — and a young man who had just proclaimed himself a missionary at that — that particularly amused him. Perhaps it was something else.

“Well, since you have said it,” he admitted at last, “perhaps it was bad taste to be so frank, especially as the Rev. Ainsley Simon is your chief. But I always speak my mind.”

Then, having made this doubtful apology, he suddenly let his massive body fall back in his chair, and indifferently his eyes sought the ceiling. Paul Hancock, baffled by something that was beyond him to analyze, cast about in vain for a polite way of departing. For his host had no intention of letting him do that, and he realized it.

“I wonder if you will like China,” the big man said presently, staring at the punkah which so wisely nodded and flapped. “China is a queer place, a very queer place, about which very few of us manage to understand anything. They say that there are only two things to do — either to drink or to think, and that it is not the latter which is the more reprehensible course of the two. Let me advise you — do not learn the language too quickly.” He stopped an instant and looked at the young man without seeing him. “By that I don’t mean what people generally mean when they say that China is a queer place— that is, that the people and customs are queer. For they are not at all; both people and customs are perfectly

simple, extraordinarily simple and natural when you look at them the right way. What I mean is that it is the Eur-Asian mixture of ideals and methods which makes times and men disjointed. You cannot find the proper meeting-point — that ‘s what makes China something of a noumenon, an unknown and unknowable thing. It is the conflict of points of view which makes the trouble. Either you accept one or you accept the other, and that is the stupid thing.”

“I can understand that,” said Paul, interested in spite of himself.

“People accuse me of hating the missionaries,” resumed the Commissioner, talking on in his curiously disjointed and impersonal manner, “and the missionaries with cheerful frankness dub me an infidel. In a certain sense I confess I am an infidel. I tell you, Mr. Hancock, that I am opposed to missionaries in a very peculiar way which I have not time to explain to you just now, but which I hold is logical and justifiable; so I warn you now that you will have to keep away from me if you want to follow your calling properly. You must look upon me as a pest, a terrible pest.”

“Surely not,” said Paul, embarrassed.

“I am quite in earnest,” insisted his strange companion. “I speak entirely without feeling on the subject; I simply warn you, Mr. Hancock, to see as little of me as you can. And to help you as much as possible to carry out that necessary resolve, I will draft you that letter at once.”

He was still engaged on his task when a gong rang uproariously from a courtyard behind the building, and instantly there was heard the sound of many hurrying feet.

“The tiffin-hour,” explained the Commissioner, rising to his feet. “You will notice that my staff have good appetites. Well, I am like them, for my appetite is good too. And, as you may judge, to satisfy me requires more than is required to satisfy two of them!”

Paul realized anew what an enormous man he was; he towered above him like a mountain as he spoke: “Here is your letter, Mr. Hancock, but first you must tiffin with me.”

“I thank you very much,” he replied, “but I had anticipated being home late, and so I have sandwiches and a flask in my chair. If you will excuse me — “

“Nonsense,” said the Commissioner very decidedly, “scratch meals are fool’s meals in this country. I insist on your coming. You will tiffin with me for once, and then it is absolutely understood that you will give me the widest possible berth.”

Laughing at his jest, he led the way out to his own very large chair. He spoke sharply to all the bearers, and then, before Paul Hancock could say one word more, the coolies had picked up the chairs and were marching swiftly away. In a very few minutes they had deposited them in front of a big, cool-looking house, down the steps of which had rushed a pack of dogs all joyously barking.

CHAPTER VII

THE memory of the long hours which he passed with Mr. Denning, the Commissioner, and which were so miraculously conjured away by him, remained with Paul Hancock for many days and imperceptibly added to the poignancy of his strange position at the mission. Mr. Denning was so very different to what Mr. Grey's warped vision had painted him; he was so full of luminous thoughts and sudden appreciations, he was so sensible and yet so violently bizarre, that it was difficult at first to accept him as wholly real. He seemed to belong rather to that race of men who live only in the pages of some tale, who have been evolved by a process of cutting away restraining influences, and who therefore represent a state of mind rather than a concrete possibility, since even when man was in the primitive Hunter Stage countless things checked and restrained him. So all the time that Paul was with him, especially after his tiffin, when they were in the library, he caught himself wondering whether this big man might not suddenly vanish into the bookcases amidst the laughter of evil sprites. Somehow that was no impossible thought.

Yet there was a fine and convincing largeness about him which was of a piece with his physical stature, in spite of his bizarre qualities. He possessed a humanity born of a wide experience and buttressed by much learning which could not but make appeal to any candid person by reason of its rough frankness. Though the ideas which he enunciated seemed to clash at every step with those unoriginal views which Paul possessed in common with other millions, it was quite plain that he said nothing about that of which he himself was not

absolutely convinced. There seemed indeed to be no subject on which Mr. Denning had not endless information — information as varied as thirty years of reading and forty years of worldly observation and continued reflection could make it. Then, again, somehow he stimulated thought instead of restraining it; he wielded a great hammer of ideas which struck off sparks and kindled the dullest mind. Such a man could not but be immensely interesting. Formalism had no meaning for him; it was plain that he looked upon all received opinions merely as fortresses inside which the weak and the ignorant instinctively take refuge because of the fatigues and perils and fears which beset the royal road to knowledge. In all truth he was rather wonderful.

Perhaps, too, the material surroundings affected Paul more than he knew, and made his mood curiously responsive to this man's appeal. Mr. Denning's house was rich enough to seem quite magnificent after the barren, unfinished mission to which he had banished himself in an excess of zeal. Paul Hancock was one of those who instinctively love everything that is beautiful merely because it is beautiful and has obviously been designed by a just Providence to delight the senses and contribute to happiness. Though he was purely English, he could not see how any beautiful thing could be in any way really bad.

He had heard from his earliest days that question ardently debated; and he had often idly wondered why, if the virtue and ugliness which were so indissolubly associated together in the minds of certain classes were necessary concomitants, there should be such a thing as beauty so largely scattered among people with no inherent vice. Perhaps it was constant insistence on this unnatural synartesis which really produced much of the morology of missions. What foolish talk had he not already heard in his own small way! How much more would he not have to hear before this criticism of ignorance had become exhausted!

Even Ainsley Simon, good man that he was, was in such matters a bigot of bigots.

Here in this house, too, there was that abundant attention to detail which so many vainly ascribe to the possession and use of money. Care was everywhere visible; everything was not only in its right place, but everything had been carefully planned and executed. The handsome and unique porcelain of the country, ranging from those immense cask-shaped garden-seats, which are the delight of native connoisseurs, down to delicate egg-shell China, so fragile that a rude cough seems capable of shattering it, was so distributed as to make a colour scheme by gentle insinuation rather than by royal proclamation. Somehow it was at once plain that even had Mr. Denning been a poor man instead of a rich man, his house would have been distinctive, just because of those imperceptible shades which when united form that pleasing whole which so many seek in vain. For Mr. Denning was a man of taste, and his collections were those of a collector.

About the house were also scattered endless varieties of curious weapons wrested from every part of this vast empire, and eloquent of the fact that once the country must have been full of armed men waging war against one another as well as against wild beasts not yet driven from their familiar haunts.

“I could almost arm an army,” said Mr. Denning smilingly, seeing that his young visitor was studying them with absorbed interest. It was true; there were certainly enough spears and swords to give point to the attack of an assaulting column.

Scrolls, too, adorned the walls, those wonderful Chinese scrolls which are so full of colour and light. There were landscapes and genre paintings which were delightful merely because they were so ingenuous in their conception, so unrelated

to those other worlds of the other hemisphere where evolution has been so slow and painful, and where borrowing — called eclecticism — has largely replaced originality. Mr. Denning explained how it was that in this branch of painting Chinese artists have displayed a mastery in poetic representation and a sense of atmosphere and colour never since excelled. Here was the fine flower of an art which bore not the slightest debt to that Græco-Oriental culture which has long been esteemed the only culture; and in those pastoral scenes Paul suddenly saw a link in the chain of Chinese conceptions which he had foolishly thought must be missing. So he asked endless questions, and his host gave quick

answers.

Yet, though Mr. Denning talked freely enough, it was not until their meal was ended and they had passed into that wonderful library that he revealed himself in a truly expansive mood. Whilst they had been eating, he had been at some pains to play punctiliously the part of a host, at great pains to set his guest at ease, rather than that of a companion who is willing to exchange, and even to offer for nothing, his most intimate thoughts. It was due not a little to Mr. Denning's art that, though the number and ceremony of his betasselled servants had been at first somewhat disconcerting to Paul, and had made him feel after the frugal mission that he was assisting at a banquet rather than satisfying his hunger, he had soon forgotten his timidity and sat listening in interested silence.

But in the library, in that great company of books, both marshaled in serried ranks and dispersed in stacks over unending tables, there came over him a subtle change. From being a nervous young man, Paul Hancock changed on the threshold as if something intangible had invested him with a new power; and in the delight of the moment at once he forgot everything else.

What a library to own!" he murmured, as he took in the richness of the collection in a few quick glances. Absorbed in his new discovery, he forgot his whereabouts, he forgot Mr. Denning, he forgot everything, and walking to the nearest cases, he lost himself in perusing titles. Here was a complete collection on all those subjects which had always mightily interested him; he understood that this was no collector's library of first editions and valuable reprints, but the library of a student. He had chanced on the sections given up to Memoirs and Biographies; and quickly running his eyes along, he calculated that there must be a couple of thousand volumes of these, — English, French, German, Italian, Spanish … What a mine to dig in! … Wholly oblivious to everything, he slowly walked along with his face glued to the cases.

Mr. Denning, rolling a cigar between his fingers, observed him thoughtfully from the middle distance. Perhaps he really appreciated what the young man must be feeling; perhaps he had some other motive for letting his mind run riot.

"So you like books?" he said at last in his deep voice, as if he were pondering over the matter rather than asking a question.

The young man turned at once.

"I love books," he solemnly announced.

Mr. Denning lighted his big cigar before he spoke again. There was a pleasant brooding silence in the big darkened room which he himself felt just then very strongly. It almost seemed as if the souls of all these generations of men and women who in arduous toil had sought to enlighten their world by transcribing their thoughts and experiences were really

present, each one watching over his own, each one jealously soliciting attention.

“That is at least one of the compensations one has here,

in this country,” he said finally, speaking rather to the books than to his young guest. “One has the time to read, the time to read properly. And in thirty years one can read much, a very great deal. My father, who was a very careful man, always said that no money, no matter how much it might be, could ever be wasted on books. He used himself to go to great booksales, though he could not afford to buy much, and no price that was paid surprised him at all — to him it was money well spent. So I come well by my passion, and I have been able to indulge it. I have twenty-six thousand volumes already, and though of course I have not read them all, I know them all. My collection on philosophy and religions is very complete.” He pointed to the other side of the immense room.

“Twenty-six thousand?” exclaimed Paul. “Are there really so many?” He knew libraries and the space books consume.

For answer Mr. Denning swung his great body off the arm of the massive chair on which he had seated himself, and walked with his heavy tread across the room. Throwing open a small door, he invited attention with a wave of his hand.

“There are not so many in my library, in this room,” he said, “but counting all these in here, there are just twenty-six thousand. This is my unconsecrated ground — the burying place of lost souls, the souls that do not count. I have treated these very cavalierly; they are buried in heaps.”

Paul Hancock tiptoed across the room and peered in at the door. The room was full.

“The books you reject, the outcasts? ” he asked

The Commissioner nodded, but vouchsafed no further explanation. Many of the books were in splendid bindings, yet they lay carelessly stacked on the ground in heaps just as they had been pitched down.

“Whom have you put in here, I would like to know?” asked Paul Hancock. He spoke so gently that his voice sounded almost pleading. To him it seemed inexpressibly cruel to treat books, handsome printed books, that way.

Mr. Denning turned and smiled.

“It is no secret,” he said. “You can go in and handle them as long as you like.” Then suddenly he became serious and frowned. “They are the books I consider merely bad books—the books that are not really books, but merely paper and print bound together

because of the vanity of their foolish makers. No one has any business to write unless he has something really to say; those who write because they want to say something should be severely punished. How few people understand that essential difference!”

Paul stepped forward, stopped, and went back. He had seized the fine distinction.

“No,” he said in the same gentle way, “though I do not agree with you, I will not go in and disturb them. Let them lie in peace. Perhaps you are right, yet it is possible that you are wrong. Do you remember, sir, in Dr. Johnson’s Life how he and Boswell once took a boat at the Temple Stairs and set out for Greenwich? Dr. Johnson was expanding on the wonderful difference learning makes on people; and to explain his meaning he turned to the boy who was rowing them and asked, ‘What would you give to know about the first sailors, the Argonauts?’ The boy answered to the doctor’s great pleasure, ‘Sir, I would give what I have.’ I always think that when people say a book is bad they perhaps forget the maker has given all that he has. Poor bad authors, it was not their fault that they had such little souls! And look what punishment they have drawn on themselves.” He ended with an involuntary sigh.

There was a curious expression on Mr. Denning’s face as he shut the door.

“Do you know, Mr. Hancock,” he said with mock severity, “that you are a most dangerous person?”

The young man coloured quickly. He had talked because the spirit had moved him to talk, and he had forgotten completely how his words might sound. He wondered what he had been saying.

“I— dangerous,” he stammered. “Surely you are not serious, Mr. Denning.”

“I am serious, extremely serious, and I will tell you just why. You have in you the germs of a fanatic. That is the most dangerous thing in the world, because a fanatic invariably believes that when he has found a fragment of the truth he has found the whole; and with that fragment he will willingly wreck everything that stands in opposition to his belief. Believe me, fanatics are persons to be very much guarded against. Possibly you have not yet realized what you are — you are still very young. Women become women at twenty, sometimes before; a man is never a man until he is over thirty. You are a boy.” He blew a cloud of smoke into the air, took a few paces, and continued: “Also you seem to have a most exaggerated regard for the printed word, a fault shared by the excellent people of this country. It is a most foolish superstition — an atavism, if you will. It survives from the time when a book contained magic, the magic of knowledge. Do you know that not a man in this country would willingly tread under foot a piece of printing, no matter what it might be?”

“Is that really so?”

” It is really so, or was really so until recently; for with the upsetting of old idols now going on, my statement may already be partially out of date.”

He continued to muse on, whilst Paul listened and glanced at the titles of a big array of books stacked beside a big reading-lamp.

“That is what I am specializing on just at present,” said Mr. Denning presently, jerking his hand towards these books. “Perhaps it would interest you?”

“Mohammedanism?”

The master of the house inclined his head.

“Yes; it is in many ways by far the most wonderful subject in the world. You will remember perhaps, since you have just quoted Dr. Johnson, what he said about the matter. No? Well, I will quote the passage. Dr. Johnson said that there are but two religions in the world that are subjects of curiosity and interest, the Christian and the Mohammedan; all the others he regarded as barbarous and devoid of interest. If you will listen a minute, you will see the starting-point from which I have pursued my studies.”

He went to a shelf, took down a book, searched quickly, and began to read. “The subject of this book has always appeared to us singularly interesting. How it was that Protestantism did so much yet did no more; how it was that the Church of Rome, having lost a large part of Europe, not only ceased to lose but actually regained nearly half of what she had lost — is certainly a most curious and important question; and on this question Professor Ranke has thrown far more light than any other person who has written on it.…”

“I know,” said Paul, “that ‘s the essay on the history of the Popes.”

Mr. Denning nodded thoughtfully and put the book aside.

“Well, though I do not agree entirely either with Dr. Johnson or Macaulay in any of their dicta, what I have been doing for many months is to try and make it quite clear in my mind why Mohammedanism within a certain circumscribed area can be as profound and real a barrier to Christianity as Roman Catholicism proved to Protestantism at a certain stage in European history; and again, why it can still

be made such a tremendous striking-force. You know it is the only religion that has ever displaced Christianity. Mohammedanism drove Christianity out of Asia Minor and North Africa, which had been Christian for centuries. It is a marvelous subject because there are so few books on it, and one has to reconstruct whole periods by one’s self.”

“I know very little about it, I am afraid,” said Paul humbly.

“You need not feel ashamed; though many say they do, actually very few people really know anything about the subject,” replied Mr. Denning, smiling. “I flatter myself that I know nearly as much as anybody in the world can know just now, whilst studies are so fragmentary. My collection of books is complete; and, as I know some Arabic, I have made not a few original investigations. Would you like to understand my methods?”

Not waiting for an answer, he went to a case and drew out some immense, roughly drawn maps.

“If you want to know anything about Mohammedanism, you must first know something about the history of civilization,” he announced, spreading his maps out on a desk; “you have first to take exactly the same steps as you must take if you want truly to understand the history of civilization in Europe. I take it, for instance, that you have received the same education as the average young person in England; I hope you will not be offended if I say that this is the equivalent to admitting that you have had no education at all. You are worse than an ignoramus, you have been wrongly taught, you are useless for all practical purposes.”

“Why?” asked Paul Hancock, his expression hesitating between annoyance and a smile. He believed that in certain matters he was original, and he was young enough to feel keenly any insinuation that he was ignorant.

“Because, without order, without explanation, without

method, you have been presumably taught a little Latin, a little Greek, a little mathematics, a little of the stuff called history, a little of modern languages, a little literature. With this hotchpotch in your head you are called an instructed man, fairly launched on the world. Whereas, if the truth be known, what you have learned here at the end of the nineteenth century is hardly one stage ahead of what was taught in the illiterate Middle Ages, and perhaps rather less than you would have learnt had you been born on the shores of the Mediterranean twenty centuries ago.”

Mr. Denning laughed uproariously: he was in his element. Here in the midst of his books he would battle with an army.

“Is that not rather sweeping? ” objected Paul. He could now not conceal the fact that he was ruffled at being thus set aside.

“Of course it is sweeping,” rejoined Mr. Denning promptly. “I mean it to be sweeping. I want you to realize, before I begin to talk to you, that it is a scandal due to the influence of a pseudo-Christianity that a people so hard-headed as the English should tolerate such a

system — or rather such a lack of system — as I have just described. They have successfully discovered the proper method for stereotyping a race of hard-heads into a nation of dunces; that is the plain English of it."

Paul remained silent. He was wondering whether this was not perhaps a mania of a man who had read overmuch without ever feeling the correcting influence of wiser persons than himself.

"I know what you are thinking," said Mr. Denning, walking up and scanning his features closely, "but I can assure you that once again you are wrong. I am neither mad nor bigoted. You were wondering which it might be!"

To the stammered denial he paid no attention at all. He appeared to have suddenly become moody, for he began pacing up and down the room with his eyes fixed on the floor.

"Please go on, Mr. Denning," said Paul, fearing now that the lecture was at an end. "I assure you, you interest me beyond words."

"Well, come here then," said the big man genially. "The first thing an English boy should be taught is undoubtedly to read, write, and count; and the second thing he should be taught is that a moral code — the Decalogue, if you like — is necessary. But at the same time it should be dinned into his ears that this is not for any spiritual purpose, but only for the preservation of the human race. Also in every possible way, morning, noon, and night, he should be told that he is a white-skinned Barbarian and the son of a Barbarian whose great virtue has lain not so much in his brains as in the vigour of his body. His mind being thus early trained to reject the whole body of unscientific thought which makes any real learning a matter of the greatest difficulty, even today, he would rapidly become ripe for teaching. I see you look unconvinced — the idea that a boy can be taught in such a manner strikes you as grotesque. I answer that it is far easier to teach such things to a boy than it is to teach them to a man, who is mentally surfeited. A boy's attitude of mind is really totally unprejudiced in all that concerns fundamental truths; it is soon made prejudiced by the crude teaching he receives from grown-up men who are very nearly all totally unqualified to teach him anything save a few pedagogic nonsensities."

Paul Hancock's face suddenly became stern as he thought of the influence the cruel fate of the unlucky schoolmaster of his early days had had on him.

"But you must admit, Mr. Denning, before going any

further," he said earnestly, "that boys have a great love for the emotional side of life, and that your system would make absolutely no provision for this."

"Wait a minute," interrupted the other. "I want you first to accept my point of view; you

can enter your objections and totally reject it afterwards if you like. Having made my youth fully alive to his racial origin, having made him understand that he is nothing but a vigorous meat-eating young Barbarian whose conquest of the world has depended on the vigour of his body and his enormous persistence of purpose, I throw open to him the history of the pre-scientific era thus —"

Mr. Denning took the top-map and opened it out. The world wherein are now stored the wealth, the intelligence, the enlightenment of the earth — almost all the European world lay shrouded in Cimmerian darkness; whilst southeast of it, on the Mediterranean basin and then sheer east to the confines of India, was illumined with yellow light. Countless arrows, each with a reference number, pointed here and there, showing how darkness had been pierced and progress made. Circles of different colours marked off culture spheres, whilst within the circles stood squares giving population statistics.

"I made this particular map for my own edification twenty-five years ago, and I am proud of it," said Mr. Denning. "That was before anybody had thought of doing so. Now this map idea is becoming popular, but only for historical purposes and as a sort of accompaniment to all that nonsense about Marathon and Platæa and Salamis and Cannæ. And my map is far better than anything that has been ever published. Look at these insets — they are really insets, though I have got them on separate paper."

There was a glow of pride on his face as Paul Hancock bent over his work and was soon intently studying it.

"Now here we pass further on. The Cimmerii are no longer Cimmerii; their perpetual darkness is being dispelled. Knowledge of a sort is gradually reaching them, and the era of prejudice is at hand. I have shown this in six sections, but it is important to understand these insets which would be properly shown on my giant maps."

He turned over sheet after sheet, hardly leaving Paul Hancock time enough to do more than grasp the mass of detail he had thus portrayed.

"Now you see, when your model boy of the twenty-fifth century — he can scarcely be hoped for before then — has been made to take a proper objective point of view of the movement of civilization of his world, he can be taught without fear a little Latin and a little Greek, both to illustrate what he has learnt and to explain the origin of languages, but for no other purpose. His main time till now must be occupied with two studies — the ground plan of applied sciences and a historical study of the world's culture. He must be made to look at things as much as possible from the outside and as little as possible from the inside. He must be taught the proper value of the objective standpoint and the absolute folly of the subjective. In this direction the Germans flatter themselves that already they are doing a good deal. But the German mind is not cold enough, in spite of what people think to the contrary, to lead in such a matter; and then the German ideal in education is a kind of cramming which is utterly useless save to produce one result, stupid cynicism.

Youths should be taught as little as possible whilst their minds are being drilled to assume a proper attitude, and all the time they should be trained to look at everything around them scientifically."

"But how about the boy's moral training, his religion?"

"His moral training?" echoed Mr. Denning. "Do you suppose there is any moral training in Latin and Greek and

going to church and Hebrew Scriptures—for that 's what you understand by moral training. I would be giving him the best moral training in the world — teaching him at every step how nature infallibly corrects vice by the sternest punishment — death, or some distortion which leads to death. Let me give examples from the animal world. I have made some experiments myself."

He talked on for a quarter of an hour or so, illustrating what he meant. Then —

"But you will be wondering, if you have not forgotten all about it, what all this has to do with Mohammedanism. Well, nothing, strictly speaking, except that unless you have been made to understand the proper way of looking at things — that is, the objective method — you cannot possibly follow me in what I have been pursuing. What I want to discover is what is to be the fate of Mohammedanism in this vast area."

He took one of his maps and showed how the Sword of the Prophet had cleft so well that a great and continuous piece of the earth, from Africa to the eastern shores of Asia, had been severed from every other creed and attached to his own.

"It is not only a serious study for me, but a singularly amusing one," he resumed — "amusing, because save for the question of women, the harem system and the promise of future houris in heaven, Christians cannot possibly attack Mohammedanism. There are no idols to throw down, no hideous sacrifices to be decreed, no obscene writings such as the Christians have had at certain periods — nothing but a rigid system with bare mosques in which to pray to God. And not only that, but historically there can be no doubt that the one excess of Mohammedanism, in the matter of women, is directly attributable to the Christians."

"What do you mean?" asked Paul hesitatingly.

"I speak of the asceticism of the Middle Ages," said Mr. Denning. "All Asia Minor was covered with monasteries full of monks and. convents full of nuns and everywhere the false doctrine was being preached that the flesh is nothing but the Devil; whereas the flesh plays a very essential part in all the world's activities; and to attempt to repress it in that way is only of a piece with the rest of Christian sophistry. Mohammed corrected that, and

though I do not wish for his eleven wives and his two female slaves, I can quite understand his feelings on the subject."

Paul had nothing to say.

"But I can never keep to the point, it seems," continued Mr. Denning presently, "and I have not a hundredth part of the time to tell you even a quarter of my investigations. Look at these notebooks: they deal only with this one question — what was the cause of the sudden superiority of Mohammedanism to the rising force of Christianity in the Middle Ages? There must be a thousand pages of notes, and I have not begun to exhaust the question yet."

"Goodness! " exclaimed Paul, as he looked at the endless pages of fine writing.

"That is nothing," said Mr. Denning smilingly. "Look at this box full of papers covering a preliminary question which I had to study closely before I felt competent to attack the other one. You will see the title, 'Notes on the history of Medieval Philosophy in its relation to ecclesiastical doctrine.' That is a subject about as difficult to handle in a competent fashion as to write intelligently about the Fourth Dimension. I do not pretend to have covered the ground fully, nor can any one man ever hope to do so, but there is an immense amount of detail properly systematized in that box. What is wanted today is a new generation of Encyclopædists who will combine to write in a few volumes a proper summary of this heterogeneous body of knowledge which is

not yet properly codified or systematized. If this can be done this century, the next century will be much happier."

"Do you really think happiness and knowledge go together?" inquired Paul earnestly. "If it were really so, why should there be so many proverbs emphasizing the bliss of ignorance?"

"My dear young man, why do you wander aside?" said Mr. Denning, pausing in his demonstrations. "You are descending from the sublime to the ridiculous. Proverbs are not proofs of anything save of the native cunning of a race. The French have by far the best proverbs in the world."

"Still," persisted Paul, with the strange pertinacity which was his when confronted by a doubt, "if there were nothing in proverbs, they would not ring true, and humanity would soon reject them. I, for my part, can conceive that the happy age was the ignorant age, when people really knew nothing and did not chase shadows."

"Am I chasing shadows?" inquired Mr. Denning.

"I do not know," said the young man, with sudden weariness. "I sometimes think that all

of us who attempt to use our brains beyond certain limits are mere fools who will be duly punished for our foolishness."

"That is a very broad doctrine," said Mr. Denning, looking much amused, "and it contains a degree of censure I would not have expected from you, Mr. Hancock."

"Oh, no," said Paul, becoming confused as he understood how his words must have sounded. "I was talking quite impersonally, I assure you, Mr. Denning, and if I was thinking of anyone it was only myself."

"Hum!" said Mr. Denning doubtfully. "Well, I will just finish explaining my plan to you, as it helps to do my own thinking to hear myself talk once in a while."

He explained how he had brought his studies down to a

certain point and had been confronted by a problem which was insoluble save on one hypothesis — that certain climates were inherently suited to certain religions, and that just as Christianity was suited in two forms for Europe, a common-sense form for the higher northern races and a more sensual form for the southern races, so was Mohammedanism suited for the hot-dry sirocco-swept deserts; Brahminism for heat-crushed race-mixed India, fetichism for African forests, Buddhism for gentle races such as the Singalese and the Burmese, Shintoism for the heroic-souled Japanese.

"You can test that in a hundred ways," he concluded, "and you will always find it come true. It is a matter of finding the ideals which are climatically the most suitable. In Mohammedanism I have carried my tests to extraordinary lengths — some day I shall perhaps tell you about them. But taking what will soon be most familiar to you — the case of China — you will find that this country is no more Buddhist than India is Buddhist, and that China indeed is the one capital example of a country that really never has had any general system of religion, but only a system of morals, probably because — and mark this well — the climate and soil are so diversified. There is an immense variety in these two prime considerations; their influence, then, is most curious."

Paul had become suddenly conscious, in a way which he could not explain, that Mr. Denning had been for a number of minutes violently attempting to distract his attention, to make him forget the point they had arrived at in their discussions on Mohammedanism. He remembered how they had early reached that debatable point concerning the possibilities of Mohammedanism, but after that something had swept them with a digression. Some instinct told him that Mr. Denning was regretting his expansiveness.

"All the time that I have been talking," broke in Mr.

Denning, " I have been thinking about what you said regarding emotionalism in life."

“Yes.”

He was sure now that his host was dissimulating, and now he watched him with increasing interest. The big man had begun slowly pacing up and down again, his arms folded behind his back, his brows closely knit. Paul followed him with eager eyes. Something curious had come over him. The atmosphere of the room had become full of suspense.

“The English race is a mystery to me,” announced the big man, “and I can only explain it to myself as a race absolutely lacking in imagination. Otherwise how can one account for the Hebraic strain which is always ready in emergency to burst into flames? You have that strain, I have it. You look puzzled, but let me give you three names as manifestations of this — Cromwell, Carlyle, Lincoln. Where in the whole world can you find three men of another race like these? And it is just that quality which makes the race so redoubtable in anything it seriously undertakes. There is another side to the race — a hundred other sides if you wish — but they are all beaten out of court by that other strain. That is the real trumpet-call. What Lincoln said in his last inaugural address had been already said by Elizabeth at Tilbury Fort in 1576; it was repeated by Cromwell, and even by Chatham in spite of his melodrama. If you can get that strain to work, all the gallantry of the French, the loyalty and persistency of the Germans, the cleverness and subtlety of the Italians, goes down before it as trees do before the winter’s blast. The Russians alone have something of the same thing, but they have in only a negative form what the English have in a most positive form. That is why the Russians can stand a slaughter which appals other men.”

“Well?” said Paul, wondering what this might lead to Why had the man gone off at a tangent?

“Well, that is exactly the reason why Protestant missionaries are at times formidable, and that is why they could be formidable in China if they only knew it. If they worked on their national strain, if they abandoned all their antique pseudo-Oriental doctrines, the historic origin of which they themselves do not begin to understand, they might become a really formidable force by inculcating the inherent Hebraism of the English.”

Mr. Denning stopped short suddenly and stared at his books. It was now or never —

“You think that they would be as powerful a force in China as Mohammedanism may be?”

The words had slipped from Paul Hancock before he could restrain them; his audacity brought a flood of colour to his checks.

“What do you mean?”

Mr. Denning had turned as if somebody had struck him. His sharp eyes were fixed on Paul

Hancock piercingly; it was clear that he had been unmasked.

“Nothing more than I say — that you evidently see more hope for Protestantism than you like to confess.”

Mr. Denning eyed him suspiciously and then began to pace up and down again. Suddenly he looked at his watch.

“My dear young man,” he exclaimed in well-simulated haste, “I must take leave of you. Do you know that it is nearly four o’clock and that that staff of mine will have fled unless I can catch them before the stroke of the gong? They at least have strictly orthodox views on the subject of work.”

He paused and walked to one of the long windows, which he opened. The outer shutters remained closed, and he did not unbar them, but stood listening.

“Good-bye,” he said, suddenly turning.

When Paul Hancock came out in the open, for a number of minutes he did not seem completely to come to. He had a strange feeling — a feeling as if he had been to church, a church about which he had not dreamed hitherto.

Mr. Denning — what was this Mr. Denning? What did it all mean?

CHAPTER VIII

THE voice of the old teacher went on unendingly until imperceptibly his person seemed to sink out of sight and nothing but the voice remained. The voice repeated the four-tone exercises with passionless monotony; the face from the first had been nothing but an impassive mask, and now it had become nothing at all, whilst the voice went on and on.

The voice seemed to say that time itself was but a human fiction, and eternity the only reality, the only goal. Follow, follow, follow — that was the real and only message of the voice; and in that air, in that atmosphere, the message became a law. There was no revolt possible against such an irresistible decree; it was useless, it was futile. The voice, passing without a break, without a change, from one tonic group to another, melting gutturals, labials, sibilants, and aspirants into one endless monotone, proclaimed it more eloquently than could the most fiery and insistent accents. Outside, in the fields men might be moiling and toiling, in the villages women weeping or spinning, in the muddy pools children laughing and splashing; yet all such things had no meaning. The thing to seize, to understand, the voice seemed to say, was very far removed from these. It floated in the air, it hovered in the room. Here it was; one might almost catch it, but that already it was gone. Only follow, follow, follow — that was the duty, the only way of earning merit …

On and on went the voice, beating down revolt, forcing unwilling obedience. There was but one course of action — that was to follow blindly. Byways led nowhere; here was the broad road, so straight, so endless, so tiresome, yet

so tranquil. And so the seconds became minutes, and the minutes fast mounted up into hours that were not real hours but only spaces …

The voice had imperceptibly shaded up to a sharper intonation during the last groups, and Paul Hancock started in conscious guilt. Yes, his attention had been straying unconsciously; he had commenced dreaming again — dreaming whilst his voice followed closely after the other voice and attempted to imitate modulations which were not real modulations but only permutations of the same thing. Every day he sat thus on the opposite side of the little table, trying ostensibly to catch that will-o-the-wisp, the correct accent. At times he thought he would never succeed; it was so elusive; so subtle in its inflections, so raucous and yet so tuneful. Yet, whenever his revolt became imminent, there was the voice to reprove him; and, chastening him with the supreme argument of monotony, irresistibly it led him back, and then forward once more. It was slavery, abject slavery, but he had embraced it of his own free will.

They had at last finished, and the old teacher came back to life by beginning to talk of common things in a new way, when the door of the little library opened quietly, and Mr. Grey peered in, with a heavy Bible under his arm. At once the last remnant of Paul

Hancock's dreams was dissolved
by the stern reality of Mr. Grey's appearance with a disagreeable and perceptible shock; everything had suddenly become as it really was. The old teacher's white beard sprang out from his face, his faded robes clear to the eye; the room was a rather mean, barren little room: the poetry had fled, and Paul felt for the first time the fatigue of the long lesson.

"I hope I am not inconveniently interrupting you," began Mr. Grey, with unaccustomed geniality in his manner.

"Not at all," replied Paul, "we have really finished already and were only talking together — or rather I was trying to talk."

He looked at his visitor hard, and wondered anew what it was that always repulsed him; there must be in the man some inner essence which offended some inner sense of his. One seemed to feel him at the end of one's finger-tips in an indescribable way; perhaps one breathed with less facility when he was around — it was almost a surprise that one did not smell him. "Yet," thought Paul, continuing to look at him steadily, "he is not really a bad-looking man in any way as far as regularity of features go; and he could even make himself very pleasant when he did not happen to be bad-tempered."

And just then something made him turn and look at the old teacher. Usually so placid, so impervious to all influences, he too had suddenly risen from his scat; and now, underlying his wonderful Oriental mask, one could almost surprise the lurking detestation. "Yes," thought Paul Hancock, "it is something that everybody, or nearly everybody, feels. The people who do not feel it must themselves have some taint."

Meanwhile Mr. Grey had seated himself and was saying a word or two in the vernacular. The old teacher inclined his head and murmured some brief reply so gently that Paul Hancock thought he had been mistaken. But as Mr. Grey looked away the old man shot a lightning glance of a very different nature, and his hands suddenly trembled. There was no doubt about it — he loathed the man.

"I have been thinking that it is a great pity the house in the northwest corner remains unfinished," said Mr. Grey, suddenly getting up and looking out of the window after having talked for a few minutes of the difficulties of learning Chinese. "Ainsley Simon says it could be completed easily

for fifteen hundred dollars, but that he will not get a fresh grant from the Board until the end of the year. He feels very keenly about it, as he fears now that he did spend too much money on raising the level of the ground, and that the houses will deteriorate if they are allowed to stand so long unfinished. Now, if we could contrive to borrow the money —"

Paul Hancock allowed the unfinished sentence to remain unanswered just long enough to

convey something which he wished Mr. Grey to understand. He knew that Mr. Grey was watching him and counting the seconds. So only after a pause did he too come to the window and look out.

“I think it a pity also that the mission should look as it does,” he said at last. Then he took a deep breath. “I can find the money, Mr. Grey — that is, if Mr. Simon will permit me to do so. And perhaps we can arrange about the other buildings.”

“Now, my dear Hancock,” cried Mr. Grey, quite excitedly, seizing the young man by the arm, “that is a very excellent proposal of yours and one that merits instant consideration. I was much struck at the manner in which you went into the settlement, and bearding the Commissioner in his den, arranged about your letter of credit.” Paul Hancock started. Purposely he had told only Mr. and Mrs. Ainsley Simon this; he saw now that leakage of his confidences was inevitable. “If you will allow me I will go and find our excellent chief and communicate to him your suggestion.”

And before there was any time to answer, Mr. Grey darted from the room with quite surprising agility. And thus pupil and teacher were left alone together as suddenly as they had been interrupted.

The expression on the old teacher’s face had in the interval become so droll that Paul, suddenly catching sight of it,

smiled broadly in spite of his preoccupation. He saw that in some wonderful way the old man, by straining every faculty, had evidently half understood what had passed in a language utterly unknown to him; for on his face was expressed profound regret that the hateful visitor should have carried a point which he at least was sure he had expressly come into the room to carry.

Now Paul, with the aid of four words of the vernacular and much pantomime, told him how building would be recommenced. The old man nodded, nodded, nodded, ever so wisely, but did not speak. Yet his face spoke, and that face said, “Long ago I knew that, as well as other things which you yourself will only later learn. Talk to me in your simplicity; I listen in the dotage of my almost clerical knowledge.” But Paul had no time to continue this study of the old man, for just then the Rev. Ainsley Simon burst in.

“My dear Hancock,” he exclaimed, “friend Grey has come to me with the strange tale that voluntarily — quite voluntarily, he protests — you have suggested the advisability of completing the house in the northwest corner with a loan you are willing to make. Now this will improve the mission most mightily — we shall be almost ourselves — those new schoolrooms on the ground floor will be most up to (late — on the upper floor arrangements can be made which will relieve the congestion in this house …”

He rattled on, quickly piling good point on good point, showing how it would all work

out. Then suddenly he stopped, hesitated in what he was going to say, and coloured.

“But, Hancock, no matter how much we may want the money, I cannot accept it unless the offer came quite voluntarily from you. I could not think otherwise of being under such an obligation even in the cause of religion. It would not be right.”

“But, of course, the offer was made by me voluntarily,”

said Paul, quickly seeking to relieve the good man’s concern. “I am even now reproaching myself for not having done it before. My letter of credit gives me far more than that to dispose of, and I can easily get more money by cabling.”

“Can you?”

The reverential awe with which the Rev. Ainsley Simon habitually spoke of money, especially of money in good pounds sterling brought from rich England to this poor land, was more evident than ever.

“Yes, certainly. You see matters in my father’s business have been absolutely settled by now and I can draw what moneys I like.” He began explaining how this was.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon hardly listened, he was so excited. And no sooner had Paul stopped than he burst out again.

“Dear me, dear me, Hancock, it sounds very strange in my ears that this happy news should have come today. You see, I have always been a very poor man — lacking nothing, God be thanked, in spite of my poverty, yet never able to speak of our English gold save as in some far-off dream, and always counting my money for many years in silver dollars — yes, and even in copper cash! I remember when I was married I had only forty-six silver dollars of my own in the whole world — forty-six dollars and no more. Yet I thought that a handsome little sum, and I gave it to my wife much as a millionaire gives a million. That was, let me see, twenty-six years ago — twenty-six long years ago. Ah, Li *Hsien Sheng*,” he had turned to the old teacher, “I am not as old as you, but I am following quickly after you.”

Now the old teacher smiled, and his voice answered without a quaver. With this man he would talk freely, for with him he had some agreement in feeling if not in tradition.

“The good old man is wonderfully typical of his race,” said Mr. Simon presently, turning again to Paul Hancock and seating himself gaily on the edge of the little table with

his hands in his pockets. Because he had been more than a little emotional, Paul knew by experience that now he would become didactic.

“I find him charming,” murmured Paul.

“Do you not see written all over him the pride of a great antiquity? Shoot a glance at him — he is much too philosophic to mind whether you stare or not. I once offered at another station in South China to an old scholar a first-class translation of Green’s ‘Short History of the English People.’ It was returned to me in a few days with the remark that the excellent gentleman was not at all interested in the history of any people with so recent an origin as the English! Hancock, I confess I was crushed. Looking back, I laugh at the absolute manner in which that retort humbled me. Yet they have some reason to be proud, these Chinese! Not only have they four thousand years of history, but they have four hundred millions of people — a homogeneous people, mark me well — self-satisfied and scornful. Think of what we English would be if the whole continent of Europe were ours and there were four hundred millions of us! Then the Chinese boast of a very ancient literature and a code of morals twenty-five centuries old — there are two more points. The missionary cannot ignore these things, he must make special note of them; and that is precisely why we must be, first and last, schoolmasters and nothing else. These good men are very sensible of ideals they cannot by themselves attain — do not accept what some people say, that the Chinese have no use for such things. The Chinese have a double nature; they are at once materialistic and idealistic, and the problem is how to reach and conquer the one half without irretrievably offending the other. That is how I see it. If I only knew how to put into practice what my experience has taught me!”

He slid off the table and began nervously pacing up and

down. He had forgotten everything else in the rekindled fire of his old enthusiasms.

“We have not done so badly, you know,” he resumed. “I mean, the Protestant churches. At least we have been frank in our methods, we have not compromised. The Roman Catholics had two centuries’ start of us, and they have had many clever men — oh, wonderfully clever men! — but confessedly they are now standing still. They came in almost ancient days; we come only as Moderns hand in hand with modern traders, very brothers to them if they would only understand. You know the story of our first man — Morrison, the dictionary-maker — how he translated that first dictionary in a gloomy cellar by stealth at Canton, with all our English opium-dealers and cotton-dealers openly against him and just some kindly American giving him asylum? That was labour and devotion, if you like — a dozen years of it in a cellar — a marvelous record. That dictionary and the man who made it form the corner-stone of Protestantism in China. But we really only commenced coming in in earnest — that is, building well and solidly — with the Treaties — Treaty of Nanking, Treaty of Tientsin forced on the Chinese by our English soldiers. Until then men just sailed up the coasts in junks, landing where they could and distributing texts, and often receiving in return blows and stones. Gutzlaff was the leader of that adventurous band. Gutzlaff came to the port of Woosung and distributed Bibles, and now his memory is forever preserved in a lighthouse. Well named, indeed, is

that lighthouse — its light will shine forever."

The Rev. Ainsley Simon ceased talking as he strode up and down, and the old teacher now courteously left. As the door closed behind him, Mr. Simon began again, this time in a softer voice, as if the glory of it all dazzled him.

"Well, we are numbered in thousands now, counting English and Americans together, and we are getting the idea

of system into our heads, as well as a better understanding of both our limitations and our capabilities. Oh, it will be very interesting to see the state of affairs fifty years hence! We are proceeding on common-sense lines, cutting away as much as possible of useless formalism, trying to be simple and direct. And because we are in a neutral land, we can be different from the professed defenders of religion at home who find themselves tied by solemn obligations to certain specified methods and conclusions and who are therefore incapable of dealing freely with minds whose interest is in truth and not in this or that truth. The religious lay-mind has outgrown the clerical mind. Hancock, I know there is everywhere abroad the suspicion that a cleric teaches what he does because he must do so and not because he really believes. Look at the so-called modernists in the Roman Catholic Church; is not theirs an ignominious position? Their intellect, their trained intelligence, tells them that much of the dogma and reasoning of their church is plain superstition and nothing else; and yet they try to keep within the communion which is founded on these things by compromising. Did you read that remarkable account the other day of one of their leaders who, while adhering to all his free-thinking, yet admitted that the superstitious government of the Popes was necessary for the spiritual welfare of mankind? That comes from their false training. The Roman Catholic idea still is to segregate the Seminarian from all the conditions of secular life in an artificial world as different as possible from the world in which he will afterwards have to live. By ascetic discipline his character is forced into a certain form which it is supposed to retain for the rest of his life. Yet the whole thing is futile, lamentable. He goes into the world unprepared for its true nature and difficulties; he has been drilled for an entirely different sort of warfare, and therefore his training is equivalent to no training at all. And

when he is confronted with barriers, instead of breaking them down he walks round them. Do you know that in China they elevate the Host to the sound of fire-crackers — as a sop to native prejudices?"

"Really! " exclaimed Paul, in some amazement.

"Yes, it is true; I have heard it often. Now we have none of these limitations; we simply take the Gospels and work as we can. It all remains with the impact our minds can make on a sluggish mass thus." He brought his fist against the palm of his hand with a resounding smack. "Now, Hancock, come with me over to that house and let us inspect

what has to be done.”

Breaking off as suddenly as he had begun, he linked his arm in Paul’s and went forth with him in this manner. Together they climbed round the scaffolding of the uncompleted house which was now to be completed; together they peered into the dark, dank interior. When the inspection was over, Paul suddenly observed that his companion was twitching with some undiscovered feeling. He looked at him smilingly; he knew it was the third and last phase fast coming. The good man, now hot and perspiring, was chuckling to himself and yet stopping himself sternly. It was plain that he was of two moods. He wanted to and yet did not want; plainly he was being tortured.

“Hancock,” cried he at last, suddenly seeing that his inner, state had been unmasked and unable to retain control over himself any longer — “Hancock, can you keep a secret, a secret which will try and burst from your bosom in a shout of laughter. Tell me, Hancock, can you? “

He tiptoed up to him along the planking of the new building and eyed him quizzically. Then, unable to contain himself any longer, he himself burst into fits of open laughter.

“Dear me, I am foolish. It is sadly out of place; yet it

is oddly droll, a veritable piece of fool’s drollery, and I have kept it secret for two whole days! Think of my agony and truly pity me.”

His mood was contagious. He looked so absurd that Paul had begun laughing himself before he knew just why. “I can keep a secret,” he announced.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon opened his mouth, but suddenly choked once more.

“You will reprove me, I fear,” he gasped; “I cannot believe that you will share my mirth after our serious talk. Yet somehow the joke is so insinuating that it stays with me perpetually; in its unutterable folly it is a most perfect thing. I must unburden myself. Hancock, swear that you will not tell it against me.” He peered round in playful suspicion.

“I will tell no one,” said Paul.

Suddenly the Rev. Ainsley Simon became transfigured. A new idea had struck him. He was no longer in China: a whim had transferred him to Elsinore; the scaffolding had fittingly become a platform before a castle — perhaps he even imagined a listening ghost. Now cautiously he advanced and seized Paul Hancock by the arm with quaint pantomime.

“Swear it,” he protested in a gruff whisper.

“I swear,” stammered the surprised young man, not recognizing the great master’s words.

“Then we ‘ll shift our ground. Come hither.”

He marched him across the dangerous planking and began anew:

“Never to speak of this that you have heard, swear by my sword.” He grasped a supporting pole.

“I swear.”

The Rev. Ainsley Simon dropped his arm and wiped his eyes with his coarse handkerchief for the last time.

“Hancock,” he said, “You remember how we were

discussing the early missionaries and their voyages up the coast and into ports? There, I give you a clue.”

Paul Hancock nodded.

“This was told me by a rude young fellow in the settlement who claimed he had invented it. He told it to me on the pontoon, when I was seeing to our stores; he said it was just the sort of joke that I should appreciate, and in truth the shock was so sudden that I nearly fell into the river Hancock, the moment has come, prepare yourself. Why did Gutzlaff? ” His voice had sunk to a dramatic whisper.

“Oh,” cried Paul, “I can never guess those conundrums in that new vein.”

“Hancock,” replied Mr. Simon, “answer me: why did Gutzlaff?”

He shook with laughter. “The answer is cruel.” He sobbed aloud.

“I cannot guess,” protested the young man; “you will have to tell me.”

Then did it burst from Mr. Simon like a bomb. “Because, oh — because, Woosung!”

CHAPTER IX

THE long afternoon was well advanced, and Paul, his day's work completed, was sitting reading when a message reached him on a scrap of paper. Mrs. Simon had briefly written:

Will you please come out and meet us? The American Mission has come to call." There was nothing more.

Mrs. Simon was always scribbling on scraps of paper in this way — she preferred writing to speaking; and though everyone found this a useful method to cultivate in a land where verbal messages are invariably delivered mutilated, few could carry it to the lengths Mrs. Simon consistently did. She had been known to write something down to her worthy husband when she was on the upper verandah and he on the lower one, as if she preferred to communicate in silence, as if she distrusted all spoken words.

Paul put down his book with a sigh, for he was reading something which interested him, and he had quite forgotten that he was really ten thousand miles away from anyone he really knew or cared about. He stood there for so long that he finally became alarmed at his forgetfulness. So now, quickly running downstairs, and jumping the last three steps in his haste, he cannoned heavily into the Rev. Ainsley Simon, who was just coming out of his study.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Simon," he gasped, staggering back, for the wind had been knocked completely out of him. He hardly saw that he had driven his victim just as heavily against the wall.

"Oh, friend Hancock," exclaimed that reverend gentleman ruefully, rubbing his elbow and trying to laugh it off,

"It was entirely inadvertent, I know, but, oh, my funny-bone!"

"I am really sorry." Paul hastened to apologize again. "It was foolish of me, but I was hurrying in answer to Mrs. Simon's summons and I was afraid that I had kept her waiting."

"On a piece of paper? " inquired the older man with sudden interest, still rubbing his elbow.

Paul nodded his head.

"Artful woman! She made that one piece of paper do for both of us. What a labour-saving device! Have you noticed how women understand economy in a way that we poor men

can never imitate? Now that we have both some-what recovered, let us proceed in more sober haste." And putting his hand in a friendly manner on Paul's shoulder, the Rev. Ainsley Simon walked out with him.

They found the party strolling round the mission grounds and viewing the kitchen gardens which Mrs. Simon had laid out. They were surveying with most zealous attention the patches of cabbage, the celery, the beet root, as if it were a matter of concern to see just how much energy was being devoted to this culture by a mission which in other things exhibited to the eye a certain sloth.

As they approached, Mr. Simon rapidly explained who the members of the American Mission were. There was old Dr. Spike, who had been in China fifty-two years; and Dr. Moss (who had been forty-two), with his daughter, Miss Moss; and Mr. and Mrs. Wayne, who had studied together and then had married so that they might labour together; and Mr. Harland, who was only nineteen and very raw; and finally, there was Miss Virginia Bayswater.

"There are really many more in the mission," concluded Mr. Simon in an undertone, as they came up, "but some of the men are always travelling, and two of the older ladies

are afraid of the boats on the river. The mission is rich, very rich, friend Hancock, compared with ours."

"Ah, here you are at last, Ainsley," said Mrs. Simon in a relieved voice, turning to him, as if she had found it a heavy task to entertain so many. Mrs. Simon's ideas about Americans, though she had lived long enough abroad to have forgotten them, were peculiar. She was filled with suspicions as to whether a people that had revolted in some vague way a century or so ago could really be trusted ; and, in her narrow, middle-class English way, every frown she gave them appeared to her as so much incense burnt to the memory of poor George III. Mr. Grey had been with her, with a roll of unnecessary papers under his arms; but Mr. Grey was always ominously silent in the presence of strangers, save when it paid him to speak. He was therefore hardly in the nature of a help, though apparently that aspect never engaged his attention. And just now, by contrast with these more animate people, he seemed to hover like a black cloud which is full of nothing but dismal rain and thunder and lightning. There are many such killjoys and marplots in the world, and yet they are tolerated.

"How do you do? " said Mr. Simon, shaking hands with everybody with his customary cheerfulness. "It is very good of you to brave the river, Dr. Spike. I always marvel at you; you have the energy of a man of twenty! I want to introduce to you our latest recruit, Mr. Paul Hancock."

Everybody took in the young man with sharp looks, as the Rev. Ainsley Simon thrust him forward in a jocular manner. This poetic-looking, different-looking young man — how

had they got him? “Dr. Spike, Dr. Moss, Miss Moss, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne, Mr. Harland — I beg your pardon, but I quite omitted you, Miss Bayswater, in my journey round the little circle. May I introduce my young friend?”

Paul had been shaking hands with everybody and replying politely to the words of welcome which all gave him in an old-fashioned way. Now he was conscious of an odd little shock as Miss Virginia Bayswater bowed stiffly to him from the middle distance. It was suddenly plain that was all he might expect from her, and just because that was so his eyes became riveted on her. There are some faces that seem to be watching and waiting; hers had that look. She had been very busy contemplating the cabbages, so busy that she had hardly the inclination to dally with this interruption.
As he realized this, he coloured suddenly, and his embarrassed manner became very evident. Yet he recognized at once that this distinction in the manner of greeting was somehow deserved. The others, men and women alike, were dressed apologetically and acted apologetically. It was as though they really hoped that that curious formula, “Clothes do not make the man,” fully covered their attitude. Old Dr. Spike’s alpaca coat was a terribly rusty brown, a sort of irrefutable certificate that he had really been in China for fifty-two years; Dr. Moss’s collars cried aloud the excessive service they had rendered; and even Mrs. Wayne, who had evidently been pretty quite recently, showed those signs of household wear and tear which should never be a delight even to the most virtuous.

Miss Virginia Bayswater was different, very different. Where the others were slipshod she was neat; even in those indefinite nothings which mean everything she showed taste. Her skirt, her blouse, her shoes, her hat — all these accorded with her own little gospel of care, all seemed to bear an intimate relationship to a personality which at once aroused interest because it was so feminine. And it was exactly in those indefinite nothings, in the poise of her hat, the natty use of pins, the gathering up of her old green sun-veil, that

Miss Virginia Bayswater somehow managed to say a good many things.

Perhaps that was why Paul blushed. Yet Miss Virginia Bayswater was no longer in her first youth; neither was she entirely pretty. It was only when she smiled and showed her admirable teeth that her grey eyes lost their anxious look and that one forgot to wonder how old she might be. And then nature had given her a handsome shape, a shape which at once caught the eye.

“We have quite finished inspecting the kitchen garden, Ainsley,” said Mrs. Simon, breaking in on Paul Hancock’s reflections and making him unconsciously start; “so I want to show Dr. Spike the view from that high ground behind the wall. He has never seen it, he says, and he has come specially armed to see it.”

“All right, my dear. You lead the way.”

Paul found himself, without knowing exactly how it had happened, beside very young Mr. Harland, who began eagerly and superfluously questioning him as to what he was studying. He wanted to know the books he was using and who had recommended them and if he had ever heard of the new course and why he himself did not believe in the existing system.

“How many hours do you put in every day”” he concluded inquisitively.

“Three or four,” answered Paul indifferently, at the same time wondering why so many people think that amiability and questioning are synonymous things. Miss Virginia Bayswater’s back was just in front of him; he was sure she was listening, and that made him impatient. Never before had he observed such a straight back, and as he looked at it he wondered unceasingly what might be the secret of its peculiar success.

“Only three or four,” exclaimed young, uncouth Mr.

Harland, keeping doggedly to the point. “Say, how do you expect to know Chinese? Three or four hours are nothing, you know. I do ten.”

He put his hands in his pockets and hunched up his shoulders, as if to show the self-imposed load he was carrying.

“I don’t ever expect to know Chinese,” answered Paul, now openly irritated by this talk and trying boyishly to be crushing. “I only hope in time to realize the exact extent of my ignorance and how far I can reduce it. Then, when my limitations are strictly defined, when I know how much I can reasonably learn, I shall be quite content.”

Miss Virginia Bayswater must have overheard him, for suddenly she laughed gaily and turned.

“How do you like China, Mr. Hancock?” she inquired, with sudden interest on her face now that their eyes met. She had perhaps noticed for the first time that Paul’s eyes were large and that his forehead was high and white.

“I like it very much, I think,” he replied.

“And why? Can you tell me — we all love to hear what other people’s first impressions are. We, who have been out here a long time, are always asking questions.”

He pondered a minute, forgetting the woman, in his anxiety to answer properly.

“Perhaps I don’t know exactly why,” he replied cautiously, at length. “Perhaps it is that China seems to leave one alone and give one time to think and do as one pleases in many little things. It must be that, and also the fact that the people of the country are so easy to

get on with.”

Miss Virginia Bayswater laughed again, as if he had said something clever. He was not accustomed to be so appreciated. Insensibly he was flattered and wondered why the day had become different. He was level with her now, and crude young Mr. Harland was quite forgotten.

“You evidently think,” said Miss Virginia Bayswater, as

if she had been thinking over his words, “that one can really escape worrying trifles here.”

“I dare say I do. Yes, I am sure that one of the reasons why I like China is because it is so peaceful.”

“It is not peaceful when Chinese are around,” broke in the irrepressible Mr. Harland, who had come up unseen and unnoticed on the other side of Miss Bayswater. “They are the noisiest people on earth, I think. Call this a peaceful country; then give me New York!”

“Perhaps I did not mean what I said to be taken quite literally,” objected Paul a little angrily. “I suppose if you want noise you can get as much in China as in any other; country, even in America.”

Miss Virginia Bayswater was smiling enigmatically when he turned to her again; and so the question which was on his lips vanished into space. Was she laughing at him? He could not know that it was merely the humour of two young men sparring before her which tickled her, as well as the somewhat remarkable discovery of Paul himself. And so, now openly disconcerted, he walked on in pensive silence, regretting that he had allowed himself to be taken to task by Mr. Harland, feeling somehow much upset. He had never felt quite like that before.

“Have you been into the settlement since your arrival, Mr. Hancock? ” inquired Miss Bayswater presently, as Mr. Harland called out to the others and, going on ahead, left them alone. An older man would have seen that she had waited for that; Paul did not.

“Once — ” he paused and involuntarily he smiled as he thought of what Mr. Grey had said on the subject to Mr. Ainsley Simon; “and on that occasion I did a very dreadful thing, so I have been told.”

“Yes? ” said Miss Virginia Bayswater inquiringly. Her voice showed renewed interest.

“A very dreadful thing,” repeated Paul laughingly. “I lunched and spent nearly the whole afternoon with the Commissioner.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Miss Virginia Bayswater. He was conscious that she had coloured faintly and was now looking steadily ahead at the others.

“I hope you do not share the general sentiment of animosity towards a most interesting man? I cannot understand it at all,” he said hesitatingly, wondering what was the matter.

Miss Virginia Bayswater coloured still more. The very innocence of this young man seemed confusing to her.

“No, not in the slightest,” she said in sudden haste. “The truth is, Mr. Hancock, I know the Commissioner very well. He often calls at our mission and he is quite a personal friend of mine.”

“Really,” exclaimed Paul. A new feeling came upon him, and his spirits fell. Something convinced him that the Commissioner admired Miss Virginia Bayswater. Something told him that if the Commissioner admired her it was with a very definite purpose.

He glanced at her quickly again. Could it be more than that — could it be that Mr. Denning — He did not follow his train of thought to its logical conclusion. He would not do so, he refused to do so. Mr. Denning? He was sorry he had so praised him. Now secretly perturbed, they rejoined the others, talking a little about books and agreeing that here was the ideal land for reading since there was nothing else to do.

The others had all collected on a knoll behind the mission wall and were taking turns at looking through a pair of old field-glasses which the aged Dr. Spike had brought with him in his pocket.

“You can just see the merest tracing of river even with

the naked eye. You see, I was right,” the Rev. Ainsley Simon was saying briskly, “just there to the northwest. I discovered that quite by chance.”

He told them how, as one by one they looked and exclaimed that he was perfectly right.

“Miss Bayswater, have you ever seen the river from this vantage-ground?” concluded Mr. Simon, turning to her at last with sudden zest.

“No, indeed,” she replied, “and I never can manage those glasses of Dr. Spike’s. I see only stars when I look through them. Dr. Spike says I am most foolish about it, but really I have tried very hard so often with no success.” She smiled a dazzling smile which showed that her admitted foolishness did not weigh very heavily upon her.

“Let me assist you,” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon, coming round to her. He gave her the glasses, but kept his fingers on the focussing screw as she looked through steadily. “Can

you see at all clearly?”

“No,” said Miss Virginia Bayswater very decisively, “I see nothing but a blur.”

He began adjusting the glass patiently.

“A little better now,” she said, laughing in spite of herself as Mr. Simon wriggled the glasses against her nose.

From the middle distance Mrs. Simon was watching this scene with a disapproving look, a look which Mr. Grey more than endorsed by his sepulchral air. Standing somewhat apart, awaiting his turn, Paul, with his senses now keenly on the alert to seize all gradations of feeling, was suddenly conscious that the American Mission collectively was also contemplating Miss Virginia Bayswater in a peculiar way. They looked at her in a manner which suggested that her future had often been discussed; that she occupied a peculiar position in their regard, perhaps unflattering rather than flattering, since she was different — in a word, that Miss

Virginia Bayswater was Miss Virginia Bayswater and nobody else.

“Oh, yes, now I have got it,” she suddenly exclaimed excitedly. “It ‘s the first time I have ever seen through glasses properly, Mr. Simon. Yes, I see what you mean now — there to the right. How clever of you, Mr. Simon, how truly clever!”

“My dear young lady, you delight me,” cried the good man, rubbing his hands with manifest satisfaction. Nothing indeed so pleased him as a little flattery. “Now, Dr. Spike, I hope next time you give Miss Bayswater the glasses she will be able to see.”

“Miss Virginia Bayswater does not need glasses, she can see most of the things she wants to with the naked eye,” suggested Miss Moss perkily. Miss Moss was small and had none too much blood in her veins, and perhaps that was why she was clever. At least, when Miss Moss spoke nobody was ever quite sure of her motives.

“Judy! ” commented Miss Bayswater ambiguously, by way of reply.

They scrambled down the knoll and into the mission compound again. They perambulated slowly round, discussing mission matters in fragmentary discussions which skirted round questions and never seriously attacked them. They looked into the chapel and at the school-houses, and talked to some of the inmates. And then at last they ended up by drinking, under Mrs. Simon’s patronage, much tea.

Here it was that that momentous trifle happened.

“Mr. Hancock,” had said Mrs. Simon, as she sat behind her teapot, “will you please cut

that bread? I am sure our guests are hungry."

So he had begun cutting the bread, and whether it was that his attention was still straying or that he was really

careless, it so happened that the knife suddenly slipped off the crust and badly cut his thumb.

"Oh, poor Mr. Hancock," exclaimed Miss Virginia Bayswater in quick sympathy, rising from her seat, "let me tie it for you quickly."

She began doing so, and then it was that she noticed that it was his right hand which had been cut.

"But it is your right hand," she exclaimed with American quickness. "Now, how did you manage to cut the hand in which you held the knife?"

He noticed once more that her voice had a caressing quality which he had never heard before, and his confusion increased.

"But friend Hancock is left-handed," cried Mr. Simon, coming round to the window where the two were standing. "He is left-handed, you know, and he cannot have the skill in protecting himself that right-handed folk have. Now you know left-handed people are altogether very peculiar."

Suddenly he stopped. His thoughts had run far ahead of his words, and now he remembered how he had warned Paul on the day of his arrival. Just then Paul looked up and caught his look.

"What is there so peculiar about left-handed people?" inquired Miss Virginia Bayswater, observing in sudden astonishment the change that had come over the two.

"I may not tell you — ask Mr. Hancock," laughed the Rev. Ainsley Simon with a roguish look.

"Mr. Hancock."

"I know of nothing, I assure you, Miss Bayswater, save that they are more clumsy than right-handed people," he replied in still greater confusion.

" That 's it," cried Mr. Simon; "they are more clumsy, they are more exposed to dangers. Ha, ha, ha!" He laughed uproariously at his jest, but refused to explain. When the elaborate ceremony of saying good-bye had been

completed (everybody shook hands with everybody else and everybody had some last remarks to make to everybody else), Paul with his thumb bound up remained oddly silent. He continued silent as his two colleagues and himself accompanied their visitors to the gate; he was silent after the visitors had mounted their chairs and gone.

And the very last thing he saw of them happened to be the silhouette of Miss Virginia Bayswater's admirable back, which seemed to grow in enchantment as the distance increased.

Unknown to him, unseen by anybody, the Rev. Ainsley Simon had noticed it all with tender eyes, with wistful smile.

"Poor young man!" he murmured to himself as he walked back into the house.

"Poor young man!" he said again, later, as he toiled over some work, "will it be that?"

CHAPTER X

PAUL did not know exactly what impelled him to do it, but the temptation had been irresistible. That afternoon something had made the vision of Miss Virginia Bayswater rise up before his eyes as the sole hope to alleviate his somber mood, and so he had suddenly reached out towards that vision over a thin bridge of written words.

The temerity of the action had made the colour rush to his face again and again; for he was reserved by nature, and because of his mood his action seemed fraught with a significance which was arresting. Yet the impulse to seek comfort in a roundabout way had been irresistible; he could no more have resisted it than he could have stopped breathing. And because he wrote that letter he threw out a thread which was destined to be wound back to him at last after making a hundred curious patterns.

The necessity had come suddenly, as do all necessities. It had so happened that that day for the first time he had taken a Bible class in English, and the inexplicable tragedy of it had remained with him long after the class was over. It had been borne on him in a dozen different ways that he was face to face with difficulties which he had never before properly realized — difficulties which somehow choked him and left him oddly conscious that his only escape was really down the road of arid formalism, which was so crowded with dishonest wayfarers and which he so despised.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon, cheerful as usual, desirous of being helpful, of assisting him materially in immaterial ways, had introduced him to the class a little in the manner of those impresarios who bring forward on the stage some magician

reputed to possess the power of accomplishing the seemingly impossible. Mr. Simon had briefly said: “Mr. Hancock will today lecture you, and explain to you what I outlined in my last talk.” And with that he had handed over a sheet of notes on which were jotted down what he called “pointers.” Beside many of the pointers were written in large letters a Dante-like but obscure warning, “Beware, beware”— a private mark for Mr. Simon’s private guidance. And leaving him with a cheerful parting grip on the shoulder, Mr. Simon had abandoned him to the ordeal.

To a hypersensitive nature like Paul Hancock’s there was something oddly jarring alone in the fact that he had suddenly become, without any warning, an essential wheel in this modern machinery of conversion. He must wind round and round with words until he had performed the necessary number of revolutions; then suddenly he must stop, break off, and walk away by the stroke of a clock. To him it was somehow more than incongruous that this should be so; and as he had talked he had suddenly remembered how the distant mission had appeared to him on that first extraordinary day of his arrival.

Not that he found any difficulty in making himself clear; yet somehow, by a strange subconscious reaction which he could not analyze, the spoken word had become to him curiously irreverent, and he found himself taking refuge in meaningless generalities, in vain repetitions, and in all those other devices which Mr. Simon's "Beware, beware," seemed so eloquently to postulate.

Those almond eyes fixed in those pale faces before him gazed at him much as the sheep look at the sheep-boy. In the hot, close atmosphere of the school-room they seemed to be wondering why he should wish to lead them blindly after him; each face had become a point of interrogation which he carefully avoided.

Did they really understand? He stopped again and again to make quite sure that they could really follow so far in English, asking them questions and receiving amazingly rational answers; for the class was composed of those who had studied this foreign language as only Asiatics can study it, and they had absorbed so much that it was a mere question of acrobatics for them to find correct answers. Yes, there was no doubt that one and all understood English wonderfully well.

Yet what did that mean, what did it mean? he asked himself remorselessly as he talked. What relation did that really bear to a set of ideas, to a set of beliefs, locked not into any framework of language but in the separate souls of men? He could not transmit to them that inner essence by word of mouth; the explanation of this or that difficulty somehow bore here no direct relation to Christian belief. This came to them as a part of a system, the tangible evidence of which was foreign men of foreign colour living in foreign houses in foreign ways, and stridently determined to proclaim that Christianity necessarily meant a pseudo-European culture which conflicted with the ideals of the country.

For he understood more than ever now that the clean, actual supernatural nature of the Christian belief, the dogma, had nothing which was not eminently palatable and refreshing to the Eastern mind. It was an idealism purely Eastern in its sublimity, and really as far removed from the Western mind as anything could be. It seemed a supreme irony of ironies to bring it back to these men of the East, in a hackneyed and stereotyped form, full of a prim methodism which really bore no actual relation to its original poetic conception. "Beware, beware," had written the Rev. Ainsley Simon for his own guidance. No wonder he had written that; it was the most sapient shibboleth his inner consciousness had ever evolved

So when Paul had finally finished, he had sought solitude in his room in gloomy preoccupation. A book, picked up haphazard, brought him no comfort until suddenly he remembered that this was the very one Miss Virginia Bayswater had expressed a desire to read. He would send it to her with a letter apologizing for his negligence in not having remembered to do so before. And so he had written, unconsciously shaping what he wrote by what was troubling his mind.

Yet, when he had finished, the fate of the letter trembled in his own hand for many uncounted moments. Earnestly he read and re-read what he had written to try and see what impression it would make. Was it good — was it bad? He did not know, and at last, with an impatient movement, he gave up the attempt and closed the envelope. For better or for worse it must go as it stood. He had written :

"There is no possible post to carry to you this book which I think must interest you after our talk the other day so I am sending it by a ragged little boy from the villa nearby, who always follows me on my walks, and who, as far as my present limited knowledge of the language allows me to understand, is very desirous of being of service. I hope he will not get lost on such a long journey!

"I am very anxious to know what your verdict will be, for this is just something one should be able to understand out here. I have read it often before; at least I never realized how true it was until just recently. Reading ought to be divided off into Zones and Times; I mean one should not attempt to read in all places and in all states of mind what is evidently meant to be read only in certain lands and in certain mental conditions. I could illustrate my theory at length, but it would sound long-winded and tiresome to you until you have read the book… .

"My hand is quite well already — I am sure it was due to your skilful binding that the recovery has been so rapid."

He did not despatch the letter that afternoon; for it was already late and he had first to run his diminutive messenger

to earth. But the very next morning, as early as possible, he had started the little ragamuffin off with the most explicit instructions; and it was with eager eyes that he watched him trot away down the winding footpaths between the green rice-fields and at last disappear. He wondered what she would say in reply: a first letter means always so much!

The answer came in the evening, just as they were finishing their supper; and he coloured slightly, as he saw Mr. Grey and Mrs. Simon exchange a sudden look. He thrust the letter into his pocket; the parcel which had come with it he placed on the floor beside his chair. Perhaps the action provoked the sequel.

"What have you got there, my young friend? " briskly inquired the Rev. Ainsley Simon, asking the question for all. It was clear from his manner that any little event was by custom counted the common property of all; and suddenly in Paul's mind rose reminiscences of his schoolboy days.

"A parcel containing some books," he answered with unaccustomed coldness. Almost immediately he got up.

"Hum!" remarked Mr. Grey after a pause. "Hum!" repeated Mr. Grey musingly, as he observed him leaving the room. Mr. Simon now remained curiously silent.

Upstairs Paul took the letter from his pocket and opened it eagerly, and somehow his reading at once pleased and disappointed him. He was too young to know that some

people talk much better than they write, just as some write much better than they talk. Yet Miss Bayswater had really said everything that could be expected of her. Her letter ran:

"It was indeed thoughtful of you to remember about the book, and it comes at a time when I have really nothing to read. After what you say I assure you I shall not skip a single page — nor look at the last page! — and I am eager to see whether our tastes are the same.

"I have thought that you might like to try something of

mine: I have picked out two favourites. You must tell me what you think about them as frankly as I shall tell you about yours. I kept your little boy here to have a rest, and I gave him something to eat. He is an amusing little fellow. I hope you will come soon to see us, and I am so glad about your hand."

He opened the two books which she had sent him, and scanned them quickly with the eye of the expert. Then he read her letter again. She had not really answered the points which he had made, but that was of small account to him now. He pondered. Was she subtle or was she simple? These two books were romantic, books such as a young girl would love.

A young girl? He took two or three undecided steps and stopped. How old was Miss Virginia Bayswater? he wondered. She was certainly thirty. Perhaps— No — Yet she had told him that she had been in China more than ten years. She could hardly have come out until she was of age. In his own case at home they had made it clear that his slender age was almost an obstacle.

He came forward irresolutely, still deeply thinking. Mechanically he sat down at his customary place on the window-sill. Now he gazed over the vast landscape with eyes which saw nothing but film-like shadows through which went and came the threads of many possibilities.

Could he have annihilated distance he would have been more satisfied perhaps; for Virginia Bayswater having already found time to dip deeply into his book, which was one of the most arresting studies ever written of a young woman in doubt, was saying to herself again and again:

"Now that must be a very, very curious young man."

CHAPTER XI

“IT is certainly a most beautiful day,” agreed Miss Virginia Bayswater, turning to old Dr. Spike, who had just spoken.

“Beautiful, beautiful,” repeated the old man, spreading out a wasted hand to the air as if he would stroke it and thus express his further satisfaction. Seated stiffly in his cane garden-chair, with his white sun-helmet tilted down to shade his eyes and his faded frock-coat of black alpaca buttoned closely round his frail body, he made a somewhat remarkable figure in the trim Chinese garden. Dr. Spike was very old; and yet, though he had passed fifty-two summers in this enervating climate, his face retained an energy of expression and his eyes a fire which would have not ill-become a man of forty. It was only the curious transparency of his skin which attested his many years, and even this was disguised by his handsome snow-white beard until one came very near. Then it was that his enfeebled condition became clear. Literally, as he sat there, he seemed to have both feet in the grave.

Miss Virginia Bayswater suddenly thought that as she looked at him.

“It reminds me of a day I passed on the Adirondacks when I was last home,” continued the old man. Then he began recounting for the fiftieth time, with all that weariness of detail which only the very old can achieve, how exquisite had been the quality of the air in that favoured region and how much he had enjoyed it.

“A wonderful land is our home, a wonderful land,” he always concluded. Yet, in spite of his enjoyment, he had come back to die where he had spent nearly the whole of his life, because he had found that they had no possible use for

an old man such as he save in China. That had been made very plain to him, so plain that it had never ceased to nettle him since. “I was expected to sit in a corner and play with the young ones”— how often had he not snorted that indignantly since his return, forgetting that “too old at forty” necessarily implies something less than a back seat at eighty. Here his ripe old age was counted a most valuable asset by a people who honour longevity above wisdom; here he was not only a teacher, but a leader, a chief; here it was but natural that he should wish to remain until the breath left his body.

“Where are the others?” he now inquired, looking slowly round the garden, which was adorned with coloured Chinese garden-pots, and trees clipped fantastically.

“I guess they’ve all been over to the chicken-run,” replied very young Mr. Harland, who was deep in a book. He was very comfortable in one chair, with his legs inelegantly festooned over another. It was a constant source of irritation to very young Mr. Harland that old Dr. Spike just had to talk when one was deeply interested in something else. It had

been no part of very young Mr. Harland's training to learn to defer to old age.

"It 's surely time for tea, Miss Virginia," resumed the old man, turning to what he thought a more sympathetic quarter.

"Not quite yet, doctor. It wants fifteen minutes of four o'clock yet. You must wait a little."

Miss Virginia Bayswater got up from her chair and looked dreamily towards the river. The American Mission was large and beautifully situated, and bespoke in many ways the ample funds donated by an all-powerful Baptism. Looking round the grounds, one could form at once a mental picture of the enthusiastic congregations in the far-away, wonderful land who supported in their tens of thousands with many good gold dollars this movement to baptize the heathen, thus blindly

contributing to the growth of forces about which they can scarcely ever know anything. There were many buildings in these grounds, handsome and well-designed buildings, which it was a pleasure for the eye to rest upon; and the mission property not only stretched far back into the rice-field lands, but ran right down to the delectable river-edge where a massive dyke (built at mission expense) shut off all danger of floods. Everything was well ordered, everything was well done; and if system could really mean anything in that intangible domain of God, here was Victory written in capital letters.

Miss Virginia Bayswater fixed her eyes on the smaragdine of the tall reeds which fledged the dyke. A junk passed down-stream so very close in-shore that its tattered brown sails showed suddenly above the green reeds as if the vessel was gliding past on the mud; and some water-birds, disturbed in their afternoon sport by the passage of this intruder, rose with shrieks and whirled away with much beating of wings.

"I think I shall stroll as far as the dyke," said Miss Virginia Bayswater, attracted by this movement.

"Eh? what? going away over there?" commented old Dr. Spike, as if lie could not understand such restlessness.

For some moments he watched the trim figure in the white duck skirt and waist rapidly becoming smaller; and he brought back his attention to his immediate neighborhood only when it taxed his eyes to look any more. Old Dr. Spike liked Miss Virginia Bayswater very much, and yet she always fled from him like that on the slightest provocation. No man ever admits, even if he knows it, that he is not enlivening.

"It seems to me all you folks are real restless today," he resumed, speaking to young Mr. Harland since there was no one else left to speak to.
The young man marked his place in his book with a fore-

finger, closed the book on it, and then with a sigh gave his attention to his senior.

“Not much restless about me, doctor,” he protested. “I’ve been here ever since my class was over.”

“Well, John, you are perhaps better,” admitted the old man reluctantly, his impatience somewhat assuaged by the sound of another voice. “But why have the others all gone off to the chicken-run?”

“Guess it ‘s because it ‘s Saturday.”

“Saturday — why Saturday any more than Friday or Thursday or Wednesday?”

“Saturday ‘s the end of the week — half-holiday, the finish up of things,” suggested the young man, looking round to see if there was no sign of them. “And,” he added with strong American common-sense, “somebody has just got to take an interest in the chickens if we want eggs and things like that.”

Old Dr. Spike, though he loved his food, snorted his temporary disapproval of these utilitarian sentiments; and Mr. Harland, seizing the opportunity given by this unexpected spell of silence, fled back to his book. Old Dr. Spike had all the patriarch’s love of the daily foregathering in the after-noon. Then it was that he really reigned supreme; then it was that he pronounced didactically on all possible questions; and, brooking no contradiction or suggestion, he always rolled serenely on. How happy must the steam-roller be as it progresses down the roadway; alas, that it should have no tongue to tell us how that triumph feels!

A movement in the distance attracted his wandering eyes. He fixed and held them on the distant object, and then quite suddenly leaned forward with peculiar animation.

“John,” he said so sharply that the young man started and involuntarily closed his book — “John, is that the Commissioner’s chair?”

“Why, yes,” replied Mr. Harland, hastily standing up. “It’s coming straight here too.”

“Now, now, now,” exclaimed the old man several times. And then with other mannerisms did he further betray irritation and embarrassment. He pursed up his lips and twisted his hands, he shifted those feet that seemed so dead, he muttered to himself; but nothing could alleviate the fact that the Commissioner’s chair was ruthlessly and rapidly approaching. This would totally disturb the afternoon, this would defeat this daily triumph; could anything be more irritating to a man of his years?

A shout and the chair had halted on the edge of the lawn, and as the bearers tilted down

the shafts the massive frame of the Commissioner slowly emerged.

Old Dr. Spike got up, his courtesy having at length over-mastered his irritation, and now he awaited the visitor with clasped hands and reluctant composure. There was some-thing in his manner curiously suggestive of the grey old bird standing ready to defend the family nest against all corners.

“Good afternoon, Dr. Spike,” called the Commissioner cheerfully from afar, as if he instinctively knew the effect his arrival had produced. He turned for an instant to give some instructions to the chair-bearers, who whisked the chair away; then he came forward in his deliberate manner, leaning on a malacca stick adorned with a massive silver head.

“It was such a beautiful day,” he explained, as the two gentlemen of the mission greeted him, “that I decided to play truant and cross the river. My office is always to be found, but beautiful weather such as we have been enjoying today is a much more elusive thing. Do you know that it is only 82º?”

“I don’t know where all the rest of our people have gone today,” said old Dr. Spike, looking round unenthusiastically,

“but as tea-time is coming along I guess they ‘ll have to turn up soon. Won’t you be seated, Mr. Denning?”

“I ‘II run off and tell them the Commissioner has come, doctor,” whispered young Mr. Harland, instantly disappearing. He stood in fear and trembling of the Commissioner; furthermore it amused him to think that the old man would be left alone to do all the talking now.

“You are very lucky, Dr. Spike, to have your own river frontage,” began the Commissioner, massively settling himself in the cane-chair he had chosen and gazing towards the dyke.

“It faces south,” said the old man, “and it means that we don’t have Chinese smells. On a day like this perhaps one doesn’t appreciate what that means, but during the rainy season it is a real boon to be quite isolated the way we are.”

“Hum!” said the Commissioner reflectively, looking round at the grounds.

“Yes,” resumed Dr. Spike, following his eyes, “there is nothing much wrong with the way we are located in this mission. It has taken time and money to get properly fixed, but I guess things are pretty satisfactory today.”

He studied the well-ordered grounds with transparent pride, finally letting his glance settle on his visitor. The Commissioner cleared his throat:

“About that towpath along the dyke —”

“Eh!” testily broke in the old man at once, forgetting everything in his instant displeasure at the remark, “have the guilds been at that again?”

The Commissioner laughed a little, removed his sun-helmet, and passed a great hand over his head before answering.

“They have been at me again,” he admitted, “and they tell me now quite frankly that if it isn’t arranged peacefully, they cannot resist the junk-crews from invading your property forcibly. That means there will be trouble.”

The old man bridled.

“The mission refuses absolutely,” he said doggedly. “We have had two meetings about it and have made up our minds quite conclusively. We bought this property outright; we paid a big sum for it, and we mean to insist on all our rights. You will pardon me, sir, for being so emphatic, but that is the stand we are taking and will maintain to the end — to the bitter end. In this country there is only one policy and that is not the policy of making concessions.”

The Commissioner did not answer at once. He extracted a cigar-case from his pocket, and, selecting a cheroot, lit it very deliberately. He seemed to be debating how much it would be worth while saying and how he should say it. For, though old Dr. Spike’s speech and manner had been so emphatic, it was plain that he was watching his visitor covertly, as if he were highly anxious to hear what he had to say. The longer Mr. Denning delayed speaking, the plainer was it that Dr. Spike’s courage was not well bottomed, because his case was not so good as he tried to make out. There was something incongruous in the suppressed nervousness of such a venerable-looking person in the presence of this formidable but much younger man.

“You know that that clause in the French treaty under which all missions in inland places —that is, beyond settlement limits — take refuge has never been properly tested,” said the Commissioner finally, speaking slowly and seriously. “That is one point which I have always thought may prove very awkward some fine day, when the Chinese are ready to insist upon it. The second point is that custom has for centuries permitted junk-crews to pass along the river-edge everywhere on this river. Riparian owners have never contested a procedure which is bound up with the welfare of river commerce; tracking is the life and soul of the up-river

trade; and, personally, I think it comes ill from missionaries to upset an immemorial custom.”

Old Dr. Spike's face flushed, and his hands trembled at the reproof. It is to be feared he lost his head.

"Sir, I cannot admit the justice of what you say," he began violently. "Sir, we are not bound to respect the prejudices of the pagan and have our privacy invaded by endless tracking-parties passing over our dyke."

"My dear doctor," interrupted the Commissioner, with a curious smile playing round the corners of his mouth, "I did not expect you to do that. I only hoped that on grounds of expediency you might see your way to solve the problem before it becomes more entangled — that is all I meant. In any case it is really none of my business; it concerns the territorial authorities and not myself. Ah! …"

The Commissioner suddenly rose from his seat and threw away his half-smoked cheroot as he caught sight of Miss Virginia Bayswater advancing rapidly from the river. Dr. Spike, still very angry in spite of the disclaimer just uttered, noted with fresh disapproval these signs of deference. The Commissioner was massively and patiently awaiting the lady he so frequently and manifestly came to see.

Miss Virginia Bayswater had seen him a long way off; she had noted how he at once stood and threw away his cigar; she had guessed something of the nature of the discussion between the two men; and so it was perhaps only natural that it was with heightened colour that she shook hands with him.

"How good of you to call on such a beautiful day, Mr. Denning! It is a pleasure to be out of doors," she said.

"I could not have employed the afternoon better," replied the Commissioner with ponderous courtesy.

"Now, that is nice of you." And Miss Virginia Bayswater added a sudden smile to her words. Perhaps it was

only the natural satisfaction which all women feel in the attention of men that made her look so happy; but behind their spectacles Mr. Denning's eyes became a little brighter.

Old Dr. Spike promptly sought to disturb this ill-disguised satisfaction.

"We were discussing the question of the towpath, Miss Virginia, before you came," he said with carefully calculated effect, "and the Commissioner said we ought to give way — that it was wrong of us to refuse."

"Dear me!" she replied, sitting down and suddenly folding her hands on her lap. "Now, is

that so?”

She looked innocently from one man to the other as though she were totally unaware of any friction. The Commissioner noted her detached manner with silent approval.

“Yes,” continued old Dr. Spike, dissatisfied with the impression he had made and determined to go farther, “that is what the Commissioner has said. But, mark you well, it is not what I say, and we will fight the junk-guilds to the very end over this question. Yes.” The veteran missionary fairly bristled as he concluded; and now, with a vigorous gesture, he challenged the lady’s studied lukewarmness.

“Dear me!” remarked Miss Virginia Bayswater still quite calmly, as if she were pondering over the matter. “I don’t see how they would run a towpath along the top of our dyke. There ‘s the big creek to the west anyway to break the line; they would have to wade and get into sampans there.”

“That ‘s true,” said the Commissioner reflectively, ” but, you see, your dyke is five hundred yards long and the creek only ten yards wide. What I mean is that the junks can slacken towing for a few yards, but not for a few hundred. They can’t pole that distance against the current, against a flood current.”

“What do they do now?” inquired Dr. Spike severely, “The trackers wade along under our dyke; and as they’ve been doing that for many months, I guess they can continue doing so.”

“Poor men!” said Miss Virginia Bayswater with a little sympathetic shudder, “it can’t be very nice in that slime.”

“No,” said the Commissioner very decidedly. “White men wouldn’t do it, there would be trouble at once; and there should be no distinction made between the races — by missions.”

Miss Virginia Bayswater got up suddenly and waved. The others were at last coming leisurely, and she wanted them to hasten. Dr. Moss and Miss Moss and Mr. and Mrs. Wayne and the two old spinsters, and several others formed the party.

“Why, I declare if that isn’t young Mr. Hancock,” she exclaimed in her impetuous manner, looking hard. “I was wondering when he was coming over.”

Her face had suddenly become pensive, and the Commissioner noted it. A new train of thought engaged him, and he found himself studying the tall graceful figure of the young man with watchful eyes. “Hum!” he muttered finally to himself very reflectively.

The next few minutes were spent in a tedious exchange of greetings in which earnestness

was mingled with awkwardness. Old Dr. Spike had regained his outward composure, and now talked fluently first to one person and then to another, with the air of a shepherd marshalling his flock. The unforeseen presence of the Commissioner had imported into the gathering a restraint as curious as it was uncomfortable. All seemed to be mentally gauging the exact meaning of his visit; and once more was it made manifest that brain-cudgelling in public is art unsociable undertaking.

“I cannot thank you enough for that lovely book you

sent me, Mr. Hancock,” said Miss Bayswater presently, under cover of the general conversation. “I enjoyed it so much, and the letter you wrote with it was so interesting to me.”

“Did you really like it?” he said. “I knew you would, I was sure you would.”

Their eyes met, and something made her drop her hands and look away.

“It is so hard to get good books out here,” she remarked, vaguely watching the Commissioner, who had been button-holed by Dr. Moss. The latter was eagerly explaining something and attempting to hold the Commissioner’s wandering attention. She went on: “How are you going to keep up your supply? We are so far, far away from anywhere that it takes ages to get anything.”

“I have written for more,” he said. He looked at her hesitatingly. “I must apologize for not having come before, but I have been so busy and it is such a distance across the river that I had to wait until today.”

She smiled back at him.

“It is a big business getting fixed up at first. I remember when I came out — ” Suddenly she stopped.

“Yes?” he said inquiringly. But the Commissioner had finished talking to Dr. Moss and was coming up, and he was conscious that a subtle change had occurred in her. “Yes?” he repeated inquiringly.

With an effort she brought back her wandering attention.

“What was I saying? Oh, yes, that it is a terribly long business settling down. Now, Mr. Denning, won’t you have some tea?”

She had moved off before he could answer her; and once more he had the strange feeling, which had so frequently assailed him since his arrival, that he had been thrust into a problem already fully developed, — a problem in which

every element seemed already irrevocably committed to a certain course, a problem which he seemed powerless to grapple with in any given particular.

He watched her graceful back as she talked to Mr. Denning; he wondered what she really thought as she talked to him. She was one of the essential factors — oh, yes, he had no doubt at all about that. But how was she going to affect the problem as a whole? Was she a relenting or unrelenting factor?

As he stood there pondering, suddenly he thought of him self. Why was he so concerned about it all? What she to him?

Alas, he did not know!

CHAPTER XII

MR. DENNING was standing at the top of the broad stone steps leading to his verandah, smoking a long thin Russian cigarette which looked absurd in his great hand.

He was smiling to himself as he smoked, and his smile, because he was so ponderous and serious-looking, seemed in the rapidly fading daylight to convey a vast meaning. It was as if he were infinitely amused not only with the world in general, but with himself in particular — particularly with himself — amused that he would continue to live in the manner he did — that he should be now standing just where he was, dressed in a white linen mess-jacket, a stiff white shirt, and a very stiff white collar, prepared to entertain, after the orthodox manner, a party of people whom he secretly despised, and who lived so many thousands of miles away from his thoughts that he could not possibly have anything in common with them.

That evening the peculiar irony pervading the human comedy in this remote corner of the world was affecting him oddly; and as his wandering attention fixed itself on his own person, it appeared to him specially ridiculous that he should make himself so uncomfortable in these hot clothes when he could be dining coolly alone and thinking out his plans wholly undisturbed.

“Why is one so consistently foolish, why cannot one be inconsistently sensible?” he murmured, smiling still more enigmatically. And as there was no one to answer him, he suddenly shrugged his shoulders and gave his attention to the remnant of his cigarette.

Mr. Denning possessed in the highest degree that dangerous

attribute, the capacity for taking detached views of most things he encountered in life, including himself. The prayer of Burns had always appeared to him the stupidity of an unimaginative Scotchman. In his heart of hearts he firmly believed that he could see himself almost exactly as others saw him, which was certainly a bold thing to think.

His method was simple. By a process of mental inversion, which he compared to standing on his head, he believed that he could actually get an outside view of that which physical laws clearly proclaimed impossible. Yet he was clever enough to know that physical laws really forbid nothing where the brain alone is concerned. The Brahmins and other reputed holy men who pierce the veil of the impossible are not at all wonderful or mad or marvelous, as is generally supposed; they are simply eminently sane. It is by artfully masking their sanity that they can trifle with the ignorant.

Mr. Denning went on thinking. He wondered what people would say if they knew everything about him, if they could add to the outer view which they could always have an

appreciation of his inner being which they could never see. It would certainly be amusing, but it might also be a little dramatic. What, for instance, would they think of his great plan?

Suddenly he became grave. The solitary and studious life he had led had given him a vast genius for brooding and working out all sorts of shadowy things. Like many men who live mainly in their dreams, he was being more and more tempted to mistake the substance for the shadow. Contrary to popular belief, it is well to know that it is the shadow which is alone satisfying to erudite men, and not the substance, which is a hard, uncomfortable, unlovely, strictly limited realization.

Mr. Denning, because he was full of strange reflections, was deluding himself and did not yet know it. So he innocently

smiled at the world and smiled at himself. Against the vast, tranquil background of dreamy Asia it seemed really possible for the mind to throw thoughts and make them stand out luminously, just as figures are thrown against a screen by a magic lantern. Here there was no hurrying action or fear of hurrying action to dissipate them; there was only peace and quiet. Thoughts were like stars, they illumined endless space, and like the stars —

The quick stamp of sandaled feet coming ever nearer suddenly snapped the thread of his thoughts, and with an effort he roused himself. He sighed involuntarily as he brought himself back to the task of entertaining thirteen people in whom he had no earthly interest. It had become quite dark now, and but for the lanterns and the sharp calls of the chair-bearers, as they swung in through the gate, he would not have known that his house was their destination.

He threw his burnt cigarette to the ground and stood attentive. Behind him he heard his servants come languidly forward; now they suddenly unmasked lanterns which flooded the steps with light.

“Good evening, Mrs. Jerrins,” he said in his courteous manner, as he saw who it was.

The chair had been abruptly deposited, the poles tilted forward to permit the occupant to step over them.

“Good evening,” repeated Mr. Denning. “You are the very first and punctual to the minute, I believe.”

Mrs. Jerrins held out her hand languidly as she stepped clear of the chair-poles. As she did that, she looked not so much at him as through him. She was tall and thin without being angular, and was the possessor of most remarkable eyes.

“I am always the first,” she said monotonously, as if the fact hardly interested her. “I go through life being the first in all manner of things. I am the first up in the morning

and the first to go to bed, the first to get cross and the first to laugh, the first to find things out and the first to forget them, and most probably I shall be the first of all the people in this charming and select community to die.”

She finished, as she had commenced, with a lack of interest that was curiously arresting. Now, having delivered herself of this soliloquy to her satisfaction, very slowly, drawing her skirts tight against her, she stepped up to the a verandah. There was a short and peculiar pause as the whisper of the bearers’ soft footsteps died away.

“Why do you think that, Mrs. Jerrins? ” inquired Mr. Denning presently, with sudden gravity, as they stood there waiting for the others. He was not so much attracted by Mrs. Jerrins’ slow and dramatic manner as by her strange mentality. It was characteristic of the man that he should always be curious about other people’s mental processes; and now that he had got over being annoyed at the disturbance of his ordinary evening routine, he was astonished to find that he was disposed to be unaccountably interested.

“Why? You know why,” answered Mrs. Jerrins, turning her brilliant black eyes on him and trying to read his face. But his face remained non-committal. So she sighed, perhaps because she had sought sympathy and had not found it. Then she resumed. “And yet without it I should die in this place, die from very boredom. I believe I was the very first in China to begin even that! Think of it!”

“I wonder sometimes why people will poison themselves by degrees,” he commented, staring into the night. “Frankly I cannot understand such a process. I myself should be inclined to do it thoroughly at one sitting and — finish.”

“Really, you are a believer in suicide? ” she inquired indifferently, sitting down on a cane chair and beginning to

fan herself. “But then you are a man. Women hate it — suicide is such a very definite thing, you know.”

In spite of himself he smiled and began to prepare an answer. It was a real pity, he thought. She had not only brains but wit. Could she not see herself — could she not see herself? “Then suddenly he remembered the danger in the woman’s mood. It was none of his business; he had perhaps already gone too far. So, murmuring something unintelligible, he went back to his post of observation.

“Ha, ha! there he is, right up against the sky line, a target for every missile,” cried a cheery voice unexpectedly. Mr. Denning once again smiled in spite of himself. It was old Mr.

Tosh, evidently in a surprisingly jolly humour, leading the main body of his guests, who had energetically walked in defiance of an immemorial custom in the East which bids everyone be lazy.

“By the veriest chance, you will understand,” continued old Mr. Tosh from the middle distance, halting to speak at his ease, in blissful ignorance that anyone had arrived before him — “by the veriest chance we met at a funny place called Our Club — total membership seventeen — quorum for general meetings seven — where they mix drinks.” He stopped and waved an arm as if to underline that. “Now, will you believe it! All these lewd young men, with no respect for age or good looks, invited me to take a drink. Sir, it is a fact, an ugly fact. Well, I drank— not much, Ye will be pleased to hear, but just three little things to keep the cholera and bad smells of China away — just three little drinks that have made me uncommon thirsty — three little drinks, badly mixed by a son of Ham who adulterates the gin with kerosene and water, I verily believe — three little fellows that — “

As he spoke, Mr. Denning had rapidly descended the verandah steps, and now suddenly shot a single word which

produced a magical change. For a moment the shock was so great in Mr. Tosh that he stood quite rigid. Then from his mouth issued peal after peal of jovial, laughter, rich, musical, deep. It was so well done that no one could have guessed its mechanical nature; no one believed that he was not genuinely amused.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the man, struggling for his words. “Ha, ha, ha! Bear witness, friends, that I fooled Mr. Denning completely — that I astonished him, surprised him, made him believe just what I wanted him to believe on his uncommon dinner-party night as well as the best actor in the world could have done. It was immense!”

He laughed for a last time with an open throat; then, suddenly straightening up, spoke again: “Now, having completed that part of the comedy, I go to say good evening to the ladies.”

Though he was sixty and more, he ran up the steps as lightly as a young man, and plunged gaily forward at the outline he saw sitting in the half-shadow. But there, like a flash, he stopped and drew back as if he had been bitten.

For Mrs. Jerrins had risen from her chair, much as a snake rears when about to strike. There was something in her attitude that was frightening when she wished it to be so; and now even, in the dim light, the wicked lustre of her eves was felt without being seen.

” ‘There is no fool like an old fool’ — you remember the quotation, Mr. Tosh ?” she began in a low clear voice. “I have told you once or twice before that I find your antics tiresome, that you weary me with your rhodomontades, that it jars me to hear your voice indulging

in stupid jests. I shall not tell you again, I warn you."

Having delivered herself of this remarkable outburst, she sank back in her chair just as a snake which has hissed and threatened to bite might have done.

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It was all over with such surprising suddenness that Mr. Tosh found himself speaking rapidly and confusedly, almost incoherently, before he realized what had happened.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Jerrins, I had no idea it was you, or else, 'pon my honour, I would not have done it. That is — I mean, you know —"

What he might have been saying in his humiliation was fortunately drowned by the coming of the others.

Little Dr. Woodman had approached, stumping along the wooden verandah with affected gaiety and totally oblivious, as he always was, to the minor ironies and tragedies of life passing under his very eyes. Dr. Woodman was distinguished by having one wooden leg. But against that he could set a golden heart, and so, in spite of one shortcoming, he was richer than most men.

A whimsical, peculiar man, too, was little Dr. Woodman. The star under which he had been born was in his eyes so undoubtedly Venus that he held it his bounden duty to pay a sedulous, old-world attention to every woman, quite irrespective of age, good looks, or morals. To him woman had always been something in a frame, like a Bible text, and therefore not to be questioned, but merely accepted at face value. Matrimony had never attracted him, perhaps because it inevitably implied a too intimate relationship with that which he had set high above himself and which he could never bring to his own level. His eyes and his speech were enough for him; let others be as they pleased. It was only when Christmas arrived that little Dr. Woodman became audaciously wicked — a Christmas which was still religiously Christmas to him because it was Christmas, though there was never a hint of ice or snow to welcome it in these sunlit latitudes. Then it was that he claimed a certain right. The smallest sprig of Chinese mistletoe, suspended in mid-air or even held momentarily in the hand, was irresistible to him,

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and he essayed, and often won, a kiss. Curious little doctor now gathered to your fathers, what art, what manœuvres what subterfuges, did you not once innocently employ to win your point! It was he now who quickly restored Mrs. Jerrins' calm with a few soft words.

"At last," murmured Mr. Denning, as several chairs came in, and the watchful gate-keeper, having counted that all had now arrived, duly shut the gates.

There were only two other ladies, besides Mrs. Jerrins. There was a Mrs. Nevin, whose father had been an American consul-general when the Democrats were in and good jobs,

even in far-off China, fell to the lot of all good Southerners. Though the turn of the tide had soon enough come, Mrs. Nevin had been so perennially elated by this chance fact that she constantly referred to it. As the years went by, the figure of the late consul-general in the midst of mere commerce had gradually acquired almost the towering aspect of a Washington; and lest anyone should fail to know it she always spoke of him in reverential terms.

There was also a Mrs. Mandrell, who was very British and very angular, and whose people, in her own phrase, had always been in the navy. That was her pride. It had been noticed that when any of Nelson's battles were mentioned her manner became acutely concerned; and Trafalgar had been known in the very hot weather to make her profusely perspire even when she was sitting quite still. Once she had obscurely hinted at the part a forebear had played in that glorious struggle immediately after Nelson's fall, but nobody had ever been able to discover exactly what that part might have been. The rude young men of the place had indeed brutally suggested that he had been a ship's sail-maker, and that it was his needles which had been suddenly requisitioned, in total ignorance of the fact that the Great Commander was not buried at sea. Possibly the naval blood

in her veins had given her a unique accomplishment: she could draw a frigate under full sail with marvelous rapidity. Somebody, delighted with this accomplishment, had once suggested that she should turn her attention to modern craft. Then it was that she had made a memorable answer. "Thank *you*," she had replied, with an accent on the you, "I prefer to live in and draw the historic past with which I am closely associated." After that she had been left in peace with her frigates.

None of the husbands of these three ladies were of importance. They were just humdrum men engaged in the soul-deadening work of promoting commerce by buying and selling in cargo-lots; and such energy as remained in them after the day's work found no outlet in subtle conversation.
"How did my husband get here? " inquired Mrs. Jerrins, now getting up suddenly and speaking to Mrs. Mandrell's back in the midst of the general conversation which had arisen.

Mrs. Mandrell turned with a start.

"Oh, Mrs. Jerrins," she exclaimed nervously, "how you startled me! Who could have told that you were there in that dark corner? You always do such curious things."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Jerrins, much amused because little Dr. Woodman had been quite successful with her. "You look at me as if you had seen a ghost. Am I so very ghastly tonight?"

She came slowly forward, the young men scattering before her like chaff, until she stood beside her husband; and to him she whispered something which seemed to bring him scant

pleasure. And because she had come amidst them all, an awkward silence fell on the party.

They sorted themselves into their places at the dinner-table with that curious unemotion which comes to people who

live at the end of nowhere and possess nothing in the world to divert their attention from themselves. Even Mr. Denning felt that numbing influence, and it disturbed him.

“I wonder that you are not afraid to do it, Mr. Denning,” at last said Mrs. Mandrell somewhat archly, after she had looked round the table and carefully counted to see that the party did not number by any chance thirteen. ” Supposing somebody dropped out at the last moment, now do tell me what you would do.”

Mr. Denning smiled mysteriously because he was thinking of something else, and it needed an effort to follow her. Long experience had taught him that a smile covers an absent mind better than anything else; he often smiled in the company of others.

“I should be inclined to do nothing,” he said after a brief pause, as if he had been thinking it over very seriously, “but, of course, if anyone seriously objected, I would split up the party among two tables, and six people could say bad things about the other seven and vice versa.”

“I never thought of *that*,” said Mrs. Mandrell, apparently much impressed. “How clever of you!”

“Mr. Denning has the habit of being clever; he acquired it at exactly the right moment — that is, at his birth. And it is the most dangerous and unsatisfactory attribute in the world,” interjected Mrs. Jerrins, watching Mrs. Mandrell with her eyes half closed. Mrs. Jerrins found amusement in saying things nobody really understood save Mr. Denning. As Mrs. Mandrell remained silent, she continued, “I wonder how many people at this table ever stop to think what superstitions really are?”

Mrs. Mandrell bridled.

“I suppose you think I am very stupid, Mrs. Jerrins, because I believe in such things.”

Mrs. Jerrins looked calmly across the table with her hands folded on her lap. She never had any appetite, and tonight she was hardly making the pretence of eating. Her eyes were open now, as brilliant as if she had treated them with belladonna. It always amused her to bait Mrs. Mandrell, she was so parochial.

“No,” she said very deliberately, as if she had given the matter careful thought, “I don’t think it is a sign of stupidity on your part at all. It is generally held to be a sign of

ignorance rather than of stupidity — which is quite a different thing, you know."

"Really, you are not exactly complimentary tonight," said Mrs. Mandrell, flushing and yet quailing under those excited-looking eyes. She turned to young Mr. Thompson, who apparently associated silence with dignity.

"Shooting all the time, I suppose, Mr. Thompson," said Mrs. Mandrell with a forced smile, trying to think she was not very angry.

Mr. Thompson, whose hands were very much in his way, breathed hard because he was startled by this unexpected solicitude.

"Yes, nothing else to do in this hole," he said violently. The sound of his voice, being familiar, seemed to give him courage, for presently he went on: "The river is full of snipe just now, and teal too — millions of them — only the beastly Chinese pot at them so much nowadays that everything is hard to get near."

"I wonder they allow the Chinese to shoot," said Mrs. Jerrins, looking up at Mr. Denning and smiling. "Why don't you try and have it stopped, Mr. Thompson?"

"Can't think of a way," said the young man, taking the suggestion seriously and talking jerkily, "but I would like to. The brutes use swivel-guns on a boat. Bring down twenty birds in one shot sometimes. They got some from

down-river. They are cunning devils—make their boats look like a reed-bank and then float it in right among the birds. What can one do, even with an eight-bore, against that sort of work?" His righteous indignation overcame his awkwardness and he looked up boldly.

"What, indeed!" echoed Mrs. Jerrins. "It is a tragedy which makes one's blood boil. I am fast coming to the conclusion that there at last remains only one method which will make life worth living in China, Mr. Thompson."

Mr. Denning looked up curiously.

"Instruct us, please, as to the only method," he said, as if he really meant it. "You have brought up the one subject that counts."

Though he smiled, Mrs. Jerrins saw that he was measuring her mood and wondering how it would end. Involuntarily she coloured; and as the pallor fled from her wasted face, she became almost beautiful.

"What will make life worth living in China?" she repeated gaily, though suddenly embarrassed. "Really, I was talking for Mr. Thompson's benefit. Perhaps the swivel-guns

did it, but I was reminded irresistibly of the benefits the Taipings would have conferred on sportsmen and all others if they had been allowed to have their own sweet way. The doctrine of massacre has its compensations."

"How terribly bloodthirsty you are!" said the Commissioner laughingly, looking round at the others. Mrs. Mandrell was now plainly frightened; whilst even the young man who hated the Chinese in a dull way because they spoilt his sport could find no answer. At the other end of the table the little doctor and Mrs. Nevin had also allowed their flow of talk to become exhausted; and the bank of dull-witted men looked up surprised because no conversation

covered their preoccupation. Silence was again about to cast its spell.

Mr. Denning, with the eye of a general, seized the opportunity.

"As it should be a good thing to do something of the sort," he said, addressing the whole table, "I have decided on the Emperor's birthday to give a general garden-party and invite everybody I can possibly think of within a radius of twenty miles. I have been making up lists. I expect we could get three hundred people together, if all come, and make a sort of record for Wayway."

"Three hundred people," echoed the table incredulously.

"Yes," replied Mr. Denning; "what with missionaries and Chinese officials, I ought to get fully that number. It will be a regular local *omnium gatherum* for the first time in the history of the settlement, and we shall be able to judge everybody."

"How amusing it might be if you tried to make it so!" said Mrs. Jerrins. "The missionaries will feel like fighting one another, they always are so bitter about rival sects. It is only six months since that last pitched battle between Roman Catholic and Protestant converts at Anhsien. Couldn't you arrange something of the sort as a set-piece for the ending?"

Even Mr. Thompson laughed; the humour of it appealed to him oddly.

"No, no, no," protested Mr. Denning.

"Then we shall see the mission beauty," said Mrs. Mandrell obtusely. "I have never seen Miss Bayswater."

"I hope everyone will come," replied Mr. Denning vaguely, now watching Mrs. Jerrins out of the corner of his eye. What he feared came.

"Do you yourself think Miss Bayswater such a beauty, Mr. Denning? " inquired Mrs. Jerrins. He was immediately

conscious that everyone had become suddenly interested in his reply, and now he regretted the solicitude which had prompted him to bring up a neutral subject.

“A man’s views are always so irrational, Mrs. Jerrins,” he answered smilingly, with rather ponderous gaiety. “What a man thinks is really not worth hearing.”

Mrs. Jerrins was not to be foiled. He ought to have known that.

“Granting that as a general proposition,” she now said, picking her words in her peculiar manner as she looked at him, “still you must he prepared to admit that in the particular matter of women his irrationality actually becomes a matter of moment. For instance,” she concluded frankly, “I have never understood what could have prompted my husband to marry me; it was certainly a highly irrational step.”

Though Mr. Denning laughed, the delicate insinuation did not escape him. It was peculiarly clever.

“Come,” suddenly said Mrs. Mandrell archly, for once allying herself with Mrs. Jerrins, because she was overwhelmed with curiosity. “You have not told us yet and you must, you know.”

“Well,” said the Commissioner quietly, though he could now hardly disguise his annoyance, “I do consider Miss Bayswater decidedly good-looking.”

“Now that is an important confession, a very important confession, from a man like you,” exclaimed Mrs. Jerrins, fixing her excited-looking eyes on him.

“I fail to see it,” he replied, trying hard to smile easily. “Tell me why.”

“I have found throughout life,” suddenly announced Mrs. Jerrins didactically, looking through everybody, “that whilst women’s capacity for love is practically unlimited, man’s is strictly limited. The poet pictures man as having

seven ages. I think he has never more than two — a brief period of love which begins when he is a baby and a very long period when, having tasted of the forbidden fruit, his man’s common-sense tells him strictly to avoid it.”

“How *deep* you are coming!” said Mrs. Mandrell, with attempted sarcasm.

“Deep!” Mrs. Jerrins leaned back in her chair and gave vent to sudden laughter. “Surely you have got the wrong word again. I am sure to Mr. Denning I have been peculiarly shallow. Now tell me, Mr. Denning.” She leaned forward appealingly to him.

At the other end of the table, with the prospect of much port coming ever nearer, Mr. Tosh's spirits had become so sensibly restored that he had begun once more cracking loud joke after loud joke to his own infinite amusement, forgetting entirely the existence of Mrs. Jerrins. In the background the servants, gliding noiselessly to and fro in their white grass-cloth clothes, performed their manifold duties with a self-effacement as remarkable as it was soothing. No more related to the scene than had they been slaves summoned by the rubbing of an Aladdin's lamp to obey their master and then to vanish into thin air, their perfect service contributed materially towards enhancing the awkward unreality of the dinner-party. The prosaic unloveliness of those whom they served seemed somehow to have become oppressively accentuated by the good fare and the generous wines. To Mr. Denning, irritated by the confession which had been forced from him, the grotesque nature of the hospitality which he was offering was more patent than ever. His eyes now sought with increasing frequency the face of the big marble clock on his mantelpiece. Long experience had taught him almost the exact moment when release might come; and as at last the servants suddenly desisted from

their efforts and grouped themselves expectantly, involuntarily he smiled.

The ladies caught his smile; they looked at one another, and chairs were noisily drawn back. In the interval of their withdrawal Mr. Tosh tiptoed round to Mr. Denning and at last seated himself with a triumphant sigh exactly along. side the port. This manœuvre completed, life assumed for him that roseate hue which is the forerunner of comfortable realization.

"Great idea, that of yours — the garden party," he said affably, as he sipped his wine "Opportunity of seeing everyone. There are always so many changes before the winter, and I hear the missions are going to inaugurate a sort of general post."

"Really?" said somebody.

"Yes," returned Mr. Tosh; "there are brotherly and sisterly squabbles going on — too much talk and too little religion, that 's about the size of it. There is not enough mystery about the Protestant missions, that 's the main trouble. Everybody has a finger in the pie, and as often as not men are carrying on a violent correspondence with one another in the newspapers or intriguing against one another with the boards and committees at home. Now the old Catholic priests are controlled Heaven knows how, and as they don't know how they stand from day to day, they are not uppish like our people."

"I didn't know you were such a philosopher," said Mr. Denning.

Mr. Tosh sat up.

"Before I began to colour this," he announced almost grandiloquently, laying a finger

against his proboscis, “there were mighty few things I didn’t interest myself in. I had more than a smattering, more than a smattering. Aye, I was once a well-read man …”

Slowly and solemnly he emptied his glass to the memory of that departed glory. Then a new idea suddenly struck him. He squared his shoulders.

“Thompson, Johnson,” he said, turning with mock fierceness on the two young men nearest him. “What did it cost me to colour my nose?”

“More than it cost to give us our educations,” promptly answered the two, grinning broadly.

Old Tosh exploded in fits of laughter. He had regained his customary mood.

“Good dogs, good dogs!” he said. “I taught them that when they were about to forget my respectable age. They won’t forget it in a hurry again. Do you know the colouring has cost me five thousand pounds?”

“Tut, tut,” said little Dr. Woodman, shaking his head disapprovingly, yet smiling a little enviously. Mr. Tosh had made his fortune in days when profits were counted in thousands and not in mere hundreds, but that was long ago.

When they went out on the broad verandahs, they found Mrs. Mandrell and Mrs. Nevin whispering together in a corner. Mrs. Jerrins was standing quite alone some distance off, gazing at the dark mass of the river which flowed past not a hundred yards away. She turned, as she heard the men approach, and came from the shadow into the light.

“Do you think you could give us a song, Mrs. Jerrins? It is deliciously cool tonight,” suggested the Commissioner.

“A song? ” she answered quite gaily, to his surprise. “Well, perhaps I could if you really wanted me to. Now let me see, what shall it be?”

She walked through windows towards the open piano in the drawing-room, but just then she paused and stood half bewildered. Her hand went up to her eyes and covered them, and thus she stood. Instantly Mr. Denning hurried

after her, and behind him came the klop-klop of the little doctor’s wooden leg.

“What is it, Mrs. Jerrins?” inquired the Commissioner, “It is too late,” said Mrs. Jerrins feebly, turning an looking round vaguely. “Where is my husband? I must go home.” Her arms had fallen beside her, and her figure seemed to have shrunk. From the verandah the group of young men watched her.

“Gad,” they muttered in youthful awe among themselves, “look at her flicker out just like a lamp. Look —lower and lower every minute — just like turning down the wick.”

“Jerrins!” called the little doctor sharply.

“Yes, yes.”

The husband gave his wife his arm, and slowly and without speaking a word he escorted her down the steps and into her chair. Like a stone statue they bore her away, and then, when she had gone, some of the men looked at their watches and nodded.

“Almost exactly three hours to a minute,” they whispered, “supposing she made her injection immediately before coming, as she always does.”

“Why won’t she carry tabloids and save us that sight?” muttered old Tosh crossly.

“Only likes injections,” explained young Thompson, who hated her. “Gives them to her little girl too, I believe anyway. Her legs and body are one mass of needle-pricks, and of course the little girl is becoming a little devil. She tries all the time to throw my dogs into the river.”

“If I were Jerrins — ” began old Tosh.

“Bah!” said young Thompson with a sudden contempt, “she would give it to you whilst you were asleep; that’s what she did to Jerrins, they say, when he first began to cut up rusty. He takes it now, I am quite certain.”

It was not till an hour or two later that the men left.

They had become hilariously indifferent to all things and marched away in a band, just as they had come in a band, all talking loudly, and thanking the Commissioner with a cheer from the gate for his good wine.

“What ‘s the matter with Denning?” he heard someone ask as they walked down the bund past the railings of his compound. The night was so still and peaceful that every word carried. He was standing once more at the top of the steps as he had stood at the beginning, but though he listened he did not hear the answer.

Perhaps they had seen him there. Yet in spite of their sudden caution, as the lights of the lantern-coolies preceding their masters danced farther and farther away, he suddenly heard a great shout of laughter and he started with annoyance. For old Tosh had begun trolling in his stentorian voice, to the river, to the black night, and to the spirit of deviltry in the young men around him, his famous and much beloved canzonette:

“He who parts
Two loving hearts
Should be sent — “

The rest was lost in the laughter.

CHAPTER XIII

PAUL climbed slowly to the top of the red bluff which overlooked the great river and threw himself on the ground with a sigh of relief.

“This will never do,” he murmured.

He was glad to be alone — alone not in a spot where a sense of isolation could oppress him, but alone here in full view of the mighty river which, rushing proudly on his mighty course, told puny man to still his ceaseless lamentations and understand once and for all that nature had no patience with such as he.

And Paul had need of that disdainful yet philosophic counsel. For as the days had gone quickly by, in the monotony of the mission, half unconsciously his focusing had become more accurate, and the conviction had deepened in him that this vocation which he had chosen from such curious motives was somehow wrong, at least in its present form. His sympathies were not really aroused by the work around him; he had had time to realize that it was different both in nature and in scope from what he had pictured to himself. He was too young to know the real meaning of what Longfellow wrote — that all great and unusual occurrences lift us above this earth and that it was only that which had once made of him an enthusiast. And even had he known the meaning of that he could never have preserved the elevation of spirit which had once been his.

That morning, too, for no special reason he had suddenly remembered the story of another young man who, filled with vague aspirations like himself, had conscientiously attempted to prepare himself for the role of a missioner in foreign lands.

One evening this other young man had been asked to address a small church meeting. Full of fire and enthusiasm, he had just stood up when the door of the little hall opened and a very pretty girl slipped quietly in and seated herself noiselessly below his platform. He had been so disturbed by her near presence that his confidence and fire had suddenly vanished and his address proved something of a failure. Warned by this small incident, this other young man had been wise enough to see that it would be worse than useless for him to exile himself in the interests of such a tremendous cause if he were not made of sterner stuff. He had abandoned his idea before it had become too late. The story was quaint, but it was a true story, and its moral was very obvious.

And how hard it was really to succeed, save by following the stereotyped and often unlovely system which the missions in self-defence had evolved! As if conscious of their severe limitations, as if conscious that they had come too late in the day, when ideas and customs were so fixed in the very life-blood of the people that to uproot them was impossible, the missions had become the homes of schoolmen who hoped by creating such

centres of activity gradually to attract the more open-minded and the children of the open-minded, and working through them and through the great floods of literature which they unloosed thus, to collect knots of adherents. Beyond that they had no real hope, no real goal. Paul saw and understood that.

Even this scrupulously limited activity sometimes earned open hatred. That same afternoon Paul had gone into the village below the mission and, proud of his newly acquired conversational knowledge, had attempted to make friends with such people as he found there. But the children had fled at his approach just as they had on the very first day of his arrival, though they had now seen him often pass and well knew his face; and the women and girls, who began

clustering at the doors in response to the cries of the small ones, when they saw him had all repeated disdainfully, with a peculiar and hurting disdain, *Chiao-t'ang-ti-lai-la* - "the missionary has come "— just as if he belonged to a breed unique as the griffon, which has the body and legs of a lion and the wings of an eagle.

It had been very cruel for him. His attempts at entering into conversation had been misconstrued into an unwarranted intrusion. Men, summoned from the fields, had appeared they had asked insistently what he wanted, and then when they had learnt that he had no want save to talk, they had viewed him with that leering insolence which is more bitter to sensitive natures than actual blows.

So, thwarted in his laudable attempt to cultivate amicable relations with these humble neighbours, he had gone sadly on his way, finding some relief in walking quickly. The ragged little boy who by some strange magic had become so devoted to him, and who unendingly haunted the environs of the mission in the hope of meeting him — this little person, silent witness of these scenes, had tried to comfort him after the primitive manner — that is, by debasing those who had rejected him. They were bad people, he had explained, vigorously shaking his little head and fiercely frowning. And when the village was a safe distance away, he had spat at it and even picked up clods of earth to show what form of condign punishment the primitive inhabitants merited.

But though Paul Hancock had smiled faintly at eloquent testimonials of friendship, they had not been sufficient to restore his equanimity. He wished to be alone; he tried to make the small boy go back. But his efforts had been unsuccessful until a strange deformed beggar had appeared who walked on four little bamboo stools attached to hands and knees. That sight drew the little boy away, and Paul had been left alone.

His thoughts so engaged him that he had reached the river before he had felt a stealing sense of fatigue overcoming him. It was then, too, after he had climbed the bluff, that he became finally aware of a sense of an inner isolation deeper than the loneliness about him. Seated on the ground,

hat in hand, he became lost in contemplation of the mighty river which swept so peacefully on its winding course. Today its ochre-coloured waters were dotted with few craft; there was a laziness in the atmosphere which seemed to have invaded the very waters and made them unwilling to bear any burden.

As he gazed idly, his thoughts took new shape. He remembered an incident which had somehow shocked him oddly in the native city when he had first walked through its narrow streets with the Rev. Ainsley Simon. At a certain point a dense crowd had blocked their way, and on pushing through they had discovered a yellow-haired Swedish missionary attempting to distribute handfuls of mission leaflets. The crowd, however, was in a jeering mood; it was frankly brutal because its antipathies had been aroused. No single hand would receive the tracts, and brutal jibes greeted the friendly remarks of the poor yellow-haired man. There was something in his wistful smile, in his weather-beaten clothes, in his poor Chinese shoes which in such surroundings had cut Paul's heart like a knife. He had felt ashamed; he had seen that even Mr. Simon had pushed quickly on with a strangely overcast look on his face. That was the trouble, the real trouble. There was a feeling of race-pride which intervened and handicapped the humble man just as much as the proud man in this peculiar work. It was impossible to deny it; a concrete example had proved it beyond all shadow of doubt. The Swedish missionary with his yellow hair, his blue eyes, his battered European clothes, st00d for something absolutely different from the crowd

around him. How could that vast gulf be bridged by tracts! …

How long he had sat there he did not know, but at length something made him turn his head sharply, and his heart — that heart against which the Rev. Ainsley Simon had so waggishly warned him many weeks before—gave a great jump. A figure was moving slowly along a footpath only a few hundred yards away, and something at once told him that the figure could be no other than that of Miss Virginia Bayswater. Motionless, he waited.

She was coming fairly fast, he noted, until she reached a point where the footpath met the winding pathway which led up the hill. Then her footsteps flagged and she stood gazing listlessly ahead, digging the grassy edge of the path with the tip of her brown sunshade. Paul, now hardly breathing, gazed in silent anxiety. She was evidently of two minds—she wished to go on home and yet she wished to linger.

A beautiful golden butterfly fluttered round her head. She stood watching it; slowly it fluttered away up the hill and—she followed. Now helping herself with her sun-shade, she climbed upwards with her head bent. Nearer and nearer she came, with her eyes still fixed on the ground and her breath coming and going sharply at the unwonted exertion.

"Will she never look up?" thought Paul. Unable to bear this suspense, suddenly he rose to his feet and spoke.

“Oh, Mr. Hancock, how you startled me!”

A flood of colour had rushed to Miss Virginia Bayswater’s face as she saw him rise up from the grass and lent confirmation to her words. Paul cast about for something to say, and then, amused at his own perplexity, he suddenly laughed.

“I was sitting here,” he said, pointing back at the river, “because I love the view. From our mission one can see

nothing really but those endless and monotonous paddy-fields. Perhaps it was the pleasant change which made me fall into the brownest of brown studies. It is beautiful up here, is it not?”

“But tell me what brought you here,” she replied, as if that alone interested her. “It is miles and miles from home for you.”

“What brought me here,” he echoed quickly. “I came such a distance because “— he hesitated —“because I was very much upset.”

“Really.”

He saw that her expression had quickly changed; now he was certain that she had at once suspected that.

“Yes,” he continued, a little surprised to find himself talking so easily. “I have been upset this afternoon because it has been suddenly driven home on me that I have made a great mistake in coming to China in “—he hesitated once more and coloured slightly — “in my present vocation.”

“Oh, Mr. Hancock,” said Miss Virginia Bayswater, “do you mean that — do you mean that you are going to give up?”

She had seated herself on a patch of soft sunburnt grass and was looking up at him full of wonder, yet looking as if she understood.

“No,” said Paul, “it ‘s not exactly that. I doubt whether it is exactly that.” He sought painstakingly for the necessary exegesis. “What I feel is that I am not in my right place, that I can’t be a success as things now stand. I am very discontented.”

In his concern he stared out at the river and forgot all about his companion.

“What is success?” she gravely inquired in her reflective way, studying his delicate profile. She had never noticed as today how refined-looking he was, how unsuited for

which demands a coarser fibre, and which, if it cannot find that fibre, remains undone.

Paul smiled down at her in a wistful way.

“Isn’t that rather like the tremendous question Pontius Pilate once put?” he inquired. “For most people I suppose success is doing the thing that comes easiest to them - that is what I have read. For the merchant it means making money, for artists applause, for the ordinary man a multitude of ordinary comforts. I don’t know at all what success would really mean to me. Mr. Grey says that I have been too much favoured since childhood ever to be contented.”

“Perhaps you are a hedonist without knowing it,” suggested Miss Virginia, still observing him thoughtfully.

“A hedonist?”

He had turned sharply. It was plain that he did not understand.

“A hedonist,” she remarked, “is one who holds the doctrine that happiness is the highest good. Mr. Denning is always insisting that everyone is secretly a hedonist, but that not one person in a thousand has the courage to confess it.”

“Mr. Denning has a formula to fit everything in the world,” said Paul a little plaintively. Then a new thought struck him. “Do you think Mr. Denning clever?” he inquired.

“Yes, indeed I do. Very clever, I should say.”

He was conscious again, as before, that there was a certain embarrassment in Miss Bayswater’s manner; now she looked away and was absorbed in the scene at their feet. Perhaps it was that which prompted him to pursue the subject. Suddenly he became almost jealous as he remembered that on the day of his visit across the river it was Mr. Denning who had taken Miss Bayswater away from him and spoilt his afternoon.

“They are very severe about Mr. Denning at our mission,” he reflected aloud, finding a negative form of satisfaction in what he said. “They are always discussing the people in the settlement, and Mr. Grey has nothing too bad to say about them all, especially about the Commissioner. He calls them all godless, and Mr. Denning he likens to the Evil One.”

“I think,” said Miss Bayswater, still gazing carefully into space, “that Mr. Grey is unnecessarily unkind and uncharitable in the way he speaks about people. There are, I know, a great many in the settlement who are not good men, but that is no justification to talk the way Mr. Grey talks. I have heard that he even disparages poor old Dr. Spike and

says he is a useless pensioner. Do you like Mr. Grey? “

She turned as she asked the question.

“I hate Mr. Grey,” announced Paul solemnly.

“Oh,” exclaimed Miss Virginia Bayswater, looking at him with open eyes. “How can you say such a thing, Mr. Hancock? It is wicked, you know. And yet you say it as if you thoroughly meant it and enjoyed saying it.”

Suddenly she began smiling; her keen sense of humour had got the upper hand. “And why do you hate Mr. Grey, may I ask?”

“Why, because all his actions are hateful; he does not seem to know that the word ‘gentleman’ has a very real significance even in these days. He is a hypocrite, I am sure — what schoolboys in England call a sneak — he picks up torn envelopes and pieces them together to see if he can discover who the writers were. I have seen him do that myself. And all the Chinese hate him, except one or two. It is so bad with the younger boys that some of them almost refuse to speak to him. I have noticed other things too —” Paul hesitated and coloured.

“Yes ” said Miss Virginia Bayswater anxiously. She

felt a little guilty, but for the life of her she could not resist the temptation. For Miss Virginia Bayswater had heard what Mr. Grey had once said about her, and the memory of his cruel speech had cut her to the quick.

“I oughtn’t to say it, I suppose,” replied Paul, now talking with a frown. “And yet, as I have said so much, I feel like making a clean breast of it all. I have sought in vain for a reason why Mrs. Simon should always be shielding Mr. Grey, but I can find no reason, and somehow that makes things worse.”

“Shielding Mr. Grey,” repeated Miss Bayswater with amazement in her voice; “what do you mean?” It suddenly dawned on her that here was the beginning of something very strange.

“I began noticing it almost at once,” resumed Paul, tearing blades of grass to pieces and speaking to the ground on which he had now seated himself. “Every time that Mr. Grey makes a false step — and he makes a good many every day —Mrs. Simon tries to cover that false step. She often prevaricates in a way that is astonishing, just to save Mr. Grey. Instinctively one feels, whenever Mr. Grey is present, that she is conducting two conversations — one for his benefit, that is, one to help him along, and one for the public. And the strangest part of all is that Mr. Simon does not notice it at all.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Miss Virginia Bayswater with a world of meaning in that simple monosyllable. A minute passed in silence whilst she considered this revelation in a number of aspects. She had good reason to hate Mr. Grey herself; she wondered what this could possibly be. “It is curious that nobody should have noticed this until you came,” she said at length. “There must be something curious about Mr. Grey.”

Paul Hancock hesitated. He had not wanted to say

anything at all about his troubles to Miss Bayswater. Something had driven him to it; it would be well to go on to the end.

“I like Mr. Simon very much,” he announced finally, by way of completing his confession, “but I must say that neither can I make him out completely. I know, of course, that people become curious and different out here, but Mr. Simon is more than that. Not only does he not notice things at all, but he seems to live in his own world and not care about other things or other people. When I first arrived, I thought that he was another kind of man — I remember well my first impressions — but now I see that compromise is his watchword and that he will sacrifice everything to get peace. He is kind and considerate, and in his own way very thorough in his duties. Yet he is not convincing — I cannot think that things are going well. There have been many worries at the mission of a financial sort, and I suppose that and the climate have made him content to take things just as they may happen to come along.”

“Oh dear,” exclaimed Miss Bayswater with tears in her voice, talking quickly, “the poor man is just another case of surrender to his environment, I suppose. When I first came out, I was surprised at many things — at the differences between those who have lived long out here and those who have just arrived straight from home. I used to see all sorts of little things which it is kindest to call little hypocrisies, and I used to wonder why everyone remained silent about them and accepted them as natural. And then, when it came to religion, it seemed to me that almost half was a great mistake, was not what it should be, and that the task was not understood at home. But now nothing surprises me; I just understand how it must be and say nothing.”

“Why should one understand and say nothing?” said Paul almost fiercely, with his eyes sparkling. “That is not

very brave, at least for a man! Either one believes and works with enthusiasm or one should finish with it and return home.”

“Return home,” repeated Miss Virginia Bayswater quickly, as if that point had often occurred to her. “Return home,” she said again softly, as if she wanted to hear the sound of the words again. Then she looked round at the young man wonderingly, as if he had been speaking a forgotten language. “Some of us have no homes to return to—do you know

that?”

Slowly he reddened.

“I am sorry,” he said gently. “I did not mean to say anything that would hurt you.”

“Thank you,” she replied, looking at him for an instant. As his eyes met hers, she turned away.

She was leaning her chin now on one hand and gazing far across the river. It was one of the rare days when she seemed so softened by the overflow of a bounteous nature that the long and wearisome years she had passed in this far-off world were washed away, and nothing but an impression of her first soft womanhood remained. The sharpness of her features had become modified; the fixed look about the eyes, that look which betrays more than anything else the presence of unhappy thoughts, had been replaced by a new look; and even the hand on which she leaned her chin seemed now more rounded. Sitting thus, she seemed beautiful to Paul, and he felt a sharp pang of compunction that he, who was really free, who commanded the means to do as he pleased, should have been so weak as to make his small worries bulk so large.

How brave she was! And then her quickness, the manner in which she detached herself by a dozen indefinable shades from any too intimate association with anything ugly or mean in this strange life, was due to something more than bravery.

He felt convinced that Miss Virginia Bayswater had within her the germs of a heroism which she herself did not suspect. He could not tell all he thought about her, but what he did not put into words seemed to float vaguely like an aureole above her head. He remembered that he had been sure, from the moment he had laid eyes upon her, that something made her different from the others; he knew he had hoped it. He wondered vaguely why she had ever come out and allowed the quick-moving years to consume her in this work which was surely not work for her. Surely there was another mission in life for her, surely she had made a great mistake? And Paul knew that a woman’s mistakes, unlike a man’s, cannot ever be made good.

“Miss Bayswater,” he said timidly at length, “would you mind if I asked you a personal question?”

“Of course not,” she exclaimed smilingly, coming out of her brown study openly relieved. “Ask away!”

“Why did you come to China?”

He watched her narrowly to see what effect his words had. Yes, the odd look had come back.

“Oh dear! what a curious question to ask me now; it makes me feel as old as the hills,” she exclaimed quickly. She folded her hands on her lap and gazed at the river again. “Do you really want to know?”

He nodded, but did not speak.

“I came,” she said slowly, “because my parents were dead and I knew I was a burden to those with whom I was living. They thought I did not see it, but I had always seen it from the day that I went to them as a very small girl. I came also because I thought a life among a poor heathen people would be a happy life for me and that I could do a great deal of good — I was very young then — and I understood very little about anything. And now I have been here fourteen years, and I shall never go away because, if I ever did

that, it would kill me to have to return. Oh dear! that’s all.”

She stopped abruptly, as if she had said too much. The gaps had told a hundred times more than the words, and Paul’s heart bled. For the first time in his life the universal helplessness of women had been revealed to him.

“I am so sorry—you don’t mind my saying that, do you?” For an instant he laid a pleading hand on her arm.

“Don’t be sorry,” she replied valiantly, smiling though the tears were now in her eyes. “I am rapidly getting old and soon it won’t matter at all. For an old maid doesn’t count anywhere—does she now?”

“Ah, but I won’t admit that — I mean, that you are getting old,” cried Paul; “what do years really matter?” (That is the blind thing which ten million others had said before him.)

“Years mean a lot — to a woman,” answered Miss Virginia Bayswater, shaking her head very wisely. “You see, Mr. Hancock, you are still so very young that you cannot possibly know anything about that.”

“But I do,” he protested vigorously, suddenly disliking his youth and yet knowing that that was stupid.

Perhaps it was that mention which brought her back to stern realities, perhaps it was something else; for with a start she suddenly roused herself from her attitude of contemplation, her smile faded, and she rose with her hand outstretched.

“I had no idea it was so late,” she said, anxiously consulting a diminutive watch. “We shall neither of us get home till after dark. So good-bye, good-bye.”

For a moment they stood facing one another with their hands clasped.

“Good-bye,” said Paul earnestly, “and forgive me if I have talked too much.”

As he watched her go, he felt somehow that she was running from him; and there came over him an ardent desire to run after her and stop her. He wrestled with the feeling for a moment and then slowly overcame it.

“Not yet — not yet” he murmured to himself.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. DENNING'S bad humour remained with him so long that he began to think that this condition would become permanent unless he managed to shake it off quickly by some commonsense process. But try as he could to get rid of a frame of mind intimately connected with excessive introspection and excessive planning, every day somehow seemed to add to his had humour, until in the end he gave up all attempts and resigned himself to a sullen pessimism. And just when he was at his worst Fate pushed Paul Hancock against him with an ugly bump. From this chance meeting sprang a train of consequences which no one could have possibly foreseen.

The mission had imported a large quantity of stores and other necessaries, sufficient to last for a year and more; and as the Rev. Ainsley Simon was not feeling very well, he had commissioned Paul to go into the settlement and arrange for their safe home-bringing.

This commission proved to be a troublesome business merely because it should have been so simple. There was an exasperating number of petty details to attend to; when these were finally completed, it was necessary to engage veritable hordes of coolies to carry the numerous cases; and these coolies, after the manner of their kind, could not be induced to get to work without much fighting among themselves.

Paul, at first much amused, soon became openly exasperated with the unending delay. For no sooner had one lot of men fixed their ropes round one great case than suddenly, without warning, they threw down their poles and protested against the others getting off more lightly. Again and again did this

happen, and only when they had completely wearied of shouting at one another did they finally consent to move.

Tired of this business, Paul handed it over with a sigh of relief to a mission servant; and, being so near the Commissioner he suddenly decided to go in and see him. Then it was that he realized that men are like landscapes, only offering a pleasing view when one proceeds to their contemplation at precisely the right moment in precisely the right lighting. Previously Mr. Denning had appeared like a mighty cliff on which the sunshine poured and the sea of life beat in joyous waves. Today he was as mountainous as ever; but it was manifest from the start that for him no sun was shining and that indeed he was wreathed in troublous mists.

"Good morning," he growled as soon as he saw the tall young man. "What are you doing today in the midst of the godless?"

"Good morning," replied Paul, a little astonished at this greeting, but purposely taking no

notice of the evident bad-humour. “I have been attending to the landing of a pile of cases, and now that I have despatched them I thought I might come in and see you for a moment. Am I disturbing you?”

“Tons of Bibles, I suppose,” interjected the big man in a mumble, still bending over his work and ceaselessly scrawling his initials on documents. Then he continued : “No — I have used the wrong word — Bible portions is the correct description, is it not? You divide them up into regular meals, enough for a healthy adult to swallow at one sitting!”

He suddenly threw himself back in his great office chair and roared derisively, as if the idea amused him. Yet his laughter sounded very much like the roar of a wounded lion.

His visitor made no answer at all, though he plainly showed that he was much offended. But when men are angry they

lose the use of their eyes, and so Mr. Denning was illadvised enough to continue:

“What do you expect to do with them? Hand ‘em out to the poor ignorant country and supply them with paper for lighting their fires when the cold season comes along. It is noble work, my young friend, noble work!”

Paul had restrained himself with difficulty. Now he drew himself up boldly and made as if he would go. Rudeness to himself he did not much mind; but just because of his own misgivings about this very work, just because he was torn with doubts, just because he was unhappy, he could not listen.

“Mr. Denning,” he began —

“Stop!” cried the Commissioner, his expression suddenly changing as he saw that he had gone too far. “Don’t mind my banter, stop your ears to it. The fact is, I am devilish bad-tempered this morning, more frankly bad-tempered than I have been for many months. That trumpery matter of a towpath along the American mission dyke is going to make a pretty complication for me; it is simply disgraceful the way we Europeans force things to move officially in this country. Look at what I have received this morning.” He handed Paul Hancock a big foolscap despatch. “That ‘s from the nearest American consul, four hundred miles down-river. He wants me to take the missionary point of view and to fight the Chinese, he insists that it is my bounden duty to do so, and he goes on to give me reams of arguments which are no arguments at all. And why? Because, sir, the American missionary, through his boards and councils and his what-not at home, is able to make it so precious hot for any consul who doesn’t *Kowtow* to the missionary vote that his billet isn’t worth a day’s purchase. That is the plain, unvarnished truth. The State Department at Washington is soft on the missionary question, dead soft—perhaps with good reason, since missionaries, cottons, and kerosene are America’s three principal

interests in China. Of course they have got to be nursed — interests are meant to be nursed! Thank God, in England we are not so bad as that yet; but we are coming to it fast, very fast, and in a few years we shall be much worse than Americans. It is scandalous."

He threw down his blue pencil and considered the ceiling. "Yet I am supposed to endorse scandals. Well, I won't, and there 's an end to it." With a crash he brought down a great fist on his desk and ended.

Paul had listened in open astonishment and in sudden interest. Now he carefully read the document, whilst the Commissioner sat motionless. The despatch was certainly a peculiar composition, the speciousness of which was very apparent, even to him.

"It is very annoying, I have no doubt," he said quietly, as he handed it back.

"Annoying," Mr. Denning spluttered. "It 's old Dr. Spike who is at the bottom of the whole matter — old Dr. Spike, who ought to know better at his time of life." An ironical smile passed over his face. "Do you know what I would dearly love to do? I would like to put Dr. Spike and Your Mr. Grey together in a locked room and leave them there for twenty-four hours. I believe they would murder one another just out of bile — that 's my opinion of some of you missionaries!" Again he roared like a wounded lion.

"I must be getting on, Mr. Denning," Paul said, suddenly seeing the hopelessness of remaining. "I have got to see my cases safely to the mission."

"There is no hurry," said the Commissioner, striking a bell and waving him back to his chair. "I will see that no harm comes to those precious cases of yours and you can stay and talk, I feel like talking. Please stay awhile — for a few minutes."

To the servant who appeared he spoke a few sharp words;

and after he had spoken he pushed away all his piles of papers with an air of relief. For a moment he studied the young man's face in silence. Then —

"One need never hurry in this land. What is the use of hurrying? Unless you learn that quickly you can never be a success, no matter what you may do. Learn that, my young friend, learn that. Listen and learn." He waved an arm as if attracting his attention to the atmosphere around.

The low peaceful murmur of the crowds of men without, who were lazily attending to the day's duties, clearly proclaimed that hurry was absurd, stupid, harmful, noxious, an invention of the Evil One — destructive not only of thought but of all the real pleasures of life. The thing to do was to take matters slowly and deliberately, to allow that ceaseless adjustment which is the essence or inner philosophy of life to come in obedience to natural

laws, and never to attempt with the force of one's own feeble strength to hasten what cannot be hastened without some corresponding loss. All quick efforts stood here confessed as a most vain antiperistasis. Float peacefully on the tide of life, float with the ebb and flood, said the pleasant hum without; and as Mr. Denning listened his head unconsciously nodded his approval.

"Have you ever thought about marriage?" he suddenly inquired, perhaps with purposeful obscurity, breaking away from this somnolence with a sharp effort.

Paul started and coloured. He had been thinking of Miss Virginia Bayswater and wondering how many sides to this man's character she really knew. Did she know him properly, did she understand him, did she like him?

"No," he said aloud — "no, I never have."

Mr. Denning looked at him in feigned surprise.

"I meant my question to be taken quite impersonally," he remarked very calmly; "in other words, I meant, have you ever thought about the history of marriage?"

"I know nothing about the subject," said Paul, with the trace of a frown on his forehead because he believed that the excuse was not true.

Mr. Denning smiled. This sort of thing was good sport to him, and it nearly restored his humour. Paul, measuring his changing mood, became more certain than ever that he was being trifled with.

"Then you have the advantage of possessing a singularly open mind," said Mr. Denning after a moment, now playing with his big blue pencil. "Unfortunately I know something about the subject, a great deal about it. All things considered, marriage is probably the best joke that has ever been played on the human race, but it is a joke which sometimes has a cruel ending."

He breathed deeply and, now that he had kindled his mind, he suddenly looked through Paul Hancock into some region where he alone could penetrate. It was remarkable, thought Paul, seeing his sudden abstraction, how interesting he always became. Perhaps the reason was more simple than Paul imagined. To be interesting one must be interested — that is the main thing. Mr. Denning continued:

"A missionary was in this morning from up-river — you will observe my whole day is being sacrificed to missionaries — asking me if I could not intervene in what he called a peculiarly atrocious case of Chinese cruelty. A woman, who in a fit of anger had killed her husband when asleep with a chopper, is being starved to death after being brutally tortured only thirty miles from here. Of course I can do nothing— it is the law of the land, and I

should be considered very officious and ignorant if I took any steps, beside courting certain failure. We discussed the matter at great length and our talk was very heated; for, though I dislike cruelty as much as any rational man, one must know all the facts before pronouncing judgment on the Chinese in any single matter.

I was able to show my visitor, to his great surprise, that until some legislation introduced in George III's reign the penalty for a similar crime in England was to be drawn and burnt! In 1790 this was very compassionately altered to being drawn and hanged."

"I did not know that," said Paul, watching him closely. Somehow he was more sure than ever that Mr. Denning was talking like this, as he had done before at his house, on purpose — as an introduction.

"I have often observed before now how ignorant people arc of their own country," resumed Mr. Denning as if he were soliloquizing. "This man was ranting to me madly about Christianity and the duties which Christianity imposed on us all in China. And he had the impertinence to inquire whether I considered myself a good Christian. However, I passed that by. What I wanted to know from him was how it came about that only a hundred years ago in a most Christian country, England, we were rather more brutal than the Chinese, and he could not answer me. For, though few people know it, no criminal who is going to suffer the extreme penalty of the law in this land need feel pain. That is where Chinese mercy comes in, even with parricides. The purchase of opium is always permitted, and a man is made practically insensible to pain. Whereas those who have read accounts of how unfortunate wretches suffered from being drawn by horses in England will tell you a very different story. Some believe that being drawn was worse than being broken on the wheel."

Paul remained silent; this man was extraordinary in his moods.

"But I am wandering away from the subject of marriage — you will have perhaps noticed that digression is my great vice," continued Mr. Denning mercilessly. "Marriage is a subject so generally interesting to all of us that I am sure

you will hear me out, especially as I am in a bad temper and will brook no refusal. If there is one thing that irritates me more than any other thing, it is your stupid idea that the indissolubility of the marriage-tie — the engagement which man and woman make to remain together until death — is an obligation created by Christianity. It is nothing of the sort; it is pure Paganism. It would be well if missionaries, who are always preaching to Chinese on this subject, knew this. The highest civilizations of the old Pagan world instinctively adopted the theory that marriage was for all time, because it was their only safeguard in primitive times. This was true not only of Rome, but of Teutonic civilization as well; and even in Athens, instead of divorcing a sterile woman, she was permitted to have a lover in the family she had married into, so as to save the public disgrace of open

separation. The substitute for divorce in Rome was a form of concubinage very similar to concubinage in China, where you missionaries imagine that a man because he has several concubines has several wives; he can have but one wife, and one wife during his whole lifetime."

Mr. Denning took a long breath and resumed very deliberately. He had noticed now that this young man was watching him as if he were irresistibly fascinated. Some brutal instinct drove him on. It was as if he were revenging himself for a rivalry which he suspected rather than believed in.

"Now the question of marriage and divorce is very important to me personally because I am no longer a young man, and as I am considering marriage, prudence bids me also consider carefully the possibility of divorce. You will perhaps be surprised. I cannot disguise from myself that in ten years I shall be an old man, and that is a very important point for a man to remember. The marriage of inclination being now the only one in the greater part of what we foolishly call the civilized world, and the marriage of suitability being a

thing of the past, it logically follows that every wise man should try and make up his mind on the vexed question of possible divorce before he irrevocably commits himself. But it is just that matter which most puzzles me. I cannot make up my mind as to whether I would have the courage to act promptly and calmly. or whether I should be weak enough to remain miserable for the rest of my life. Can you help me to decide, Mr. Hancock—you who have an open mind?"

Paul, wrestling to remain calm, started as his name was spoken. He had hardly understood what Mr. Denning had just said — he had thought of nothing but one pale, anxious face which seemed to stand out through this extraordinary monologue and look at him appealingly. Never had he heard such cynical talk, never in his life had he pictured that one man could talk to another in such a vein. That he had sat listening to it all outraged him. Suddenly he rose. He had tried mightily to remain neutral; it was of no use.

"Mr. Denning, I am afraid, though it is unoriginal, I have rigidly conventional ideas on many subjects, especially on that subject. I have always thought that it is worse than caddish to speak of women as though they were — cattle. Sir, I do not know what you mean."

He stopped, and his cheeks were a brilliant red. The words had slipped from him in his great distress before he could hold them back, — as always happened with him — and he had showed something which he perhaps had wished to conceal.

For Mr. Denning, too, had risen; he seemed now to tower above him and be about to crush him with his great physical stature.

“You are singularly frank,” he observed in a low, cutting voice, “and you are so censorious as to forget that I do not talk to you with the object of being reproved.” He paused, and his great chest heaved. Then he restrained his glow of

rage and sank back into his chair. “You will find the door, I do not doubt.”

Without another word Paul Hancock, hardly knowing what had happened, walked gravely out. Again he had the strange feeling that he had been thrust into a problem already fully developed.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than Mr. Denning rose and began hurriedly pacing up and down. There was real anxiety in his manner now, there was something more galling than bad humour.

“I may be too late, yet I must bide my time,” he muttered again and again.

For he had seen in the distance Miss Virginia Bayswater and Paul that day they had talked so long and so earnestly together, and something told him that this meeting was a presage of no small moment.

He believed that he got the confirmation of that now, and, frankly, he was openly alarmed.

CHAPTER XV

AND now this young man, under trial in this new and strange life, found a new load added; and thereby his philosophy was sensibly widened. Briefly, summer, blazing summer, had at last come.

By some lucky chance the great heat of this torrid zone had held off week after week, and it had remained tolerably cool though the season was far advanced — much to the wonder of those who, because they sit in unending sunlight, await the lurking menace of greatest heat in open dread. And then this day it had suddenly got hot, really hot.

At seven o'clock in the morning, when some coolness from the night should have remained, it was veritably stifling, choking. The heat, stimulated by the low pressure of the atmosphere as well as by the action of the masterful sun, stole into the house through every crack and crevice. It fell on the land like a noisome cloak; it enveloped everything as with a shroud; it made everything useless and futile, for it was more deadening to the soul of man than the black plague itself.

Not a breath of wind fanned the air; all was dead-still, with the copper sun, as it rose higher and higher, beating down ever more burningly. Yes, that heat was terrible. As you looked, the world seemed to become sickly and choked. The scissors-grinders and the cicadas, calling their endless choruses from every tree and rice-field, alone seemed content; the rest of the world was utterly crushed.

Paul, who had been warned how one day this would come, gazed out of his window before coming down to breakfast that morning with the curiosity of one who sees in what

he has never experienced before a source of amusement rather than a matter of concern. Being lean and healthy, he did not feel particularly oppressed. It was a new sensation to feel so hot; and in the bliss of his present ignorance he watched with amused eyes a mission servant carefully open an umbrella to walk across the compound. The action seemed so unnecessary. Yet in the distance he could see, now labouring stark-naked in the rice-fields, brown figures capped with immense straw hats — brown figures which bent low into the slime of the paddy to escape the sting of the sun. Otherwise there was no animation, no life anywhere. Man alone laboured on because, being the highest in the animal scale, his struggle is always the most sordid. The birds of the air, the pigs, the dogs, and possibly the very fish in the waters had retired into what shade they could find.

"It is evidently very hot," murmured Paul to himself, after he had studied the landscape for some time.

He came downstairs full of his new discovery, and perhaps half expecting to make light of

it before the others. He was surprised, as he went along the hall, to find that silence reigned. The house was full of leaden silence. His surprise increased when he found the breakfast-table fully occupied.

“Good morning,” he said hesitatingly, looking round the table almost apprehensively. The Rev. Ainsley Simon groaned a reply; Mrs. Simon inclined her head; Mr. Grey preserved a sepulchral silence. Overhead the punkah flapped shiftlessly and irregularly, as if it too was mortally tired of movement.

“We are all feeling the heat very much,” said Mrs. Simon finally, “and Ainsley, I fear, has his fever again.”

“Fever? I am sorry to hear that.”

“It is the first time in eighteen years that I have seen the thermometer mark 103° at eight in the morning,” said

Mr. Grey in a crushed manner, after another short pause. Never very careful as to his dress, this morning there was about him an open disregard. Frankly Mr. Grey looked more unattractive than he had ever looked before.

“What! ” exclaimed Paul, trying not to notice this; “it is 103 °.”

Mr. Grey did not trouble to answer by word of mouth; he slowly nodded.

“I think I ought to take a few more grains of quinine, Maria,” said Mr. Simon, feeling his own pulse; and when he had measured the frantic coursing of his blood, he slightly groaned.

Ainsley, you know the doctor told you it was useless taking it until the temperature fell at night. It will only make you more dizzy.”

“Very well,” said the poor man with a sigh, “but why was I not wise enough to take some last night?”

“No one could have foreseen this sudden change,” said Mr. Grey stonily, “excepting the Evil One. It takes the heart out of a man.”

He also groaned, as he abandoned the attempt to eat a third egg. And for a while all sat there in apprehensive silence.

“I was reading that in the last heat-wave in America the mercury never went above 95°, and yet there were hundreds of deaths,” began Paul, after vainly thinking of something to say.

“It will be 105º before ten o’clock and 110º by noon,” said Mr. Grey. “It is quite possible that by four o’clock it may touch 115º. You will understand what heat means before this burst is over.”

“What! ” exclaimed Paul, beginning to get alarmed. He studied the tired faces of his companions. “What is the highest you have ever seen it, Mr. Grey? “

“113°,” said that gentleman solemnly.

“Heavens!”

“Ainsley has seen it hotter than that,” remarked Mrs. Simon, passing a handkerchief over her forehead. “I think you said it was 117º once in ‘76, didn’t you, dear?”

The gentleman nodded his feverish head.

“Yes,” he admitted, “it was that and perhaps more. How I suffered! For twenty-nine days it never fell below 100° night and day, and the mortality even among the Chinese was great.”

Breakfast, being full of these thermometric threnodies, was a very dismal meal, even for the mission, and as Mr. Simon got up from the table, he gasped and staggered. Paul caught him by the arms and helped him to a sofa. The others looked on silently, as if they were themselves too oppressed to speak or lend help. On the sofa Mr. Simon closed his eyes for a moment, but for a moment only. Perhaps he felt that lying down was an act of surrender which he must palliate.

“I feel better, much better, lying down,” he murmured, looking from face to face. “I am sorry, Hancock, that my sickness will throw more work on you. But you are a valiant young soul; you will not mind, I am sure.”

“Mr. Simon,” cried Paul, “you know I will do anything to help you.” He flushed at the vehemence of his own words.

The sick man smiled faintly and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, it was to turn to his wife.

“Do you know, Maria,” he said gently, “I have been wondering whether it would not be wiser for me to go over to the new house, to the house we owe to friend Hancock. You see, though our land is well raised, this house backs on to the paddy-fields, and the night air must be very poisonous

at this season. Perhaps it would be wiser if I changed my quarters until the dog-days are over. What do you say, Grey ?”

He turned a little to look up at that gentleman. Mr. Grey was gazing out of the window and manifestly deliberating as to what he should say. Paul, watching him narrowly, suddenly knew that he would raise some insuperable objection.

“I think you are right in a way,” said Mr. Grey finally, in a thoughtful way. “But the new house has one most serious drawback for anyone with fever — it is very damp still. I noticed only this morning the streaks of damp on the walls in my room. I was thinking how unhealthy it must be. Everywhere there are great streaks of that damp. Yes, I am sure it is unhealthy.”

“I fear Mr. Grey is right, Ainsley,” put in Mrs. Simon. “It would be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire. You had better remain here and change your room to the front of the house. That seems the best plan.”

“Perhaps you are both right,” said Mr. Simon weakly. “It would, be a nuisance, too, to change across, feeling as I do. I think I could almost sleep now. Thank you. Thank you.”

Paul had come forward and pushed a cushion under his head; but whilst he did that he thought all the time of Mr. Grey.

“What a pity it is that you can’t get away for a brief change to the hills, Mr. Simon!” he said aloud presently, “I hear that numbers of people have gone away to Fuling.”

“Fuling,” exclaimed the sick man; “I have no patience with that Fuling fad. It does us no good in the eyes of the natives — or in the eyes of the commercial communities, for that matter —that we should flee the hot weather. Do you know what they call it? The missionaries’ annual breakdown.

Some of the stations along the river are quite untenanted for two months— the shepherds abandon their flocks to get cool. I will die in Wayway sooner than abandon my post. That is my view.”

“Oh dear! ” said Mrs. Simon suddenly, “I think it a pity you should have such strong opinions on that subject, Ainsley. I am sure a change would do Mr. Grey good as well as yourself.”

Mr. Grey looked at her almost suspiciously.

“I require no change,” he said briefly. “I am of Mr. Simon’s opinion that it is best for us to remain at our posts.” And with that pronouncement the discussion ceased.

The day wore on very slowly in that terrible outburst of heat; and the next day, though it was not so hot, even the native inmates of the mission were almost prostrated. Little Dr. Woodman came out from the settlement and stumped up the staircase on his wooden leg and shook his head over Mr. Simon and advised a change. And when he heard Mr. Simon insist that nothing would make him move, he examined his heart and told him something about it in a very grave voice.

That same evening the three men debated the question whether it would not be well to have a holiday until the heat-burst was over. They decided to curtail the work and to see how matters then went. And when Mr. Grey had left him alone by Mr. Simon's bedside, Paul asked him if he would care to have him read to him.

"No, friend Hancock," said the sick man. "I would prefer to talk to you, to say certain things that always come to my mind when I am sick. Dr. Woodman says that it is better for me to talk a little than to lie alone and fret."

"Yes," said Paul.

"When I am sick, Hancock, grave fears assail me, not only as to whether our methods are right, but as to whether what we are doing really amounts to anything. Mr. Denning

says ours is but another home of lost causes and impossible loyalties; is he right? I have been thinking it over very earnestly once again as I lie here, and I cannot make up my mind. After years of work we have only eight communicants and thirty-four catechumens. It is a sad record, Hancock, a sad record."

The sick man looked anxiously at Paul with tears of pain in his eyes. It would have been cruelty to hurt him. Paul prevaricated.

"But you forget our classes, Mr. Simon," he said earnestly. "We have nearly a hundred in our classes now, and the amount of good we may do through them is not to be calculated by a mere counting of heads. Since I have been here, twenty new boys have come to the schools—that is surely something. It may be different work to what people at home expect, but it cannot be called bad work since there is manifest good in it." He flushed as he concluded, remembering other conversations he had had.

"I knew it," said Mr. Simon, putting out his feverish hand and clasping for a moment the young man's hand and looking deeply into his eyes. "I knew friend Hancock was not of the surrender type. I knew you would refuse to listen to my faint heart." For a short while he was silent, thinking deeply. Then, "Yet still, though I take great comfort at your words, I wonder whether you speak them merely because you are young and therefore enthusiastic. Everything in this world is really subjective, you know. People talk of taking purely objective views, when there is not a man living in the world who can do it. One sees through the eyes which one's temperament, one's circumstances, one s particular age,

give one. What will you think when you are as old as I am, when you have laboured as long as I have. Tomorrow you may think differently from today — remember that, remember that."

Paul, his hands clasped together, his eyes fixed on the future, shook his head.

'No," he said slowly; "I shall never think very differently from what I think today. In the fundamentals I have not changed a hair's breadth since I was a schoolboy. There is a certain strain which we have which bids us never despair, never be discouraged, never turn back. And it is that strain I am sure that counts out here — that impresses the people, whether they believe what we teach them or not. Mr. Denning said that to me, Mr. Denning believes that that is true. But I knew it long before he had ever spoken to me; I knew that when I was a boy."

The Rev. Ainsley Simon turned in wonderment. "You have thought that," he said in a whisper ; "it is a thought which I have always locked deep in my bosom. Other men have had it too —many others. But they also have jealously guarded it, because they believe it is the wrong motive-force in such work as ours, because they believe that some-thing more sublime is required."

"Why should it be wrong? Are we not generally too much the slaves of tradition, of certain received opinions, of certain attitudes of mind? Is not the main thing, even with us, to do things, to get results?"

"That is Jesuitical," replied Mr. Simon, closing his eyes with another sigh. The younger man felt something he could not put into words, but he persisted with his curious argument.

"No, I do not think it is Jesuitical. The Jesuitical method is that which justifies anything to get results. We do not believe in that for a moment. We only say, let us be schoolmasters and from school-work proceed to better things."

The Rev. Ainsley Simon did not answer at once. But now he opened his eyes, stared steadily at the ceiling as if he

would pierce that human obstacle and see into the boundless empyrean above.

"I cannot judge," he said at last, "I cannot judge. Only, lying here, I am full of fears that we are of too miserable clay really to be able to serve our Maker. Are all of us in China of the same clay? Are we nothing but men gaining a livelihood in a business like any other out here — exiles who must live? It is a terrible thought."

He groaned and turned his face to the wall, and now it was plain that he was silently

weeping.

“Mr. Simon, Mr. Simon,” begged Paul, “do not think just now about these things, do not excite yourself. Remember what the doctor said. We are what we are—human and therefore fallible. We can only hope that we do our duty. Mr. Simon —” He put out his hand.

Suddenly he stopped, convinced that he had failed, that it was worse than useless. For the immense irony of it all struck him and burnt him like red-hot iron. It was all so useless, so small, so finite in the face of the infinite.

He stole away, as Mr. Simon’s fever sobs became louder, since it was not right for him to remain; and in this despondent manner did the terrible month of anguish pass.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was not merely the dreary isolation in which the little community of Wayway lived that had made people look forward so eagerly to Mr. Denning's long-promised garden-party on the birthday of the Emperor of China; there was something else. To be frank, gossip had been so busy with Mr. Denning's name that, beneath his startling innovation of assembling everyone he could think of from far and wide to celebrate an event about which no one cared anything at all, was seen the beginning of a definite plan of campaign in which he was destined to show himself a man of surprises. He who had been so completely wrapped up in himself and his own affairs, he who had been so self-contained and reserved, was certainly becoming less and less so from week to week; that everyone noted.

Now, to account for this change there must be a reason, an adequate reason. Was Mr. Denning at last to become a Benedict, was he to succumb to the attractions of marriage? That seemed to be the most popular hypothesis. The women, whispering to one another his admiration for this Miss Virginia Bayswater, said it would be really rather amusing to see how things worked out, because — well, they had quite a number of reasons why it would be amusing. The men were judicially silent when the subject came up, and seemed to be very much on their guard. Altogether it was a perplexing problem.

Now, though mission life rolls along its own channels, more or less cut off from the other channels of this exile life, there exists a certain intercommunication between the two, especially in the matter of gossip. So from the settle-

ment the word passed to the missions that Mr. Denning undoubtedly had some special idea in thus assembling all his friends and acquaintances, and that the inclusion of every Chinese official, high and low, though natural on such an anniversary, carried further meaning. So everybody became more and more interested.

Chinese gossip, that marvelous causerie which trickles through the stoutest walls and undermines the most ingenious dissimulation, had a very large number of things to add. The serving-world of Europeans in the East is necessarily in a somewhat unique position. Attached to classes of people most sharply differentiated in habits, dress, observances, and traditions, this serving-world is in much the same position as a super-curious audience perpetually viewing from the regions of the pit an amusing comedy played before it on a high stage. Not only are the antics of the protagonists when they are before the footlights seemingly made for their especial edification; but at the robing and the disrobing behind the scenes they are also present. The grins, the smiles, the oaths, the muttered confidences, the sobs, the tears — in a word, all the sub-tragedy and sub-comedy of the green-room and the dressing-room is theirs to behold. It has been said with some smug satisfaction that no man is a hero to his valet; think of the position of a man—and of the woman — who is a real living actor, a clown, a buffoon, a kill-joy to a whole nest of servants — a man who is

perpetually performing either alone or in company for their benefit, a man who is laughed at and derided! After that to be merely unheroic is surely a very small thing.

Now, in the case of Mr. Denning, what that gentleman proposed to do was a matter of special concern and interest to a very large number of a heterogeneous population. His marriage would mean that he proposed to turn his back on everything that had gone before — in brief, to turn over a

new leaf of life. So every straw was watched, everything he said or did was ruthlessly dissected, and with the vast diplomatic skill of the East each separate person tried his best to fathom the mystery. But they tried in vain, for Mr. Denning was never less communicative on this one subject than now, and he appeared to be always listening and watching. So the mystery remained as deep as ever.

The day of the garden-party came with most beautiful weather. A seasonable breeze fanned the air, and what with that and the genius of the Chinese artisans who had been employed in putting up airy, oblong tents of bamboo and matting, the Commissioner’s grounds were certainly everything that could be desired. The barefooted gardeners, who without enthusiasm, but with that supreme art which comes from being close to nature, had been labouring at, making everything blossom, had put forth great efforts; and even in a country which teems with gardeners their results appeared remarkable. The smell of the Molihua, the Chinese jasmine, was heavy in the air, but it was the peonies, so rare in Europe, that made the bravest show. There were masses of peonies, multitudes of peonies, grown to marvellously beautiful plants by years of careful gardening and much rich, moist soil. The Festiva maxima vied with the Alba superba; there were Philomele and Reine des Français and Marquise de Lorne in serried tiers, whilst the virgin Duchesse de Nemours stretched away in lines of pots that seemed to have no ending. Their lovely colours and glorious form were fit to adorn the gardens of queens.

Punctually at four Mr. Denning took his stand, though no one had been invited till five; but he had his Chinese to think of. He knew that the probabilities were that for many weary minutes he would be bored uttering platitudes in the Vernacular to the mandarins and their many friends to whom watch-time is still a phantasy.

His assumption proved correct. The sound of a gong beaten sharply, was heard almost at once, and with a shake of his head he prepared for the inevitable. As the neighbourhood of his main entrance-gate was reached, a long drawn-out, melodious shout came from a ragged retinue carrying red boards and ancient weapons, thus announcing to him that the highest official, the Taotai, had arrived. Then the chair-bearers swept into the compound, and the native audience, already gathered without, was agog.

As the Taotai stepped from his green-covered conveyance, he exchanged salutations with his host which were renewed at frequent intervals.

“Permit me to offer you my most humble congratulations on this happy day, the Emperor’s birthday,” said Mr. Denning in the exaggerated language which ceremony demanded.

“Seldom is it that such unheard-of hospitality is seen,” said the Taotai, waving a thin aristocratic hand towards the garden and the banks of flowers.

“That you have been able to come to this poor place overwhelms me,” said Mr. Denning.

“Your constant thought of me duly impresses on me my singular unworthiness,” said the Taotai.

Thus conversing, together they advanced to the central mat-pavilion, the Taotai’s long robes of office swinging gracefully as he walked, and his official card-hearer following so close behind him that he almost trod on his heels, whilst his other personal retainers, released from immediate duty, remained in an inquisitive knot on the edge of the lawns.

Meanwhile the ragged retinue carrying the “boards of office” and the “symbols of power”—a retinue recruited after the wonted custom from among the loafers at the Yamen gates and paid for strictly by the trip — this ragged retinue showed an increasing disposition to spread themselves in attitudes of exhaustion whenever Mother Earth

appeared to offer a cool seat. As the master of the house was almost out of sight, the gate-keeper and his assistants became suddenly irate that such scant ceremony should be shown; suddenly they determined to put this dirty, motley brigade outside the compound palings. But though the decision was made, the order was somewhat difficult to execute. The crowd of miserables, in spite of its ragged aspect, was truculent because it was officially employed and showed distinctly adhesive qualities. So it came to pass that as the Commissioner and the Taotai still conversed together in stilted phrases, the latter, turning at the noise, had the felicity to witness from the distant background his host’s servants unceremoniously cuffing and pitching out the rabble. But eyes are not necessarily given us to see all that passes before them, and the Taotai was for the moment diplomatically blind.

This comedy had not been entirely played out when a new invasion came. A long line of arrivals, mainly composed of two-bearer chairs, swung rapidly into the compound. Instead of any accompanying rabble, there were only card-bearers attached to these new arrivals, for they were minor officials of no special importance. Mr. Denning did not go right up to the gate to meet them; a few steps forward sufficed to indicate sufficient politeness to those who were his inferiors in position. Then, after they had met amidst a great bowing and shuffling, the whole party ceremoniously approached the Taotai, who, in view of his authority, treated these smaller officials with a complete indifference which was somewhat delicious to witness.

This bevy of territorial officials had hardly composed themselves in front of the main pavilion when there was a fresh stir at the gateway and more chairs and people approached. Mr. Denning, engaged ostensibly in several conversations conducted simultaneously after the Chinese manner—

with sudden ejaculations, bows, stiffening of the body, nods, laughs, protests, and so on *ad infinitum* — had managed to keep his eyes in that direction; and now it was with difficulty that he repressed a sudden frown. For it was the American Mission from across the river descending in force — the ladies in chairs, the men walking — and they were at least a quarter of an hour ahead of the time he had named. In the particular circumstances it was particularly annoying; he knew the significance with which this early arrival would be invested.

“Pardon me,” said he in the vernacular, suddenly interrupting the flow of gutturals and sibilants still being poured on him. Hastily he went towards the large group now advancing across the lawns.

To greet all of these good people took some little time; for the mission had turned out in force and almost every one of its many members was there, and each one expected some attention. When these heavy preliminaries had been completed, old Dr. Spike suddenly cleared his throat as announcement that he had become the general spokesman.

“I am glad to see,” he announced sententiously and slowly, “that on this auspicious day you, Mr. Denning, have been favoured with beautiful weather. It is right and proper that I express to you in the name of the mission our keen interest in attending any celebration connected with the Emperor of this heathen Empire — which we hope may soon be converted. We anticipate all of us a very pleasurable afternoon.”

Having finished his speech, his shrewd old eyes seized with appreciation the distant view of the collation spread beneath the mat pavilions, and suddenly he rubbed his hands.

“That is very kind of you,” replied Mr. Denning, looking at Miss Virginia Bayswater. He wondered whether it was design that had placed her between the two old maids

of the mission, who watched him so carefully whenever he spoke.

What was her attitude? It seemed to him that in some comment she made just then there was an anxious note, and he was sure her eyes were not quite peaceful. Dressed in a white muslin dress which cramped her generous lines, not even the ugly hat on her head could disguise the fact that she had reached an eminently marriageable age. Miss Virginia Bayswater, without being exactly beautiful, undoubtedly possessed that vague something rendering her attractive to men; that was proved by the suspicious manner in which her own sex invariably viewed her, women feeling instinctively in some vague way that they

were handicapped by her whenever she was about. Why had she remained unmarried?

Mr. Denning, walking beside her, pondered over the matter again and again as he glanced at these two dried-up old maids. If she delayed much longer, she too must inevitably resemble them. “What a fate,” he thought, “what a fate!” For to him these two old maids appeared a living example of unfulfilled destiny, a standing protest against outraged laws. Perhaps long residence in Asia had given Mr. Denning over-much Orientalism — perhaps he viewed things too much from a point of view that the West calls shocking because it is wholly natural. But once more he noted that as he introduced the highly polite native officialdom to this missionary world about which they knew so little, instinctively it was Miss Virginia Bayswater that attracted attention. Perhaps something of the wonderful native causerie had percolated even through the cracks and crevices of yamên doors; perhaps they saw in her his future wife.

But five o’clock had now arrived, and with the punctuality of loneliness Wayway suddenly precipitated its incon-

gruous elements in a motley crowd through the crowded gateway. Mr. Denning for nearly an hour had scant time to ponder over anything, for his duties claimed his sole attention.

His ample gardens soon presented a curious scene. Everyone had been at pains to dress up to the traditions which they had brought with them as the essential note in the life elegant, and the result was perhaps more sad than comical. Clothes suddenly resurrected from stored traveling trunks are like forgotten memories, — they hurt far more than they please; for one grows out of memories just as one grows out of clothes, and it is not good to tamper with either. The men betrayed in their stiffness their acute sense of oppression; and though the women in their dresses of somewhat vanished fashions struggled valiantly to extract their husbands from such dolorous embarrassment, for a long time they were only partially successful.

Somehow it was all a little reminiscent of schoolboy days. The *sans gêne* of daily life had unaccountably vanished, and the awkward young men who stood together in tightly tied knots wondered vaguely why hands at times seem so unnecessary. Fathers of families suddenly became soft and solicitous towards their familiar offspring, relieving the surprised *amahs* of their charges because they found in Jack or Willie or Jane a sudden sense of relief. And so for a time matters proceeded very seriously. It was official — it was stiff.

In the midst of all this, alone Mr. Tosh stood out the supreme example of jovial unembarrassment. His hearty laugh, echoing here and there, brought with it manifest relief, and, always popular, today his popularity reached its highest zenith.

“This is more than a garden-party,” he was announcing again and again. “It is a fête,” he pronounced the words as if the arrangement of letters was purely phonetic, “and

I cannot hold myself from stravaiging about a little like the wild man from Borneo. There will be conjurers and tumblers in a minute over there. Watch till you hear their noise, you know how they work — war-whooping all the time. Ah, Taotai, *hao, hao!*" he concluded, coming up to the territorial magnate.

The territorial magnate said something, and waved his thin aristocratic hands gracefully in the air as an explanation to his silken words, which he knew were Greek to his interlocutor. For though Mr. Tosh had lived forty years in the country, in common with the majority of his companions in exile, of the vernacular he knew scarcely a word. He had been accustomed to view the Chinese as a people amiable in themselves; densely populating vast provinces and therefore highly convenient for trade purposes; remarkably skilful at profit-taking, yet nevertheless pliant under the dominant will of the Westerner, and therefore easy to get on with. To learn to speak the language had never occurred to him. His position was identical, indeed, with that amiable French countess who, after having lived thirty years at Constantinople, had been asked whether she spoke Turkish.

" Monsieur," she had indignantly answered, " est-ce que vous me prenez pour une odalisque!"

This linguistic limitation did not, however, embarrass Mr. Tosh in the slightest. "The thing to do is to set John Chinaman at ease" was his proclaimed policy; and now, seizing the Taotai affably by the elbow, he led him unprotestingly to one of the numerous tables, and together they drank.

"*Hao-hao,*" he exclaimed, as they clinked glasses ; and the generous wine of Champagne having already been freely sampled by the Taotai, his thin laugh echoed at the oft-repeated words as if they had been some excellent witticism. Wine is the secret of much good converse.

Much elated, Mr. Tosh now wended his way back to the groups of frozen young men whom he was determined to bait.

"You are a pretty set," he began in mock contempt. "Here you are, all gathered together on the best of occasions and with the best of everything awaiting your kind attention, and what do you do? You stand together in ugly lumps of men — just ugly lumps — and more miserable, oppressed, woe-begone creatures it has not been my sad fate to witness in forty-two years of China."

Mr. Tosh laughed uproariously, and the young men, though irritated, joined him.

"It is only old Tosh," they said to one another. Then one of them inquired, "What is one to do?"

“Am I a nurse-girl?” began Mr. Tosh indignantly. “Well, you would think it. Go and seize hold of those Mandarins and make them have a drink. That’s important. If ye answer, ye can’t talk the lingo, I ‘ll tell ye, no more can I. But what do I do? I seize my glass and say *Hao-hao* and grin; and the other boy seizes his glass and says *Hao-hao* and grins, and between the two of us there grows up all the appearance of an intellectual conversation. You try it, it ‘s as good as any other kind of conversation I ever tried. Ha, ha!” he laughed uproariously. He began to move off, but suddenly turned.

“And,” he now added in a hoarse whisper, “go and drink Her health if ye dare! Good-bye.”

The missions had evidently considered it a point of duty to turn out in force, for even the priests of the Catholic Mission were there, their long black cassocks, their olive faces, and their courtly manners contrasting strongly with the others. They had brought with them two Jesuit Fathers who happened to be passing through bound for some distant station; and these two were so perfectly garbed as

Chinese and had so long worn their dress that it was hard at a distance to tell them from the true native.

The Catholic priests mingled with the territorial officials and exchanged courtly remarks with them with a manner that somehow established their singular difference to the others —*they* belonged to the historic church. Had not they been familiars of the last of the Ming Emperors and the first Emperors of the Manchus? The great Ricci, first leader of the brilliant band which might have effected the Catholic conquest of China, had converted a Prime Minister. Schall, one of his successors, regulated the Imperial calendar, cast bronze cannon for the expiring Ming dynasty, and almost won over the first Manchu Emperor. Verbiest, who followed him, was equally notable, and in Father Gerbillon was found the draftsman of the celebrated Peace with Russia, the Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689. Had it not been for the unfortunate controversy of the Confucian worship, a sort of Arian heresy which the Jesuits wished the Popes to sanction so as to found a mighty Eastern hierarchy, they might indeed have captured all China. Even as it was they now possessed official rank, from bishop down to parish priest, by Imperial decree — and they were proud.

Not far from them, eying them in no friendly manner, refusing even to go near them, were men and women of the Overland Missions. They too were dressed in Chinese clothes, men and women alike, but the difference between them and the representatives of Roman Catholicism was startling and profoundly suggestive, not only as an outward and visible sign of the spirit within, but of something physical which differentiates Northern Europe from Southern Europe and which makes it impossible for such Northern types to be anything but aggressive. Briefly, these good People wore their clothes aggressively; they had put them on not in any attempt to assimilate themselves to the people

of the country, but in obedience to a fiat with which they were not in sympathy. Theirs was clearly a muscular Christianity contrasted with this other Christianity of insinuation — the somewhat unlovely Christianity of an action people compared with the Christianity of dreamy and philosophic submissiveness. For aesthetically they were pathetic. To see flaxen hair and pale white faces above flowing robes and loose pantaloons, to note how heavy is the white man's frame in the yellow man's habiliments, is bad enough. But the most jarring note of all is the foot—the strong, big, dominant, assertive foot of the white man. Feet — do you not proclaim better than anything else, when you are shod so contrariwise, that you are attempting to cross forbidden boundaries?

The crowd now, though very dense and somewhat marvelous for such an out-of-the-way place as Wayway, carefully kept itself to its component parts. The mass of Chinese officials, the knots of various missionaries, remained aloof from the local community which occupied as it were the centre of the stage and made unblushing comments about the others. Especially did the Overland Mission people arouse unfavourable comment.

"Every time I see them," said a short stout man who had made a fortune selling Indian opium, "it makes me wonder whether our people at home are not mad to expose us to ridicule. Fancy putting our own flesh and blood into such clothes! I call it a scandalous and immoral proceeding. I remember when I first came to China no one dreamed of such things. That was in the Sixties. They say now that it is necessary in order to get nearer the people. Nearer the people, indeed! It 's enough to frighten them out of the country."

The thought that his market might really be spoiled made him suddenly angry, and he almost shook his fists.

Mrs. Barchet Grand, to whom the remark was addressed as the most suitable person to hear such philosophic views, now put up her glasses to look once more.

Mrs. Barchet Grand was of an uncertain age, but very energetic. She was the sort of massive person who must, in every country and in every age, be pressing forward some great and totally unnecessary movement to the embarrassment of her neighbours because of her store of superabundant energy. As destiny had cast her lines in China, she had remained for a long time undecided as to what form her energies should actually take. The men of the country being admittedly hard to get at, and Eastern ideas being decidedly against a mere woman attempting to reach them, she had somewhat sorrowfully decided that it must be the women, and not the dear men, who must benefit. *Force majeure* is admittedly an unsympathetic thing. So, after much hesitation, Mrs. Barchet Grand had finally founded her society. Its title, though long, was euphonious. It was "The British Society for the Introduction of Corsets among Chinese Women."

It was admittedly a very bold move, indeed, and suggested a doubt at once as to whether it was really wise to take up arms against a sea of troubles even in such a noble cause as

waists. But her inaugural address had been a powerful plea, untainted with false modesty. She had said that she considered it perfectly disgraceful, and more than a little indelicate, that the figures of Chinese women should not be suitably restrained by whalebone in an age when man was known not to have abated his predatory nature and to be ever on the prowl under the mask of civilization. Those were her exact words. As no one at the inaugural meeting had any sense of humour, no one laughed at these alarming insinuations; indeed, after the manner of people who have not been trained to think, one and all were suddenly

impressed with wonderment that they had been living such a long term of years in the country without noticing the crying necessity for such a reform. At informal meetings of the officers of the society (all ladies, of course) Mrs. Barchet Grand had always added that it made her positively uneasy to see the way Chinese women, when they were fat, *flopped* (that was her exact expression) as they walked on their small feet. “Such a bad thing, you know, for all concerned, my dears,” she concluded somewhat cryptically.

Some of the officers of the society, misled by the fiery zeal, had even tried to introduce the reform among their body-servants — that is, on the persons of their own women servants — but the *amahs* one and all had incontinently rebelled and boldly stated that in Eastern eyes this Western custom was disgusting. If nature, they explained—more it is to be feared by gestures than in any polished idiom — had willed a certain exuberance of form in some, it was only meet and proper that nothing should be done to accentuate the fact. That was an argument which was singularly philosophic and logical, fit answer of a rationalist people, and so the society languished. A culminating blow had come when the far-famed and masterful Empress Dowager, hearing in her mysterious Peking palace, that Chinese ladies who had been abroad had actually brought back with them these truly infernal inventions, ordered several high-born persons before her to show exactly what they were. No sooner was her curiosity satisfied than the august lady had stamped her feet and flown into a towering rage and had threatened to have any woman in China who used these “iron cages” most severely punished.

Yet that story, quickly spreading over the length and breadth of the Empire and leaving immoderate laughter in its train, had had a very opposite effect to what might have been expected. Mrs. Barchet Grand’s fighting proclivities

had become suddenly aroused by it to their highest pitch. Her propaganda became so active that she did make converts, for zeal actually accomplishes miracles, and at length it was whispered that these delicate articles need no longer be thrown away, but had become, like the gentlemen’s abandoned boots, a marketable quantity. Such was the re-doubtable person who was called upon to pass an opinion on the unfortunate members of the Overland Missions. Now having at last completed her survey, she spoke:

“They have not got them on,” she muttered ominously; “I shall make it my business

officially to deal with the matter. How can one expect ignorant natives to reform when our own people are so perverse?”

She looked again and resumed unpityingly: “Poor things, fancy robing them like that! I am going to speak to them.”

She marched forward ominously, and the circle near her chuckled with sudden glee. Oh, these people who are forever concerning themselves with the affairs of others — oh, these people who are always so busy — how tranquil would the world be if they were all gone!

But just as she came up to her victims, Mrs. Barchet Grand was intercepted. In her path stood Mrs. Jerrins with outstretched hand and a devil in her eyes.

“Good afternoon, dear Mrs. Grand,” said that lady sweetly, “and how is the great work proceeding? Merrily, I trust, with converts coming in and squeezing themselves to unbelievable lengths just to gratify your life’s ambition. What it is to have great ideas!” She ended with a little screech of laughter — she could never take this thing seriously. It was really too droll.

Mrs. Barchet Grand drew herself up with dignity. So ingrained had the habit of fighting and crushing criticism become with her that she could no more have ignored Mrs. Jerrins and passed on her way than she could have ignored

the lustful summer sun above her head. Therefore she rushed into the fray with incautious ardour.

“Really, Mrs. Jerrins, I think you are wrong to poke fun at me,” she said, fanning herself spasmodically and making her points heavily. “People are beginning to realize that there is a great deal more in my idea now than they did a few years ago. All the world’s great movements have had fun poked at them at the start.”

“What a peculiar idiom you employ! ” said Mrs. Jerrins, looking at her thoughtfully. “I mean, fancy, for instance, calling burning people having fun poked at them. You know that ‘s what they used to do until quite recently with enthusiasts who started great movements. Oh, Mrs. Grand, suppose the Chinese took it into their heads to burn you, what a bonfire you would make! At least you would end in a blaze of glory!”

Mrs. Jerrins gave another sudden little shriek of laughter, and two or three others, because they were so afraid of her, joined in her merriment. But Mrs. Barchet Grand, refusing to be drawn aside, remained ominously polite.

“I do not think that is a nice thing to say about me,” she remarked in order to gain time and select her best darts. “But then people never say nice things unless they have something to gain. Some of the things they say in Wayway about people are really

scandalous, though they may be true."

Mrs. Barchet Grand suddenly trembled; her voice had made her angry and she had never known fear.

"Really," replied Mrs. Jerrins indifferently. "You assume in me a greater amount of interest in my neighbours than I really possess. After all, there are only a certain number of nasty things in the world to be said even about a fiend, so don't get cross. Now come with me to see those tumblers. They are really wonderful."

Now seizing the lady by the arm, she led her somewhat against her will to a raised wooden platform densely surrounded by children and their native nurses.

Three tumblers had just jumped up on the boards, and with a few graceful movements they stripped themselves to the waist. At a shout from one they all suddenly fell flat on their faces and lay motionless; at another shout they leaped up and began furiously somersaulting backwards and forwards alternately, packed so close together that their shapely brown bodies and limbs seemed inextricably mixed, collapsing onto the platform finally like rubber men and lying there motionless and inert, while the children crowed with delight.

Hardly had they got their breath before they were at it again, this time illustrating the marvelous pliability of their arms and legs. They seemed to have no bones at all; they seemed to frustrate the laws of gravitation. Then, using a rude wooden table and a strong bench, they turned themselves seemingly inside out and standing on their hands used their bare toes as if they were fingers, passing each other things, lighting matches, and ending up with a comic tug-of-war in which each man, seizing with his feet another's pigtail, attempted to pull him down.

They had not yet exhausted the infinite variety of their antics when from another corner of the ground Japanese boys began firing out of wooden mortars rockets that sped up into the air to burst and let loose balloons, umbrellas, flags of all nations, and figures of men and women. The air soon became full of these clever paper objects that floated very slowly down to be followed by a wild scrambling for their possession by the great concourse of native sight-seers, gathered beyond the Commissioner's palings. "This was a fête, a great fête, a real fête," they all exclaimed.
Thus amused, the time sped rapidly for Mr. Denning's

many guests, and the sun had set before even the mission world thought of going. But at last, having fully satisfied their curiosity, they all suddenly thought of going. The French Fathers led the movement of retreat; others, perhaps afraid of being accused of greater worldliness, followed suit; and soon Chinese officialdom was following this example. All of them had been waiting on the Taotai, who, owing to the insidious influence of really

good champagne, had lost all count of time and was now laughing hilariously at everything and everybody.

Somehow he managed to make his adieux without disaster. No sooner had he been ceremonially escorted by the Commissioner to his chair than the rest of the gowned and hatted bureaucracy of the land made a hurried pell-mell exit very much like a *sauve-qui-peut*. Like a flock of sheep, they had followed their leader.

Soon ladies with their children and their chattering native nurses followed, referring apologetically to the obvious lateness of the hour. As chair-coolies sorted themselves out to a tremendous uproar, others found time to say good-bye. And so at length there was no one left save the familiars headed by rubicund Mr. Tosh.

“At last,” said that gentleman with a sigh, taking off his helmet to let the cool evening air fan his heated head —“at last we are by ourselves.”

Mr. Denning laughed and led him forward, followed by the small brigade who always remained behind. The thing had gone marvelously well, and Mr. Denning was satisfied, very well satisfied indeed.

His feelings would have been different had he known what had taken place only a quarter of an hour before. The redoubtable Mrs. Jerrins, tired of the garden and the people, had wandered up to the house. There, some glimpse of gay

colours behind the closed jalousies and a peal of half-suppressed laughter awakened her instant interest.

With a swift glance behind to see that she was unobserved, she had gone up the stone steps very quietly, and suddenly looking in a doorway had unmasked the mystery before the mystery could disappear.

“Well, I declare,” she said to herself breathlessly as she retreated, “two of them — actually two of them, and young hussies at that.”

CHAPTER XVII

PAUL had returned from Mr. Denning's garden-party in that unsatisfactory frame of mind which is not rare in young men. He had gone, not because he wanted to go, but because, the mission having received a collective invitation, it was incumbent on somebody to go, and he was the only one to do that. Mrs. Simon never moved outside the mission gates, Mr. Grey was not on speaking terms with Mr. Denning, poor Ainsley Simon was still in his sick-bed.

So Paul had had to go, in spite of his own mixed feelings on the subject of Mr. Denning, who ever since the day they had fallen out had treated him with marked coolness. That Paul did not much mind; it was other things that hurt him. The whole afternoon had been one long penance. It was impossible for him not to have seen Miss Virginia Bayswater's peculiar embarrassment, and the peculiar circumstances which seemed to surround her. It had required no special cleverness to see that a certain line of conduct was expected of her, and the few remarks he had overheard left him angry and sick at heart.

The position was odious, odious from every point of view. Her particular value lay in the fact that she was eminently marriageable, just as his value lay in the fact that he had money. Both were levers to be used to forward the secular policy of their respective missions—brutally that was the position.

He had longed to speak to her intimately again, but every effort he had made to do so had been frustrated by some interested person. In his eyes he had been warned off,

told in no very roundabout way that his attentions were out of place and that he would be well advised to recognize that fact. That Miss Virginia Bayswater had been sadly watching him whenever he had been near her had added to his keen sense of dissatisfaction, to his growing feeling of rebellion against a tangled skein which threatened to envelop him as much as the others.

He longed to discover what she really felt, he longed to know whether she understood Mr. Denning as well as he did. He was too young to appreciate the one vital difference between men and women — which is, that though the latter often grasp subtleties just as well as the former, purposely they shut their eyes to them, because, being women, their role through life must be marked by an unending submission to unpalatable facts — by a constant embracing, physically as well as metaphorically, of that which is distasteful to them. In that essential difference lies much of the drama of the world.

Other things had also hurt and irritated him. He could not remain blind to the fact that those who were of the missions were coolly treated by the, rest of the gathering — treated a little as if they belonged to a curious species which it was well to stand aloof from. He

had not been accustomed to such treatment, and it was only here, when the contact was open and unrestrained, that he saw the full measure of this peculiar displeasure. Missionaries were contemned because they were missionaries, poor people who were engaged in work which forced them to adopt a supplicatory attitude towards an Asiatic race. It was only on the spot, after the educative influence of climate and environment had left their mark on him, that he was able to appreciate the full meaning of this. At a distance, say ten thousand miles away in cool Europe, this could never be understood. In fact, it could not possibly be understood any more than the

native, labouring in his rice-fields, could understand the meaning of the feudalism underlying the European structure, and the social developments that feudalism had gradually given rise to. It was all very curious and above all perplexing; and perplexities are not good things either for young or old, but especially are they bad for the young.

So Paul Hancock's surroundings looked barer to him that evening than they had ever looked before. The apple which Eve gave to Adam is merely an eternal allegory, an allegory which is perpetually recurring because it is so human. One is always eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge; one's inherent nakedness is every day being emphasized in some new form by the educative force of the events around one. As he took his old post by his window, he thought that even in the waning moonlight the mission compound looked bare and gaunt. The stars, now shining so tranquilly in the vast vault of the heavens, seemed pitiless tonight just because they were so full of peace and so clear. *They* knew no changes — *they* could pursue the even tenor of their way down through everlasting ages — never subject to this endless questioning, this endless readjustment which poor mortals must make.

The stars — what a message is in the stars!

Now, over-weary from too much thinking, he tried to compose his mind so that he might sleep. Though latent misgivings oppressed him, he conscientiously tried to sleep and therefore utterly failed.

The methods of treating sleeplessness are so numerous and so wonderful that a serious matter has become fantastic. Nearly everybody has a special method, and all are unavailing. Paul tried thinking of one thing, then of another, until in the end, by some mental process which he could not explain and which he tried in vain to restrain, he came to think of an endless stream of men passing in Indian

file into the mission compound and then out again. Angrily he tried to twist his thoughts to sheep, dogs, horses; but the sheep frisked, the dogs barked, the horses reared — and they were men . .

Ugly men too, wicked men most certainly. They were men who grinned and who found in

that devilish contortion of their features a rude joy. There were millions of men, just like the millions of stars. Endlessly they came and went —endlessly, endlessly. He was not dreaming, either; for to banish this sleepless nightmare he suddenly sat up again and again and again in his bed, with eyes wide open and his mouth twitching. Determined that he would sleep, that at all costs he would conquer sleep, again and again he closed his eyes, and again the endless procession returned.

How long this really lasted he never knew, but finally it reached a pitch when his sensitive mind could stand it no longer. Rising, he determined to read, and full of this resolve, he looked for matches.

Yet it seemed a foolish thing to do when all the world was peacefully sleeping. To burn the midnight oil in the cause of knowledge, that was surely permissible; but to read as a refuge from stupid thoughts seemed to him just then a sign of weakness.

He approached his window once more and looked out. The moon had disappeared now behind some clouds, and the brilliance of the stars was effaced by the night mists rising from the rice-fields. The hot air seemed very lifeless; and he wondered whether poor fever-stricken Ainsley Simon was managing to sleep.

He could not say what made him do it, but suddenly he remained stock-still, hardly venturing to breathe. A sound had reached him — a faint, peculiar sound, pregnant with bad meaning. It was a tap, a light tap such as a man might

make with his finger-nail against a pane of glass, or such as an iron instrument might make on a wooden surface. Straining with all his might, he kept his ears keenly alert. Would he hear it again? Was it a deception — yes … no, no, there it was—louder this time, as if there were no need for great caution.

He was certain of it — somebody was in the rooms below him.

As the conviction deepened, he felt his knees and his hands involuntarily tremble, whilst the palate of his mouth became distressingly dry. He was frightened, openly frightened; for there are few men, even those who are very strong, who are not affected by the grim possibilities of a black night in a country which they do not completely understand but about which they have heard many dread tales. And Paul Hancock was very young.

He would have dearly liked to creep back to bed and bury himself against all sounds, but something stronger than his physical fear prevented him. All the terrible stories he had heard at home about Chinese desperadoes now came back to him, and he reflected that in spite of a long period of probation he had already passed in this land he really knew nothing about it. Somebody had broken into the house, he felt sure. There was only sick Mr. Ainsley Simon and a feeble woman in the house beside himself; it was his plain duty to bestir himself.

He told himself this again and again, and yet somehow he did not stir. A moisture had spread over his forehead, and his hands felt now very cold. With a sort of shameful anguish he bethought himself that if he had only managed to sleep he would have been spared this trial and tribulation.

It was no use shouting to the lowering night. An alarm given in that way meant nothing in this country, for people here were only anxious to prevent thieves from harming them

and never thought of their neighbours. Also, if he shouted, there would be a rapid retreat, and whatever plunder had been collected would be carried off. There was only one thing for him to do: he must go down and surprise these thieves, if they were thieves, and put them to flight in such a way that nothing would be taken. That was his plain duty.

Suddenly he thought of Miss Virginia Bayswater. What would she do in a crisis of this sort? He had no doubt that with amazing common-sense and courage she would march straight down on the men and somehow make them her captives. Yet she might be frightened, he felt certain that she would be frightened. And then, before he realized what he was doing, he found that he was stealthily making his way across the room in the dark towards his door.

He paused with his hand on the door-handle as he remembered that he had no weapon of any sort, not even a stick, in his room. Then he wondered, even if he had a weapon, whether he would be justified in using it. No — because in the dark it was easy to inflict mortal wounds, and nothing would justify that. Now, pausing no longer, he carefully opened his door, and with nothing but his naked hands he crept downstairs to the struggle which he held inevitable.

He was glad now that the house was so bare, for on the staircase and in the lower hall there was nothing to trip him, nothing to make him stumble. And so, with one hand touching the bare wall, and his feet gliding noiselessly over the bare floor, he quickly reached the rooms whence had come the disturbing sounds.

He stopped outside the first door and applied his ear to where he judged the keyhole must be. No, there was nothing here. He moved like a shadow to the second door and again bent himself double.

This time the keyhole found him instead of his finding the

keyhole, for a faint point of light fell on the hand which he moved down the panel. Very slowly he brought his face right against the woodwork and peered in.

Perhaps it was his agitation which partially blinded him, for it was sonic seconds before

anything came across the restricted line of vision which he commanded. He was, vaguely conscious that there was movement in the room, but the light had become suddenly dim and it was impossible to be certain about anything. Faint sounds reached him, as if drawers were being opened; but whoever the nocturnal visitors might be, they were working with devilish cunning.

The light suddenly almost entirely disappeared and then as suddenly became so bright that he gasped with surprise at what it disclosed. Three stark-naked men, their brown bodies glistening with oil, had crept past his line of vision not more than five feet away, crouching as wild animals do when about to spring, with every muscle rigid, with strength and cunning showing on every line of their supple bodies. He heard them open more drawers and begin to take out knives and forks with a calm disregard which showed that their audacity was increasing. It was too much! …

With a sudden incoherent exclamation Paul Hancock tore open the door and rushed in.

As he did so, he heard the men's frantic call of surprise, the light was blotted out, the rush of their footsteps was in his ears, and he flung himself on them.

He seized a shoulder, but his hands came away as if he had gripped slippery ice. A smell of rank oil smote his nostrils, as rushing after them he made attempt after attempt to grapple. But the limbs he caught hold of raced through his I fingers as a hawser does through a hole. The men were oiled from head to foot, and in a few seconds all that remained as a trace of their presence was that rank smell of oil. They had successfully fled.

It was some time before he mustered sufficient courage to strike a light. Knowing nothing of the country and now almost beside himself with excitement, he feared that they might try and revenge themselves on him if they saw him from without. So a fever of caution possessed him. Yet, had he only known it, the men were fleeing through the rice-fields as if they had seen the devil himself.

The continued silence at last gave him confidence, and presently, having securely fastened the heavy wooden shutters and closed the windows, he sought for matches and, striking a light, surveyed the scene.

Nearly everything of value in the dining-room had been wrested from locked drawers. Two rough sacks were full of spoil — napkins had been impressed into the service; and if he had not come down when he had, the mission would have been poorer by all its cutlery and plated ware. He examined with curiosity the manner in which these cunning devils had used an old cushion to break in some glass which faced a cabinet without making any noise. Housebreakers at home would have had to use putty; for these men an old cushion was sufficient. Cunning devils indeed! …

And the oil on their bodies, he reflected, as he smelt his fingers. That was clever; who would have thought of it out of the East? He had never imagined before that such an effective way of avoiding capture existed. It made their soft, hairless skins as elusive as quicksilver. What an experience!

Gradually he became elated at the fortunate ending. He had handled the whole matter alone and not so badly. He smiled, now quite happy, and it was not until he began to go upstairs again that he remembered that he ought to inform somebody. It was not one o'clock the hall-clock told him; and so, still carrying the candle which the thieves had abanoned he knocked at the Rev. Ainsley Simon's door.

The sound of a voice speaking quickly made him enter. Ainsley Simon was sitting up in his bed, looking straight at him.

"Mr. Simon," began Paul Hancock hurriedly, "I ought not to disturb you at such an hour, I know. But there has been a most unfortunate occurrence, or perhaps I should say a most fortunate occurrence —

His explanation died on his lips as he suddenly became aware that Mr. Simon was talking on more and more rapidly in a monotonous undertone. As Paul held the candle higher, he saw that the poor man's eyes had a glassy look. Only fragments of what he said were intelligible. "We must keep straight on, always along the straight and narrow path, the cruel road." Then mumble, mumble, mumble. "Yes," this time louder and as with authority, "we must, — for defeat does not mean merely defeat here, but a toppling over every-where and ultimate death to the Church." His arms were now lifted. "Death, death, death," repeated his lips — "oh, how I hate it —"

"Oh, Mr. Simon," said Paul in fresh agony, as he approached the unfortunate man. "Stop, Mr. Simon. Lie down and sleep. It is all right, it is all right."

He took a glass filled with congee water from the night table, and gently he forced the sick man to drink. Holding him steady, very slowly he let the liquid trickle between his lips, and he felt the hot feverish body relax a little.

"Is that you, Mr. Hancock? " said Mr. Simon presently, in a feeble but natural voice. "It is very kind of you to look after me. I feel a little better now."

Gently Paul Hancock forced him back on the pillow.

"Sleep," he said, "sleep, for sleep will do you good."

He watched him carefully to see that he was really quiet again; and at last, as his breathing became more and more regular, he tiptoed away.

He did not know why he did it; but as he came to the connecting door, which was ajar, he called gently.

“Mrs. Simon, Mrs. Simon,” he said, “I must arouse you, I am afraid, Mrs. Simon.”

He coloured at his boldness, and full of embarrassment he waited to hear her stir. There was a long story to tell, but he felt that if he delayed until tomorrow, and the thieves returned, he would be severely blamed. Also he felt sure that if she knew that her poor husband was light-headed again, she would get a servant up to sleep near his door.

“Mrs. Simon, Mrs. Simon,” he called again, tapping with his finger-nail on the door. “Mrs. Simon.”

He listened intently to catch any sounds of her moving, but the stillness in the house was so great that save for the ticking of a distant clock and Mr. Simon’s heavy breathing, he might have been in a tomb.

Once again a sickening feeling of apprehension welled up in Paul Hancock’s heart. His mind faltered. He could not bring himself to think. For he was suddenly convinced that Mrs. Simon’s room was empty, that Mrs. Simon was not there. With a spasmodic gesture he pushed open the door, held the candle aloft, and peered in. He was right; she was gone.

“Oh, mercy! What has happened?” cried Paul Hancock in his distress. “Where are you, Mrs. Simon?”

For sole answer the feverish man stirred in his sleep behind him and began muttering again. “No, no, no,” he said.

Paul stood there trying to think. Yet his idiopathy was such that he could not think at all. He could only come back to this single concrete, stupefying fact, that in the middle of the night Mrs. Simon was missing.

Then slowly he mastered himself. Why was she missing, oh, why? Had she heard the thieves, too, and, going down to arouse the servants, met with some terrible mishap? For

the servants were lodged in a distant outhouse; and perhaps the men who had entered the house with such devilish cunning and in such devilish guise had had confederates posted outside to intercept all attempted communication. Yet surely she would have come to him first, would have sought his aid. And then, as he had been awake the whole time, if she had moved down the hall, he must surely have heard her. The more he thought the more convinced did he become that she must have been gone before he himself had got up.

With sudden resolution he turned, threw one searching glance at Mr. Simon, and gently

withdrew. There was only one thing to be done. Mr. Grey must be roused, and then together the two would have to decide what they should do.

It was another proof of Paul Hancock's real courage that, in spite of his fear, no sooner was he downstairs and at the front door than with agitated hands he extinguished his light and stole out into the warm dark night as defenceless as a child. He had to cross a great part of the large untidy compound without any knowledge of what dangers might be lurking there; for the small house which had been completed largely through his own generosity and in which Mr. Grey now lived was at the very farthest point.

Bending low, as if there were some safety in making himself as small as possible, he stole with the utmost cautiousness along the pathway, pausing frequently to see if he could surprise any sounds. But the night was very still, and the farther he advanced the more convinced did he somehow become that the thieves had fled for good and all.

He gave a start of surprise as he came in view of Mr. Grey's house, for a light was burning in his bedroom and he thought he saw shadows on the shutters. It did not occur to

him then that there was anything curious in this save that it was very late for Mr. Grey to be awake.

Rapidly he approached, and just as he had paused to consider whether he should simply call up to the room or knock at the front door, he heard Mr. Grey's voice begin to speak.

Thunderstruck, he paused and listened. The mumble became clearer and clearer, louder and louder. A fist was struck down on a table and there was a whimper of dismay. Then Mr. Grey's voice sounded strong and full:

"Every man is brutish by his knowledge; every founder is confronted by the graven image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, the work of errors; in the time of their visitation they shall perish."…

The man's voice ended with a sob. Something clinked against a glass. Then the glass was set down, and Mrs. Simon's voice was raised in piteous protest, calling on him to desist. Paul Hancock, choking with emotion, leaned against a verandah pillar powerless to move, powerless to do any-thing, waiting sick at heart.

"No, no," he heard Mr. Grey almost shout, "I will —I do not care for the consequences."

There was a short silence, and a glass half fell on the table. Then once more the voice began declaiming, louder this time, defiantly, drunkenly.

"Thou art my battle-axe and weapons of war; for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms; and with thee will I break in pieces the

horse and his rider; with thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young, and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid.”

In the garden below the young man waited no longer.

With a half-stifled cry he fled back down the path he had come, back to the house he had left, back to the thieves in the night, back to his own sleepless bed …

For at last he knew the loathsome truth.

Mr. Grey was a secret drunkard, and that was what Mrs. Simon was always shielding.

CHAPTER XVIII

MISS VIRGINIA BAYSWATER hid her inner agitation in a finely assumed outer surprise. She had stopped and fallen back a step or two as the great frame of the Commissioner had so unexpectedly loomed up. Now, as he stood immediately in front of her, heroic-sized, it was plain that the situation demanded heroic treatment. Yet could she give it?

“You have astonished me, Mr. Denning,” she exclaimed in answer to his question, “I did not expect in the least to meet you here.”

Then she began fanning herself hurriedly, as she nervously glanced about her to see if anyone might be observing them. That would have been worse than anything else— the news would have fled so far and so rapidly! But the neighbourhood seemed quite deserted, there did not appear to be even the smallish native child about. So, partially reassured, she went on more easily:

“I come over to this village once a month, you know, to see the old women. We have several little girls from this particular village in our school, and long experience has taught us that if we only conciliate the old women they take good care that no irresponsible mischief-makers circulate re-ports that one fine day we are going to boil and eat their young ones, as has been sometimes maintained. So, you see, it is something closely resembling the wisdom of the serpent that brings me here.”

She laughed at her own words. Yet even as she laughed, nervously she studied Mr. Denning’s face, seeking to draw from it some inner secret. Did a definite purpose lie behind

those sharp eyes, set in that big, tranquil countenance; or had she been labouring under a delusion?

Mr. Denning laughed too. He generally laughed after she spoke. It was no servile tribute to her entertaining power; it was a frank admission of her charm of manner.

“I am sure of one thing,” said he genially. “If you did boil them, Miss Bayswater, you would be quite sure to make them most appetizing.”

“Don’t,” she interrupted with a little shudder. “What an awful idea! Think what would happen to us if anyone who understood English overheard such remarks.”

Now with one hand she made a graceful gesture suggestive of summary decapitation, and then she laughed at her own pantomime.

“There is no fear,” said Mr. Denning, speaking quite seriously and looking round carefully. “For a wonder in China we are absolutely alone. There is not even a single little boy in sight.”

He took a deep breath and leaned on his stick.

“Oh dear!” exclaimed Miss Virginia Bayswater a little irrelevantly. Her tone of voice was charged with clear regret, and now she applied herself once more with vigour to her fanning. It was certainly hot, and yet, had it not been for Mr. Denning, it is reasonable to suppose that she might have forgotten her fan.

The village which had been her goal that afternoon lay some distance behind them, bathed in a golden afternoon sunlight which made pleasant poetry of its prosaic outlines. At that distance the mud walls and the thatched roofs were just as they should be, whilst the grunting, roaming pigs, and the ugly, noisome dirt were quite hidden. Near them were only the fast-ripening rice-fields stretching away in every direction. Through a dip in the foreground could be seen the great throbbing bosom of the vast river, with brown

junk-sails moving slowly across it. The long afternoon had yet an hour or two to spend; and it seemed just then to Miss Virginia Bayswater that this space of time yawned before her like some perilous gulf.

“May I walk with you?” inquired Mr. Denning, coming back suddenly to the point which had been left in suspense. “I suppose you will take a sampan at the upper landing?”

“The mission boat goes at half-past six. I was wondering about the time just now,” she murmured, once more recurring to her first hurried manner. A blind man would have seen her meaning; Mr. Denning had the advantage of being whole-sighted.

“Then we have nearly an hour,” he said with deliberate obtuseness, producing and studying a massive gold watch—“an hour in which to gain a point which may be easily reached in very few minutes. I can see it from here.” He looked straight ahead of him into the distance.

“Oh!” said Miss Bayswater, because his sharp eyes suddenly glanced round at her and gave a subtle meaning to his commonplace words. Yet there was nothing for it. Most obviously was he master of the situation; it was as if his great bulk made resistance out of the question. So submissively she began walking with him.

“How foolishly we are all tied to routine,” he said in his deep voice, after a few paces, speaking perhaps to the landscape and certainly ignoring for the time being his companion. “You rush here and I pace stolidly there as if all the world depended on the regularity of our movements. What does regularity really matter? It is a stupid fetich in

everything save the purely business side of life — that is, in the matter of offices. The Chinese are sufficiently philosophic to understand that even in that matter it is not necessary really to be regular to the point we Europeans have carried regularity. Have you noticed that a new doctrine is every-

where gaining adherents — that we should eat only when we are hungry and not when the clock happens to point to certain hours?" He looked at her laughingly.

"But that doctrine is like all other fads," objected Miss Virginia Bayswater, her American sense fighting the non-sense of the suggestion, her woman's sense hoping blindly that this would lead him astray. "It misses the essential fact, that we should be hungry at the stated hours if we ate as we should eat. And, then again, if whim took the place of regularity, what would the cooks say?"

"In the ideal age which the new doctrinaires foresee," said Mr. Denning still laughingly, though his manner was so didactic, "there will be no cooks. Acids, setting up the right chemical reaction, will do the work. Therefore present objections are not valid. You must try, Miss Bayswater, to throw off the heavy, soul-deadening fetters of tradition and preconceived ideas. From the scientific standpoint they are abominations."

"But I don't want to throw them off," she rejoined, becoming earnest in spite of herself. "For me traditions are sheet-anchors, and if they go my ship would soon be on the rocks."

"Shipwreck does not always mean a total loss," said Mr. Denning easily, accepting her simile only to turn it to his advantage. "And people forget that sometimes the only way of getting out of the region of storm and stress and reaching land is to run your ship aground."

"Alas! I should have known the futility of arguing with you, Mr. Denning," said Miss Virginia Bayswater, "you are so much more clever than I can possibly be. You delight in turning things upside down."

"Do you know that that remark contains a censure?"

"How so?" She looked at him keenly and suspiciously, wondering what was coming now.

"Because," he said, "it means that I employ any ability I may have in gaining conversational success — which is no real success, you know, but only a series of antics. It doesn't really matter in the least whether a person can argue or not; the great thing is to be able to act, to do things."

"But surely the two go together more or less?" she suggested, still cherishing her hope that he would be led astray.

“Not at all,” he answered. “The best talkers are often mere boys; the best doers, bears! After that poor epigram I am sure that you will admit that it is unflattering to say that a man talks well until one is quite satisfied that he can do something better.”

“Perhaps you are right,” murmured Miss Bayswater, abandoning the discussion unexpectedly. Something told her that it was no use fencing with him, no use trying to put off the threatening danger. Now she tried to devote all her energies to composing her mind, hoping that the shock might not be too cruel.

For some time they walked on in silence, both openly absorbed in their own thoughts. They had reached the river-bank at length, and now before them flowed that great world of waters that is able to nourish a population far outrivalling that of the greatest European nation. Today the river looked immense because few craft were sailing on it. To Miss Virginia Bayswater, troubled as she was, it seemed a veritable inland sea, able to swallow up all this low-lying earth and miserably drown every living thing. In brief, it was an oppressive, mean river with no pity or compassion in it.

“I have lately come to a remarkable conclusion,” resumed Mr. Denning unexpectedly, and talking so unemotionally that she was completely thrown off her guard.

She glanced at him, and marveled at the peculiar calm which always seemed to shroud his face.

“Yes,” she said. “What is your remarkable conclusion?”

He turned as he answered and looked at her squarely.

“I have come to the conclusion,” he said slowly, “that I am a very lonely man and that my loneliness is not good for me. If it goes on much longer, it will bring a bad ending on me.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed under her breath.

The tell-tale colour which rushed to her face accentuated a hundred-fold the repressed exclamation that had sounded so curiously like a gasp. The dread moment which she would have given almost anything to avoid had at last openly arrived. Never before had she felt so defenceless. Long years of mission life had produced in her that childish attachment to the protecting strength of material surroundings which forms the real attraction for converts.

She had never known until just now how much the system had enslaved her, she had never suspected how much the annihilation of self which any system implies had weakened her. She felt that she had no courage or resolution at all, no strength; and worst of all, even in her weakness, she seemed to feel that she did not wish to have those virtues. She looked

quickly to the right and left of her, almost as if she cherished a wild hope that something would justify a running retreat. Yet how could she escape from this mountain of a man — how, oh, how!

In her agitation she suddenly dropped her fan. Mr. Denning at once stopped, and bending down, clumsily picked it up. She thanked him with an excess of gratitude, finding relief in a return to the commonplace.

“What I have just said seems to have astonished you, Miss Bayswater,” he resumed after an interval. “At least, I can only suppose that it has astonished you, since you have made no reply.”

“Mr. Denning,” she began in sudden desperation. “Why must you talk to me in such a way?”

Her eyes pleaded tearfully for a truce, but the man had made up his mind and would have none of the woman’s compromise.

“Miss Bayswater,” he answered slowly and deliberately, “I am talking to you in this particular strain because I have thought that possibly the subject could be made to interest you. If you will hear me out, you may not condemn me.”

He breathed deeply, and went on with a careful plainness that was more disturbing to her than any of his subtleties had been.

“I am no longer young, as you know, and I am increasingly lonely. I have a handsome salary, and moreover my investments during the past twenty years have turned out so well that I may say that I am a rich man. I have practically everything a man can wish in material things. And now, because this is so, I want to know” — he stopped walking and because he had stopped he seemed to be towering over her —“whether, Miss Bayswater, you will become my wife.”

‘Your wife? she faltered, —“your wife?”

There was open physical fear in her attitude as she drew away from him.

“Yes,” he resumed, “I humbly propose myself as a husband. You will find that I am not an unkind man, in spite of what people say of me. I have certain tastes which have become habits, but that is all. I am willing to make every provision that caution can suggest, so that if anything were ever to happen to me, or if we should ever disagree, you would never have cause to regret your decision.”

“Oh, Mr. Denning,” interrupted Miss Bayswater, with tears in her voice as well as in her eyes, laying a hand on his sleeve, “don’t heap coals of fire on my head, don’t make me

more miserable than I am! The more you say the harder do you make it for both of us. I — I cannot be your wife.”

“And why?”

He had taken a step forward, and now quietly clasped her hand as if her refusal left him totally unconvinced.

” I do not know why, save that I feel with every nerve in my body that it cannot be,” she faltered. “I feel that you have done me an honour I do not deserve — an honour which I cannot dream of accepting. Please— “

Gently she released her hand and looked up at him. Something in his silence touched her, and now she went on, openly struggling with her tears:

“I am very, very sorry, Mr. Denning, that I should have ever given you cause to think that such a proposal as you have just made would not be unacceptable to me. If I am to blame, forgive me. But I did not think you had any such definite thoughts — I thought that you only liked me because we found things to talk about and that sometimes I amused you. if I could have only known —”

She stopped, feeling that what she said was inadequate, foolish, unnecessary, perhaps untrue, because no small poor strings of words can possibly tell all one’s tale. Oh for the power of that fluency which he so recently had decried! She felt that her very excuses were cruel, that she had no right to speak at all.

For still this strange man remained strangely silent. They were standing on the very brink of the river now, and below them gurgled the ochre-coloured waters, laughing, laughing, laughing, eternally laughing at this evanescent human comedy. This flowing tide rushing on to eternity, this mighty tide which had been running since the beginning of time, could well afford to laugh. Is it not true that nothing matters—the actions of good men and the actions of bad men, the leering of bad women and the tears of good women? All pass away and leave no trace behind them, time blots out everything, and nothing save nature endures…

At length timidly she glanced up at his face. A curiously grim, set expression had come over it which she had never seen before and which frightened her. She remembered how some men were affected by the rejection of their suit and she became afraid. Yet even in her fear her honesty of heart forbade her making that compromise which would have made things so much easier. She had spoken at last — she was glad that she had spoken. And so they stood silent for uncounted minutes.

“I am steeling myself to take your answer as absolutely final, Miss Bayswater,” said Mr. Denning at length, in a cold voice, “and I find it very bitter. Is it final, absolutely final?”

“Yes,” she said, looking down at the water.

“Then there is nothing for it — it has been duly appointed, it is the appointed end.”

He clasped his hands on his stick.

“At least I have made an attempt to escape,” he added in a low voice which she did not hear.

Even had she heard him she still remained too confused to understand. “Poor man,” she thought, “I have brought him to this. Perhaps I am guilty, perhaps I did lead him on until —” Then the figure of a younger man rose up before her, and suddenly the colour guiltily returned to her face. Now deeply thinking, she stood motionless and unobservant.

It was Mr. Denning who drew her attention to the minutes that had fled.

“I fear you ought to go, Miss Bayswater,” he said now quite calmly, “if you wish to catch the mission boat. There it is, I can see it from here.”

He pointed with his stick to a distant landing-stage where sampan-men were crowding round the groups of passengers desirous of crossing the river. The mission boat, large and commodious, was distinguished from the other boats by a flag, and in the boat were red cushions.

“Good-bye,” said Miss Bayswater, holding out her hand. He took it and bent his head over it in a courtly manner, “Forgive — oh, please forgive me if I have hurt you,” she whispered as she went.

After she had gone, he remained motionless for a long time. The sun had now set, and the last fierce red rays flung up over a sky which the reflections from the great waters tinged with a myriad shades of pink and orange and purple and green. The sunset was magnificent, wonderful, as it was nearly every evening of the year; it was like some giant conflagration enveloping half the horizon, some conflagration so cruel and vast that it could destroy all mankind. It seemed to advertise in a new way, to call insistent attention to, the giant plan on which nature had modelled this region; it opened up endless vistas of river and rice-field; it proclaimed that the millions who laboured here unceasingly whilst there was light, and who fell log-like on their rude couches when it was dark, were a race after the very heart of Dame Nature — a race so close to her, in spite of their hoary and complex civilization, that at will she crushed them just as she fed them, raising them up by the million only to destroy them on the same great scale… .

Mr. Denning mechanically removed his helmet to let the evening air fan his head. There was something tragic in that great figure of a man standing there like a dark silhouette,

silently contemplating the great waters and seeking to seize their message. The light was going from them now — they were turning inky-black as if to suit the colour of his mood.

“It has to be,” he muttered finally. “It must go on to the appointed end.”

Now slowly, very slowly, he walked away. He seemed so buried in thought that he had become physically a mere automaton, walking away because the spring of that action had been touched by his will.

A monotonous sound of calling at last caught his far-straying thoughts and brought him back to his immediate surroundings. Mechanically, now, he went in the direction of the sound; it was so sad and animal-like that even in his great distress his curiosity was aroused.

A little distance away, near a hut almost hidden by tall reeds, he found the explanation and abruptly stopped. A woman, with her hair streaming wildly down and a tiny blue cotton jacket held in her hands, was kneeling on the ground and rocking herself to and fro. Her man was on the brink of the river calling in a monotonous voice, “Come back, come back!” and the woman was feebly responding, “Come back, oh, come back, little Chang!” whilst she held the jacket of her baby ready to receive it.

Mr. Denning paused, as if it would be irreverent to pass between the two. He knew what it meant — it was an old, old custom, perhaps three or four thousand years old. The man was calling to the spirit of a dying child to return, and the woman was holding the little jacket of her baby up to receive the spirit if it would only come. As he listened, his face quivered with emotion; just now it seemed more mournful than anything he had ever heard.

“Come back!” called the man.

“Come back, oh, come back, little Chang!” echoed the woman piteously.

“Come back!” called the man to the great river spirits. “Come back, oh, come back!” echoed the woman. And so their voices rose and fell.

Alas! it cannot be. All the world is crying that; all the world is piteously seeking to coax back that which has already irrevocably fled. Vain words, vain work, vain hopes, vain dreams!

Come back, oh, come back! It cannot be. There is an allotted span for each single thing which can never be ex-

ceeded by the veriest fraction, which is as it must be, because each thing comes out of the

womb of time to give joy and heartache, and must suddenly depart as it came, never to return.

Oh, cruel world! …

Yet not cruel world! For do we not weep so that we may prepare for laughter, and do we not laugh because that is the fittest herald of tears?

Come back, oh, come back! All the world is crying it, and mother Nature does not hear. So little man, terrified and piteous, has raised his little gods and his little religions wherewith to console himself — little gods and little religions exactly fitted to deal with the emotions emotionally; gods and religions which arc very careful about observances and yet which know really little or nothing about anything else.

Strange world, then, but not cruel world.

For remember that for every threnody there are many rhapsodies; and that this should be so is the bounteous handiwork of God.

CHAPTER XIX

MISS VIRGINIA BAYSWATER had been unconsciously sobbing to herself in her sleep. Half the night through she had been turning and twisting uneasily, fighting with many formless phantoms that suddenly seemed to darken until they became sooty-black and terrifying of aspect, and then began to envelop and drag her down very slowly. With great courage she had boldly met these awful things in her subconscious state, and had tried to beat them away by sheer will-power. But it had been useless; they possessed the power of giants, whilst she had only the puny strength of woman. And so they had unendingly returned and tormented her in every possible way. Now, with a stifled cry and a last great start, she suddenly awoke.

“Oh, what a hideous nightmare, what a perfectly hideous nightmare!” she exclaimed wildly, as her mind struggled with the last remaining vestiges of the obsession.

Her spoken words awoke her completely; and so, now sitting up in bed, she pressed her hands against her temples in the hope of banishing the lingering impression of this cruel dream. The heat had done it — she was sure the heat and the quality of the air had done it. They alone were sufficient to disturb the coolest brain. This year the summer seemed endless — a true nightmare of a summer, if there ever had been one. For unfortunates such as she, with something troubling the mind, the uneasy heat was an added horror to life.

Presently her eves wandered to the heavy wooden shutters which did duty as windows. It seemed to her that dim

daylight was already coming through the narrow down-turned slats. Had the long night really spent itself, and was this dawn? With sudden resolution she rose, and stealing across the room, quickly threw back one shutter and looked out.

There was light on the horizon — a dim, diffused light; a light infinitely pale and weak, infinitely dispersed, which might mean day; but there were also great dark shadows which seemed about to thicken to a dense and gloomy black.

“Is it the false dawn —Mr. Denning’s *subhi kazib* —or the true dawn?” she murmured drowsily, thinking of how he had often explained that the Persian phenomenon could really be seen here. Then she started, as her thoughts wandered away from this scene and recurred for the thousandth time to what had happened on the other river-bank.

What must he think of her? Would the cruel thought of that afternoon never go? Why had she refused him in such absolute terms, why had she dashed all his hopes to the ground forever? That great big man — how solemn he had been, how deeply wounded! Somehow she was afraid of what she had done, she had been afraid ever since. Would she not have

been wiser had she prevaricated a little, had she held him off for a few months and trusted to time to wean him of a fancy which in her eyes was worse than folly? No, no, no, her conscience said! she could not have been so deceitful. Involuntarily, as her mind leapt forward, she gave a little shudder. The idea of mating herself with such a man offended her every instinct —it would have been the same sort of concubinage as filled the whole land and against which they fought night and day in their preaching to the people. In the privacy of her bedroom she blushed at the very thought, it was something she should not think, and yet it was something which was always recurring to her.

For she was not happy — she could not have been that.. Because she was no longer in her first youth, because she

had lived long in a land where women can fill only one niche, she could no longer delude herself as inexperienced girls do. She well knew, and she had long known, that she was in more than passing danger of becoming that pathetic, that tragic figure, the “superfluous woman,”— the woman who because she has not been married is marked with a vague condemnation in the West as well as in the East, and set in a little category of her own which both men and women sneer at. It was very cruel, it was very harsh. Yet it was all that could be expected; and with that strange inconsistency which plays such a commanding role in life, it was the very old maids themselves who were the harshest in their judgment of her.

She sighed to herself softly. She knew that she was a normal woman, desiring marriage and maternity instinctively, and therefore secretly ill at ease these many years because her manifest destiny had remained unfulfilled. But just because she was this, just because her greatest grief somewhere down in the very bottom of her heart was that she was without her man, she was unwilling to barter herself for any material advantages, no matter what they might be. Ten years ago, when she had been very inexperienced, she might nave done that; now it was too late. Even her own narrow intellectual and spiritual independence was something which she could not exchange without a compensation which she must judge sufficient. Society was surely wrong to demand that women, having at last on the right to a freer and fuller life, should still immolate themselves on the altar of Hymen at the behest of almost any man!

Yet this particular man had always been very kind; he was very clever, he was not really old, he was in many ways a desirable husband for any woman no longer girlish. Properly analyzed, many objections which seemed so mighty magically disappeared. And just then it was that she again

suddenly shuddered. Had the image of a younger man again risen up in front of her?

“It would have been terrible,” she said to herself aloud, in fresh anguish induced by a new train of thought. For life had been less happy for her at the mission during the last days —

in fact ever since she had categorically refused Mr. Denning. The mission, in some mysterious way which she had not discovered, had become acquainted with her decision, perhaps had just guessed it by her manner and by Mr. Denning's prolonged absence. And now, alas! the mission openly frowned on her, because they had one and all seen what it would have been to gain such a source of influence as this man in authority. No one cared about anything else, no one had any higher views. Perhaps that had increased her determination — she had lately clung with desperation to the antique idea that marriages are really made in Heaven and are the spontaneous union of two yearning souls.

Now she took a deep breath and brushed the rebellious tears from her eyes. Her thinking had made her earlier mood return with full force, and she was once more oppressed with a sense of vague terrors.

"It is the true dawn," she murmured, as the shadows chased away and a great shaft of yellow light shot up from the cast. The shaft of light broadened out fan-like until it filled heaven and earth. Then suddenly it was tinged with pink; the great dome blushed rosily; birds, as if in awe, gently twittered their matutinal prayers. And, as if a great curtain had been mysteriously rolled up, it was day…

"How beautiful," she whispered to herself, gazing at the prospect before her eyes, "how unspeakably beautiful!"

The vault of heaven had suddenly become immense, as If the coining of day had made it immeasurable. It seemed to stretch out and leap stupendously into eternity, preparing the way for the coming of the great sun, which would drive

up and over this little globe of muddled mortals on a chariot of fire, leaving in its train a myriad new problems, born of its sudden passage but cruelly left to solve themselves as best they could. Below the vault the vast, level landscape, as a rule so lackadaisical, was now alive, alert, trembling with new life. It laughed up to the vault of heaven as a child might have done, because the day was yet so young and nothing burdened it. The smaragdine of the endless rice-fields seemed marvelous at that early hour — full of deep, untranslatable hues more wonderful than those of any painted picture; and even the broad waters of the great river, so dismal and drab-coloured when the day was full, caught something of the new-born spirit and seemed to flow on proudly, commandingly, majestically, calling to the other elements to witness this giant strength of …

The lonely woman had fallen on her knees at the open window and was saying her prayers. She prayed almost joyfully, as if the dark shadows in her heart had been chased away by the light of the new day; she prayed fervently because somehow she felt that just now prayers had a new meaning and could do everything that had ever been claimed for them. Great and wonderful prayers, supremest power on earth, power more mighty than any ever dreamed of, never desert us! *You* are the beginning and end of all things; *you* are more than most men will ever know, because *you* are humility, and is not humility the

fountain of all virtue? The life pulsed quickly in her veins. She felt renewed, uplifted, and almost happy; and as her lips moved, her heart forced them to tell her inmost thoughts… .

Presently she rose quickly. Now very calmly she looked out of the window for the last time. It was really so beautiful that she could scarcely leave it. Yet she must not tarry. So she turned; and then, just as she turned, something seized her attention on the river.

This time a new feeling suddenly gripped her and gradually filled her with deepest apprehension. Something told her that it was not chance that was doing it; something warned her to understand at once this singular scene. For though day had only just come, though it was the hour of dawn, a great convoy of junks, an immense convoy, had begun boldly sailing across the river, their brown sails looking almost black against the river waters because the sun was still below the horizon; whilst beyond the mission grounds, only a mile or two down-stream, a long line of other junks, their bare sticks rising sharply above the flat deserted embankment, were being tracked up-stream by groups of ant-like trackers who sung no choruses as they hauled, but worked as silently as the ants themselves. These men had risen in the black night to begin this work… .

She turned quickly and fetched a dressing-gown, for the air suddenly seemed chill. Then she came back and once more took her stand at the window, gazing now at the river with her lips parted and her heart beating very hurriedly. She wished to make sure, to be quite certain about it. She stood there stock-still, as if completely fascinated…

At that early hour there was, in all truth, something strangely dramatic in the slow advance of all these many silent craft from across the broad river. Their black-looking sails and their clumsy prows seemed strange to her, though she had seen them for many years. They were like flocks of evil birds gathering for a well-understood carnage, birds that had been gradually corrupted from more innocent ways. They seemed to be gathering not too quickly, but rather in that sober fashion which bespeaks a firm and unalterable resolve.

Onward and onward they came, their number constantly increasing as more and more boats left distant anchorages. Onward and onward in dense groups, whilst down-stream

the line of stick-like masts, all set awry on the hidden hulls, were tracked nearer and nearer with a slow wiggling that seemed to fascinate her, just as the waving of something in the distance is said to fascinate the gentle deer.

Could it be possible, she thought, could it really mean that they were all coming to the mission dykes, converging on the mission? Was the long-uttered threat to be at last translated into action?

Now she trembled violently. Something convinced her of their evil intent. What would they do when they arrived? They would …

She did not carry her reasoning any farther. With sudden resolve she turned, ran across the room and out into the hall. In an instant she was hammering wildly on Miss Moss's door.

"Judy," she called, as the girl answered her summons in affrighted accents, "get your father up quickly, the junks are coming across river for the mission. Call up the others in the house at once. I am going to Dr. Spike's."

Without waiting for an answer, without giving any other explanation, she tore downstairs in her bare feet and began racing across the compound. She forgot everything in her frantic desire to give timely warning.

"Doctor, Dr. Spike," she called gaspingly, as she reached the path in front of the little house where he lived — "doctor, doctor, doctor!"

Dr. Spike always rose with the grey dawn; now he came out at once onto the verandah.

"What is it? " he called back sharply —"fire? " She noticed that his voice trembled violently.

"No, no, look at the river; the junkmen are coming, the junkmen are coming. I am going to warn the others."

Miss Virginia Bayswater, with one idea now fixed in her head — to carry the alarm to all in ample time — rushed

away to the other houses, bruising her soft feet as she ran. She was out of breath, sick with fear, wrestling with another hideous thought — yet she never paused a moment.

"The junkmen are coming," she screamed as soon as she saw anyone, sometimes in English, sometimes in the vernacular. "Tell the others and get up the children and girls."

On and on she ran, as quickly as a boy would have done, because her mental excitement bore her up. The mission was very big, and contained dozens of buildings and hundreds of people, and it was necessary to rouse everybody at once. The girls' school, the workmen's homes, the mission factory, the pastors' house — to every dwelling did she run and carry the news, using the vernacular in quick, excited sentences which spread confusion as a lighted match thrown amongst hemp spreads fire. The tocsin of an attack was, alas! but too well known in those not very distant days; and some, because they had been reared in fear and trembling, on hearing this rude, sickening alarm, stood stupidly as if they had been struck senseless. Fear is a terrible thing; only the trained intellect can conquer it.

At length, however, her task was completed, and mistress of the situation, because she alone had risen to an understanding of its meaning, she ran pantingly back, in the rear of a

motley gathering of men, women, and children of all ages, who fled before her as if she had been driving them. Like sheep they ran, like sheep they must be treated.

The mission leaders, men and women, now all gathered in a dishevelled, anguished throng in front of Dr. Spike's house, awaiting instructions and discussing the matter. Dr. Spike, looking very old and feeble — a veritable shadow of a man to be opposed to such hard, unyielding substances - was conferring earnestly with Dr. Moss in a low voice. Yet in spite of the talking, in spite of the air of resolve, it was plain that no one knew what to do, it was plain that the inaction

of panic had already almost come. The whimpering of the children and the twitching of the poor women's hands somehow told Miss Bayswater at once that during her brief absence, instead of attempting to reassure any of these helpless beings, the men had been loudly uttering the gloomiest forebodings.

"Dr. Spike," called Miss Virginia quickly, as she approached, "we ought to send at once across the river, to the Taotai, to the Commissioner, to the settlement. If we can delay the junkmen, we may yet save ourselves. But we must be quick, very quick."

"Pastor Yang has gone already," snapped out old Dr. Spike. "I am attending to matters, Miss Virginia, and I beg of you not to interfere."

"But Pastor Yang is old and feeble and will take hours to fetch help," cried the girl passionately, "Dr. Spike, it may be a matter of minutes. We ought to send several of our men, our young and active men, and let them race against one another. It is our only hope."

"I beg you, Miss Virginia," began Dr. Spike querulously, but what he was saying was drowned in the storm of comments from the rest. Miss Bayswater was right, they cried one and all, her advice must be minded; it was no time to discuss measures. They must get help quickly.

Now no longer waiting for Dr. Spike to decide, several young men, still only classed as catechumens, were selected by acclamation and instantly started off. They disappeared running fleetly and noiselessly out of the mission grounds and scattering outside the gates. They at least would not be stopped by their fellow-countrymen, they at least would not be recognized.

Miss Virginia Bayswater at last breathed more freely and gave her especial attention to an anxious study of the awe-struck throng. Somehow the thought was gaining in her

that she would have more to do with things than anyone would have supposed. Every soul in the mission was there, every soul was awaiting the upshot of the debate between Dr.

Spike and Dr. Moss, which seemed unduly protracted.

“Virginia,” whispered Miss Moss, coming up to her, “Mr. Harland has gone down to the dyke, the southeast corner, and he is that young and foolish that he ought to be brought back. Virginia, say something.”

“Why, Judy?” she inquired.

“Why, because he ‘s got a gun in his pocket,” Miss Moss whispered. “I saw it sticking out, and when he gets excited he doesn’t know what he does. Virginia, get him brought back before the junks get nearer. You remember, in that trouble with the chair-coolies, how foolishly he acted?”

Virginia Bayswater nodded and waited for a favourable opportunity. The other men of the mission had now joined Dr. Spike and Dr. Moss; they were wasting precious time by this discussion, and yet they were regaining something of their courage through the animating influence of words.

“What I want to know is whether we are justified in using force,” a big man was saying repeatedly. “If we line the dyke with all our people and bolt and bar every gate, they will have a tough job in getting into the compound. I doubt if they can land, as the river is now so low — at least they will have to wade through the mud.”

Dr. Spike made a curious sucking noise with his wasted lips, as if he had been scalded.

“That ‘s good sense, doctor,” observed Dr. Moss; ” I am in favour of that.”

Dr. Spike still did not speak; he moved his lips as if he could not frame the words he had on the tip of his tongue.

Miss Virginia Bayswater seized the opportunity.

“Dr. Spike,” she said earnestly, “Mr. Harland is down there and he ‘s got a gun. Miss Moss saw it, and that will

mean starting the trouble if he isn’t brought back. He ought to be brought back, Dr. Spike.”

The old man was now showing, more than he had ever shown before, that he had indeed passed fifty-two years in this land of compromise with fate.

“Eh, eh, eh,” he muttered querulously, “a gun! Who said he could take a gun?”

Miss Bayswater shot a look of despair at Dr. Moss and the other men.

“Dr. Moss,” she whispered, “our executive isn’t strong enough, that ‘s what ‘s the matter now! Our executive has been clean broken down. It isn’t my business, but you ought to take charge. We must do something, we must stop being so irresolute or we shall reap the natural reward.”

“Look at the junks, look at the junks!” called Miss Moss excitedly, and with one accord every eye looked towards the river. From here the surface of the water was hidden by the dyke, but high above the dyke could now be seen the tops of the junk-sails coming quickly nearer and nearer. And just then young Mr. Harland, dishevelled and splashed with mud, came rushing back.

“Watch out, you people!” he shouted. “The trackers of a big bunch of junks are just under the southeast corner and are now hauling in their slack. Watch out, I say, or they ‘ll be in the compound.”

A sort of moan went up from the assembled blue-coated throng of converts — men, women, and children joining in it instinctively — until it swelled to an unearthly sound. It was like a wild wind sighing through the tree-tops of a lonely forest, and to the little group of mission workers its sound was infinitely depressing.

“It’s maddening, that’s what it is, Judy,” whispered Virginia Bayswater violently. “Old Dr. Spike isn’t fit to manage things, in truth he looks mighty near fainting.

And we will just stand here until it ‘s too late to do anything.”

Suddenly in the silence that had fallen the sound of confused shouting came clearly from the river. Then high above everything sounded the ominous clanging of a gong, the tocsin of Eastern revolt. The clanging was caught up by other gongs, and soon, almost magically, this rude music had risen to a great roar of menacing sound. Oh, yes, it was an attack — no one doubted it now.

“Doctor, I take command,” shouted Dr. Moss with new-born resolution. “Now then, all the men —” he dropped into the vernacular, and the strange gutturals and sibilants and labials of this monosyllabic tongue raced from his mouth in rapid commands as he sorted them out. Then he continued:

“Now the best plan is for all the women and children to retire to the north gate and await news from us there. I shall take all the men with me, and we shall see what we can do. Judy, lead the way back.”

Tremulously yet willingly his orders were now repeated again and again, and the mission groups split up as he had ordered. The men quickly followed Dr. Moss, whilst the women and children, rapidly marshalled by the ladies of the mission, began falling back.

Almost at once there was no one left standing there on the trim little lawn save Dr. Spike and Miss Virginia Bayswater — the old man who had become a woman, and the young woman who had the spirit of a man.

CHAPTER XX

ANY sailor of the old sailing ship-days, could he have but witnessed that strange early morning sight on that great far-away river, would have taken delight at the manner in which the great press of junks, sailing head on for the dyke, was now manœuvred. It was splendid.

The shouts, the calls, the running of feet, the waving of arms, the beating of gongs — all these things, though they seemed to make the confusion worse confounded, though they seemed to banish all order and to summon Pandemonium, did nothing of the sort. All merely served as spurs to the phlegm, the inherent indifferentism, of the East; all were only incitements to action such as the West does not need, but which the East always demands. Beneath this surface commotion steadily ran the undercurrent of stern resolve and definite purpose which had brought all hither.
Packed so closely together that there now seemed no room for them in the river to manœuvre, all the hundreds of junks from the opposite shore in one great convoy were now swooping down on the dyke.

The leading craft, the chocolate waters curling away under their square noses, sailed straight on until they were nearly on the mud. Then, of a sudden, as the *laodahs* (steersmen) shouted and put over the heavy, clumsy rudders, the rough junk-sails rushed down in dozens, their bamboo stays clattering with the noise of fire-crackers, as the canvas furled, whilst on the bows the stripped polemen, catching the force of the impact on their poles, made each junk glide quietly home on the mud much as a ship sinks onto the bottom of her dock. Soon each one of the first dozens lay safe with

the lapping tide around each high poop. It was all done in the twinkling of an eye.

At once from each junk, as if shot from a sling, blithely sprang a young fellow, a veritable mud-lark each; and, ploughing through the knee-deep slime, with light chain dragging after him, planted the small four-pronged anchor high and dry, so that no wind could swing his craft from her present purchase. This completed, long light planking was shot out from the bows so that each crew could walk to *terra firma* almost unmuddied; and as the *laodahs* half shipped the heavy rudders and secured them with a lash of rope, the crews suddenly abandoned their boatmen’s potterings and quickly prepared to march ashore.

For flight after flight of junks were now arriving, wedging themselves in between the others with an absolute nicety of calculation born of perpetual practice, which was wonderful to witness. There was never a jar, never so much as the suspicion of a collision, never so much as an unnecessary shout or call. Each took its allotted place as if directed by some higher power, each followed some other as if it had been dragged so to do. Men

and junks alike were creatures of the river, born together and dying together, knowing to within the fraction of an inch how much way they needed for every manœuvre, knowing to a pound the pull of the tide, knowing where the current curled in miniature maelstroms; bound together in more than human ways, always working like perfect machinery.

And so they piled in and in until the bank was lined so thick with them that not another mother's son could creep through by hook or crook. Then, as if by a common signal, though there was no admiral of the fleet to direct them, they began forming a second tier behind the first tier, each junk pushing its nose in between the sterns of two other junks, and now, instead of using anchors, taking rope to lash themselves

secure. Their disorderly order became more and more invested with fascination; it was really as if some unseen power directed them.

On and on they came, the lame ducks hastening after the others and steadily making an ever denser mass along the shore line. Soon it was clear that a double bank was not enough; and so before even that second bank was completed, the third bank had commenced to form in the centre, until the mass of bare masts became so dense that they looked like a forest of fire-seared trees. Now, as the sailor's business was completely at an end, the noise of the talking and shouting grew louder and louder; and the gongmen, beating their gongs in unison, soon were making a continuous volume of sound that was deafening, irritating, feverish, demoniac — the very presage of grave trouble which would sweep over the dyke like a tidal wave… .

A few hundred yards below this, the junks which had been tracked up the bank had at last been all assembled and were safely moored, anchored head on to the stream and forming a species of flanking army which could either advance or retreat as might seem advisable. The tracking-parties, splashed with mud, every man stripped bare save for a tattered jacket, quickly coiled up their tracking-ropes and then threw them back into their craft just as cowboys throw lassoes. Now, armed with poles and uttering fierce shouts of defiance, they advanced under cover of the embankment in scattered parties towards their comrades, ploughing through the mud in calm indifference. It was clear that the crucial moment of the crisis had arrived.

In this interval the mission had not been idle. Dr. Moss, made leader of the defence by acclamation, had been busily dividing up his fellow-workers and their able-bodied coadjutors into groups. His object was to scatter all the men

of the mission, of whom there were a couple of hundred, along the top of the high embankment, and there to make them, by employing both the arts of conciliation and admonishment, attempt to stay the work which he most feared, the cutting of the dyke. In the last resort only were they to beat back the raiders. Dr. Moss hoped, he explained, by arranging some temporary *modus vivendi* with the leaders pending the arrival of help, to

keep this great motley horde from overt acts of violence. Now, having completed this preparatory work, he was himself about to mount to the top of the dyke, when Dr. Spike hurried up.

“Moss!” cried the old man, “I am more composed now. I insist that to me belongs the privilege, the right, to deal with these people now. I cannot admit that I am superseded. Moss, I am going up.”

And suiting the action to the word, the old man began hastily climbing the dyke. His cheeks had now a hectic flush, and so great was his agitation that his white beard seemed to be bristling.

“But, doctor, doctor,” cried Dr. Moss insistently, “what is your line going to be? Remember I have already instructed our people how to act, and above all things we don’t want more confusion.”

The old man paused for an instant.

“Dr. Moss,” he shouted back peremptorily, ” I am going to give them my defiance. They have no right to be here on our property, and, sir, they *shall* know it from me.” And with that he marched on top of the embankment.

“Oh, Dr. Moss, bring him back,” cried Miss Virginia Bayswater piteously, as a great roar went up from the other side of the dyke. “Dr. Spike seems to me not quite right in his mind. I tried to keep him on his verandah as you asked me to, but it was useless. He will so incense the crowd that the mission will surely be lost. You know how these

people act when one excites them! Dr. Moss, go, go!”

Dr. Moss had already started after the aged head of the mission, but he was too late. For with astonishing activity the old man had climbed to the summit and had already commenced speaking. The crowd, always inquisitive as are all Eastern crowds even in their greatest moments of violence, had gradually stilled its uproar, until now an almost death-like stillness replaced the previous hurricane of sound.

“My friends,” Dr. Spike had begun in his harsh, untuneful vernacular, “I wish to speak to your leaders. I wish that we may first understand one another. Where are your leaders, the old ones? Who leads you?”

He shouted these words again and again, his thin voice carrying his clipped untuneful words far out into the river and calling back long murmurs of surprise and doubt, as the men, half in wonderment, half irresolutely, repeated to one another what he had said, and made puzzled comments.

“You, you, you,” called Dr. Spike once more, seeing that he must further assist them, and pointing one long gaunt arm to a group of white-bearded steersmen,” come here — right under the dyke. Let us discuss — we who are old and sober. Let us discuss, let us discuss — *shang-liang, shang-liang*.”

Standing on that commanding height and looking down on them, his words suddenly took an imperative sound. He was so venerable-looking that the East could not deny him.

So the men, thus apostrophized, advanced hesitatingly amidst fierce cries and counter-cries and much shouted counsel from their comrades, who now formed a great solid bank of sun-tanned faces and deep chests and powerful limbs set off in monotonous China-blue clothing. — a great bank of vigorous men which now stretched from the very water’s edge to the foot of the dyke — a great living bank that claimed their birthright and no more.

“What is it?” cried the white-beards. “What is it you would do with us — what? We want our old rights, nothing but our rights.”

They gesticulated with their arms and indeed with their whole bodies, as agitation seized them; for they well knew what they were doing, and even now they greatly feared what might afterwards happen.

Dr. Spike paused a minute and then began to speak again — this time violently, passionately.

“This is not your own doing, coming here in great crowds,” he cried, losing his point entirely. “Who told your guildmen to do it?” No answer came. Dr. Spike waved his arms in sudden rage and then dropped them in silent contempt. “Well I know,” he continued, “and you will see what I shall do. What is it you want? You come here disturbing us before the day has properly begun. You are — “

Choking with his burning emotion, he could not conclude, but stood there facing them tremblingly.

A brawny fellow, pushed forward by the others, at last answered him, aiding himself with the pantomime of his arms and face, forcing up his courage with the noise of his words.

“Now that the river is low we have no grievance,” he cried back, “but in flood-time, when the water is high, how can we track in the river up to our shoulders without much danger menacing us? In old days our tracking-path ran there.” He pointed to where Dr. Spike stood. “But you have built your wall on it, and now for nearly a *li* there is no tracking-ground. Last year men were lost by that, this year men will be lost again and boats damaged. Why should we die? We want our tracking-path, and if we cannot have it, you shall have no wall and the river shall flow in. I have spoken clearly.”

A roar of excitement greeted this rude oratory; and now

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for the first time, as if since their purpose had been openly proclaimed, there was no longer any need for subterfuge or conciliation, the dread shouts arose.

"Ta, ta, ta!" It ran like wild fire from man to man.

"Ta, ta, ta - strike, strike strike!" And then, as if by some prearranged signal, the gongmen suddenly resumed their fierce brazen music.

"Hear me!" cried Dr. Spike for the last time, his voice cracking under the strain. "You shall be punished."

"Fool!" cried a young fellow who had edged nearer and nearer until he was immediately under him. "Fool!" And with that he hurled up with all his strength a heavy clod of earth, which struck his victim on the chest and brought him spluttering to the ground.

As a match kindles tinder, so did that first blow now kindle the crowd. Dr. Moss, standing irresolutely a little lower down on the inner side, knowing not what to do, had only time to drag old Dr. Spike to his feet before great volleys of mud came at them. Bruised and hurt, they half fell, half slid down the inner slope of the dyke, always followed by that cruel fusillade. Shouts of alarm came from the other men of the mission, who rushed to their assistance, crying to them to hurry. And now, in the twinkling of an eye, Dr. Spike's poor plan of holding the great mob in check, as well as every other plan, had been forever destroyed.

"Are they coming over, are they coming over?" gasped the old man, as he was half carried to his house, for fear had openly won him now.

"They are on top of the dyke in hundreds," answered those who ere supporting him,"but none have come down into the grounds yet. Ah!… "

Something like a whip-crack had rung out sharply, and a mad scream answered it instantly as if it had been an echo. The blue-coated throng on the dyke swayed and rocked, as

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if it had been heavily struck. Then, recovering itself, it surged forward as one man to the southeast and shouting madly.

Miss Virginia Bayswater sobbed her alarm.

"It 's young Mr. Harland," she cried. "He wouldn't come down — he said he would stop them at his end — he's fired, and now — " She wrung her hands, for she was sure they had caught him.

“Merciful Heaven!” cried Dr. Moss, running back and gesticulating insanely ; “follow me, follow me.”

But the native men of the mission hung back, and of the others only two made as if they had heard him. Running fast, they were just in time to see the figure of the foolish boy in his shirt-sleeves wrestling with a great pack of men. Then the group slid down the further side of the embankment and was lost to view.

Dr. Moss’s two companions now seized him and refused to allow him to follow.

“No, no,” they cried, as Dr. Moss wrestled with them, “they will not dare to kill him, they will throw him into the river. Harland swims like a duck and will get through on the current. They can’t stone him — there are no stones — and mud doesn’t stun. Come back, come back!”

Unconvinced yet irresolute, Dr. Moss allowed himself to be dragged back. Then, standing with the rest of the men outside Dr. Spike’s house, he watched hopelessly for the next development. To resist was useless, to beg was useless; against such numbers everything was useless, save a policy of absolute passiveness. If they were not opposed, the junkmen might hesitate to commit fatal acts; perhaps even their anger might cool, as the innate reasonableness of their race asserted itself. Yes, it was just possible they might come to terms.

Dr. Moss wiped the perspiration from his brow and sobbed

in his emotion as Miss Virginia Bayswater, who had been in Dr. Spike’s room, came back with his glasses. She screwed them into focus quickly, remembering how she had been taught to use them, remembering in a flash every detail of that far-off day when the Rev. Ainsley Simon had showed her from his mission the scrap of river. Now she fixed them on the far end of the dyke.

“I thought so,” she exclaimed aloud, paling suddenly. “What is it?” shot out Dr. Moss, clutching at himself. “What do you see?”

Miss Virginia Bayswater continued to look steadily. Then she spoke slowly and carefully.

“They have all gone down to that other end where the land is low. And there they have begun working to cut the dyke. I knew it.”

She stopped short and caught the words just in time. It was Mr. Denning who had told her that that was what they would at once do if they came.

Now for the first time she saw in all the garishness of a complete revelation the

hideousness of the thing; for she knew now that, had it not been for her refusal, all this might have been stopped.

CHAPTER XXI

EVER since the night when he had made his hideous discovery Paul Hancock had been increasingly unhappy. Not only did he feel that his own position in the mission was wellnigh intolerable, but it seemed to him now that a sort of heavy pall hung over the whole place like those ominous thunder-clouds which are a sure presage of the coming storm. To his suspicious eyes all the native inmates seemed in some subtle way to have become conscious of the fact that a drama of the most fantastic description was being slowly enacted within the very walls of the mission. This impression began with his own grey-bearded teacher of Chinese, and ended with the smallest boy in the day-schools. Somehow they now all seemed curiously on the alert. In his eyes one and all appeared to he impassively and silently waiting for something which, though they did not completely understand, they guessed at with the aid of some sixth sense which all Orientals possess.

How much did they know? — that was what greatly troubled him. Did they merely guess that there was something wrong with Mr. Grey, and that this thing was really a secret to everybody; or did they suppose that reasons existed for sheltering him and treating in the most hypocritical manner what was openly denounced as a most heinous sin? And what did they think of Mrs. Simon and of her poor, fever-stricken, irresolute husband? Had they measured these two as they had measured Mr. Grey, assigning to each a value reckoned in crude but eloquent terms? All these questions Paul had asked himself so persistently that the very thought of these things had grown detestable to him; and

try as he might to disguise his thoughts, as the days went by he became more and more sombre and reserved. For a sort of loyalty founded on race and colour bade him range himself on a side that he did not respect; there was nothing to be done but to watch and wait — that is, to condone. He was sure there was no other course open to him.

Still there was the question of his own future to be considered, and that was a question which in vain he tried to answer. He was sufficiently quick to have seen long ago that this question would arise one day in some very urgent form; for he had never disguised from himself that the resolution which had brought him to his present vocation had been an emotional resolution, and, because it was such, destined to die away unless reinforced by some more enduring sentiment. He often smiled grimly when he followed this particular train of thought.

Yet what could he do? Supposing that he took upon himself to speak to Ainsley Simon about Mr. Grey, would matters be helped at all? No, emphatically no. For not only could he not produce proofs, but besides creating a far-reaching scandal it was not at all certain whether Mr. Grey, being driven at bay, would not turn on them all, and, crystallizing the vague dissatisfaction felt by the Mission Board with Ainsley Simon’s regime, turn his threatened defeat into a glowing victory. That Mr. Grey was dangerous and would stop at

nothing Paul felt sure; and he had lived sufficiently long in the world to know that it is just this class of person whom it is best to leave severely alone, even though that seemed cowardly. It was not, then, himself that he was thinking about, but the ultimate effects on Ainsley Simon. He, with his terrible attacks of intermittent fever, was a man to be pitied in every way and surely not to be troubled just now. And here he paused to remark to himself on the curious way in which Ainsley Simon by some unconscious process

had sunk into a position of unimportance. He had suddenly become unimportant, totally unimportant. Then the moment for speaking had gone by; for, yielding to Mrs. Simon's advice, he had said nothing about the thieves whom he had surprised. Every way he turned he was faced with an absolute obstacle because of the fatal necessity to compromise everything in a land where their continued presence was itself due to a political compromise, where their teaching was in the nature of a secular compromise and their very articles of faith something which in no two cases could be reduced to exactly the same words.

He had not a single friend from whom to take comfort. The only person with whom he had really exchanged ideas, after all these many months in China, was Mr. Denning; and to carry any troubles to Mr. Denning would now be an openly traitorous act.

Failing Mr. Denning, who was there? The colour stained Paul's cheeks as he thought of Virginia Bayswater. Often he had wished to confide in her, and as often he had rejected that thought as a weakness. A weakness? Yes, because he had never ceased regretting the afternoon on which he had talked to her so gloomily — that day in which he had acted as if he were the only person with troubles in the world. Somehow he felt that he must have just then become small in her eyes.

Yet women were to him no ethereal creatures to be worshipped from afar; they did not occupy the little niches in which some so carefully place them. To him they were nothing but women, the companions of men. Still it had always seemed strikingly wrong to him that a man should run crying his woes to them — that is, to those who from their very nature are less fitted than men to bear the rude shocks of life. Undoubtedly it was the business of a man to wrestle with problems by himself. He should throw them down,

hold them firm, and conquer them or be conquered. He should neither ask nor take quarter; it should be a struggle *á l'outrance* after the old fashion. The advice of another man was in any case purely ring-side advice. But that sort of advice was quite impossible in the case of a woman. Either she was so interested that it was a matter of profound concern for her to save by any means, foul or fair, or she was so little interested that, with a strange cruelty of indifference which remains one of her most disconcerting characteristics, she assumed that detached attitude of those cruel people of the ancient classical world who delighted in gladiatorial struggles to turn down their thumbs.

Such thoughts as these were always working at the back of Paul's brain, and such a constant and earnest analysis had effected in his appearance a subtle and somewhat remarkable change. He was fast hardening into a man. And now, as he sat in Mr. Simon's study at eight o'clock in the morning, rapidly working out what Mr. Simon wanted done during the week, he suddenly looked back on his former self of a few months ago with strange wonderment. How little had he then thought of the manner in which his life was going to be shaped by the stern logic of unavoidable events!

He had finished filling up some forms and was about to ring, when one of the catechists knocked at the half-open door and without waiting quietly entered. He stood there for a moment in his sober blue clothing with a peculiar detachment from his surroundings which was arresting. There was something in that manner Paul had never seen before, something wonderfully curious. He seemed to say that though he had stepped into the room, he was not to be associated with the room or with what the room stood for. He had separated himself from all those things; he had become ominously neutral

For a moment the two men contented themselves with the

exchange of some conventional remarks, as if each was on the alert. Then the catechist suddenly stiffened, as if he had finally made up his mind.

"Fighting has commenced at the American Mission across the river," he said casually. His almond eyes traveled quickly round the room, as if they were seeking for something which he could not find. "Fighting has commenced at the American Mission across the river," he repeated monotonously.

Paul did not at once understand. The surprise came from such an unexpected quarter, had been induced by a train of circumstances about which he was so totally ignorant, that he could not have been expected to understand. Then the catechist began anew, this time throwing a nervous look through the window at their own broad compound.

"It is said that they have already put fire to all the buildings."

Paul suddenly leaped to his feet, as his intelligence, now grasping not only the meaning of these words, but the allied consequences of such acts of violence, kindled with excitement.

"What!" he cried in his broken vernacular; "they are beating and burning at the American Mission."

The catechist gravely nodded.

"Yes," he said.

He still looked on without the slightest change of countenance at the commotion he had

caused, for Paul was already half-way out of the room.

“Wait!” he called back suddenly as he ran. “I must get Mr. Grey. Mr. Grey must investigate. I cannot properly understand.” And as he dashed out of the front door he saw Mr. Grey slowly coming towards the house— it was breakfast-time.

“Mr. Grey,” he called to him, his excitement banishing all other feelings, “come quickly, hurry up! They are burning

and sacking the American Mission; there is grave trouble —”

As he understood, Mr. Grey paused for an instant and seemed to stagger. Then he commenced wildly running towards him. Words tumbled almost incoherently from his mouth.

“The devils have commenced again, have they?” he cried.

“It is only six months since the Huchow business. And if it spreads across the river with us so far away from help, nothing can save us. Ah, they should be treated in such a way once and for all that they would never attempt it again. Devils, devils, devils!”

Now he frantically waved his arms; the man’s fear was so evident that Paul was ashamed.

“Hush!” he whispered, “or Mr. Simon may hear you upstairs. It must be kept from him, or he will become light-headed again.”

“Keep it from him!” echoed Mr. Grey violently, “keep it from him! You know little about the country. It may be our turn before dark. Simon has got to be told.” And with that he made as if he would rush upstairs.

Paul again interposed.

“Wait — please come in and hear what Tsin-lien has got to say. He is in here. I cannot understand all he says. Perhaps it may not be as bad — “

Against his will, Mr. Grey allowed himself to be led into the study. Now he listened to the flow of words with frowning brows and twitching. lips, as if it was almost too much for him to keep silence. But no sooner had the catechist finished than he burst out again.

“The very worst people of all to get into trouble with, the Mohammedans! You do not understand? Well, the junk-guilds are all Mohammedans; the men are Chinese Mohammedans, and they have even got a mad Mullah or two

from Turkestan. I have heard about this matter before. I know that Dr. Spike had been trying to get Denning to arrange the matter."

Suddenly Mr. Grey stopped and gave a series of short sharp laughs that sounded oddly like the harsh barking of a dog. Then he rushed on:

"Denning — the Commissioner — that 's the real clue, of course. You know it is more than suspected that he is a Mohammedan, that he indulges in evil practices — " Mr. Grey gave the young man an ugly look. "It is reported that certain of his plans have recently miscarried, that he has been disappointed, that he is a rejected suitor." Again Mr. Grey laughed his horrid laugh. "A devil's business! I knew it from the beginning."

The quick blood rushed to Paul's face, as Mr. Grey stood facing him with a leering expression. Oh that this should have come out so! The man was taking delight, even in his fear, at the evident effect of his words; and now Paul almost choked with anger at the overwhelming thought that busy tongues had smeared Miss Virginia Bayswater with every sort of insinuation, including this last one. Was this last one really true—was it? was it? — that was the thought that beat on him incessantly. With a great effort he pushed it aside, and began speaking in a voice that was ominously calm.

"Then that means at least that there is no danger here, that it is only a feud with the American Mission." He paused a minute and became more fully determined as to his course of action. "And as that is so, I shall make my way as speedily as possible across the river to give what little assistance I can."

Mr. Grey, who had for a moment turned, wheeled on him, like one possessed:

"What!" he burst out. "You mean that you are going

to leave me here alone to safeguard all this property and all our people? You mean you are going to indulge in mock heroics! Well, in Mr. Simon's absence, I forbid you to leave the compound. Do you understand, I forbid it. And under the regulations I have the right to forbid you." There he stood with upraised arm, the incarnation of a dozen hateful emotions.

All the pain or grief Paul had so long felt surged up at the sound of these rough words. Trembling with emotion, he yet strove to speak calmly. The crisis was being forced upon him; he could but accept it. The day had come when he must burn his boats… .

"May I ask one thing? Do you keep the regulations so strictly that you can afford to quote them?" He looked searchingly into the other's face, and as he looked he determined to strike.

"Sir," clamoured Mr. Grey, not understanding what was underneath, "you are openly

insolent to me."

"On the night of Mr. Denning's garden-party," began Paul, speaking dully as if he had become afraid of himself, "on that night, as you know, thieves broke into this house. I discovered them and they fled on my approach. It was my duty to go for help, or at least to make known my discovery. That night Mr. Simon was light-headed, Mrs. Simon I could not find, it was necessary to find you. I went out of this house in the middle of that black night. I approached your house; your house was lighted, and what I saw and heard made me cry aloud. And — Shall I end, Mr. Grey?"

He had taken a step nearer to show his determination, but suddenly Mr. Grey, as if to show his surrender, took several steps back. His face had blanched, his arms had fallen limply beside him, his whole person betokened collapse. *He had been seen, he had been heard that night. …*

"That cry in the night — it was *you*," he muttered. "Do not end — there was no end. Later perhaps — " Suddenly with a spasmodic gesture he rushed away.

For a moment Paul, overwhelmed, stood as motionless as a stone image. Then with a start he followed. He must give the news to Mr. Simon and tell him what he proposed to do.

Behind him the native catechist, forgotten, unheeded, unsmiling, yet somehow seeming steeped in the atmosphere of these acts, opened another little door and, like an unsolved enigma, smoothly vanished.

In the school-rooms that day no boys or girls collected. The rumours had reached here the night before, and it was only those rumours, which he knew would crystallize into facts, that the catechist was repeating.

CHAPTER XXII

Those who have never witnessed tumultuous or wicked scenes can form no conception of the strangeness with which matters inevitably move to their appointed end. Time, being suddenly annihilated by the violent play of the emotions, hours may seem like minutes, or minutes become so strangely leaden-footed as to be veritable hours. Since it is also in the nature of things that the sublime and the ridiculous should commingle and unceasingly struggle for mastery — the sublime being the majestic or generous portion of man, and the ridiculous the base or ignoble portion — in every such scene there will be suddenly exhibited the most glaring contradictions, at one turn making one applaud man's magnificence, at the very next forcing up doubts whether there is in him any virtue or sanity at all.

Further, it is well to note that the judgment of ordinary days no longer applies in such extraordinary times, since a new set of values magically produces new men and new women. Thus he who has always been taken for strong and commanding may suddenly be shown deplorably and shamefully weak, a coward perhaps; whilst a common butt may become, by this spasmodic spinning of Fortune's Wheel, a common hero. As to what inner essence it is which is thus wonderfully quickened into the all-compelling motive — the inner essence which makes men cowards or heroes — philosophers, in spite of much investigation and much philosophizing, have shed no real light. Man being a volatile creature, influenced to unheard-of lengths by heat and light, exposure and confinement, fatigue and hunger, blows and soft words,

as well as by a hundred other things which have no names, it is only natural that in extraordinary situations he should act both in an unexpected and irrational manner.

Now, when he and his kind are gathered together in those strange conglomerations called crowds, his irrationality is certainly a thousand-fold intensified, no matter what his nationality may be. Yet to study a crowd is really to study the microcosm of a nation, to study its history; for through all the swiftly shifting cross-currents of emotions, in the midst of the tempests of shouts and curses and groans, in the midst of the rocking and swaying, must run certain broad bands of feeling which tell a nation's story better than any language. A crowd is always changing its mood, is always shifting, is always childish or brutal; yet that does not change its secret heart-promptings. It is in these things that one may see those broad bands which run straight back for countless generations, and which disclose what a people's chiefest characteristics really are. Go, then, into crowds, look at crowds, study crowds, if you would understand history, or even the smallest piece of history. That is very essential.

The fierce junkmen, gathered together in their thousands round the devoted mission, were no exception to this rule. As all the history of their race proves, they were eminently

reasonable and cautious even in their most uproarious moments; and had they been met halfway, had they only been placated and their humour humoured, they would have become as lambs. But they had been opposed, most foolishly and childishly opposed. So, having ignominiously struck down old white-bearded Dr. Spike because he had incensed them, and having beaten and thrown into the river young Mr. Harland because he had fired on them, for a term of minutes they contented themselves with roaring a hoarse-throated defiance, as if waiting for some welcome interruption which would save them from taking any initiative.

Then, because there was nothing else for it, because the mission had abandoned them to their own resources, with that blind simplicity which is their most outstanding characteristic, they proceeded suddenly to the one specific object they had in mind, the cutting of the handsomest turf grown dyke and the ruining of the mission grounds.

Used to such work from infancy, no sooner were shovels, hoes, picks, spades, and baskets dragged from their craft, than one and all settled down to it with a steadfastness of purpose which would have been admirable in a more worthy object. Hundreds of men now, stripped to the waist, with knot-hard muscles and splendid lungs enabling them to work with the resistless energy of athletes, dug and hoed at the mud-dyke. Other hundreds loaded up light wicker baskets, and slinging them on poles carried them down the outer slope at a run, to dump their contents on a foreshore which grew mountainous with this refuse. Goading and inciting one another with short, sharp cries, racing against each other in their fury to be quickly done, they accomplished as much in the first quarter of an hour as they would have normally done in an hour. Now, as their brown bodies streamed with perspiration and a great yawning gap grew in the dyke, they redoubled their efforts, working as if they had been veritable children of Israel in captivity trembling under the lashes of Pharaoh’s taskmasters.

More and more quickly they worked, the deeper did they get. The soft earth now yielded as if it had been cheese. The hoemen, bringing down their broad-edged hoes with all their strength, bit out great pieces of earth, which they slung down the outer slope in a never-ending fusillade, where they were as quickly caught up in baskets and whisked away. As they worked down deeper and deeper and the base of the dyke grew ever broader, there was room for more men, and so more men came. Those who had no tools, seeing success so

nearly won, now used their hands and tossed down the great clods of mud dug up by the spademen, until round the outer foot of the dyke the mud-heaps grew more and more mountainous.

No sooner was one man totally exhausted than another took his place, and so not a minute was wasted. This hot animation filled the air, it went up to heaven like a blast of furnace heat. It was fierce, exultant, strange, bad, ominous, ugly; yet, by reason of its very

hatefulness, it was fascinating. It was man wrestling with elementary things as if he were a giant instead of the veriest pigmy; it was man exciting himself to madness because he has ever been a fool… .

Onward and onward they worked, going faster and faster as they sweated themselves into an ever-higher fever of exaltation. Only those who have seen how much a fanatical outburst can accomplish would have believed the testimony of their eyes. Already, in an hour or so, the great dyke was half cut through, it had melted away. Now it was clear that in a very few minutes the water-level would be reached, and a little further cutting would send the water rushing through. In preparation for this, and in answer to shouted orders, a mob of boys stripped themselves as naked as Adam, and plunging into the slime, lapped by the waters of the river, they marked out a water-channel with some bamboo-splits.

This channel they began at once to deepen so as to aid the inrush. Using their hands and such few tools as they could find, they began to sling aside the mud, spattering water and slime over one another and yelling rude jests. They were river-boys, born and bred on the river, knowing how to handle mud as only mud-larks know. They plunged in the mud, they swept their native element aside. With vast cunning they made the lapping river-waters second their efforts,

ceaselessly raking the river-mud with their feet as they worked with their hands, knowing that the current could carry away this disturbed silt more swiftly than their most frantic efforts could do. And thus the destructive work swiftly advanced.

This strange armistice — strange yet natural in the East, where things always move by fits and starts — had reacted on the inmates of the mission in an equally strange manner. Those who had been filled with fear, who had openly and pitiably shown the white feather, were gradually becoming truculent, and were now recommending measures which were obviously absurd.

The women and children, the sick and the ailing — in a word, all who, obeying the first order, had gone to the gates at the extreme end of the immense compound — had waited in extreme anxiety during those eventful minutes in which the action of the crowd had been indeterminate. They had been able to see the confusion which had attended the over-throw of Dr. Spike; they had waited further developments in fear and trembling. Then, as the men of the mission had all remained in groups in the middle distance within eyesight but long beyond eyeshot, curiosity had taken the place of fear. Questions flew from one person to another; the crying children, seeing that something arresting was occurring, suddenly became still; and at last, unable to restrain themselves any longer, a few of the ladies of the mission, with some of the Chinese women-teachers, began going back to where they could see Miss Virginia Bayswater parleying with Dr. Moss. They were burning with curiosity and anxiety.

Gradually the contagion of this movement spread, just as all contagions must spread.

Relieved to find things progressing so peacefully, now hoping for the best, by degrees the great and heterogeneous crowd of non-combatants slowly

trickled away from the gates back into the centre of the compound. Children had commenced to cry loudly for food; all were anxious about their future movements; so, very naturally, all moved.

Meanwhile, outside the great open gates a growing number of countrymen and pedlars had begun to collect. They were soon joined by numbers of those homeless men who in every densely populated country appear almost magically whenever the smallest signs advertise that the even tenor of life is being rudely disturbed. At first willing to keep at a respectful distance on the roadway and to watch from there, they soon became more daring; and at last finding the open gates completely unguarded, and the mission inmates intent on gazing at the river, they began to dribble through. Soon the boldest were far in the compound, mixing with the converts and eagerly questioning them. Many others gradually followed this example; more and more people quickly collected, as time passed and no one opposed them, until at length not only did a great crowd completely block this emergency exit, but its numbers were being so rapidly augmented that its aspect became menacing. It was wonderful to watch its growth; like that trick of Hindu conjurers, the seed was becoming in the twinkling of an eye a full-grown mango-tree.

It was Miss Virginia Bayswater's quick eyes and quicker brain which first understood what this might ultimately mean. Once again she wrung her hands in despair at the strange palsy which had seized the mission. It was unbelievable that everyone should have become so short-sighted.

"Dr. Moss, Dr. Moss," she cried, seeking him out, "look at the crowd at the back-gates! They must be driven back and the gates locked. If the junkmen join hands with them, it will be terrible. Quick, Dr. Moss! Oh, Dr. Moss, what is the matter today!"

Dr, Moss, thus apostrophized, moistened his dry lips with his dry tongue and gloomily shook his head.

"How can we drive them back!" he muttered; "they will refuse to go. They are so mixed with our own people that perhaps they are something of a safeguard."

The sophism of this poor argument was so evident that Miss Virginia Bayswater stamped her feet and wrung her hands again in her vexation. It seemed almost like a visitation of Providence. Everything wrong that could be thought of was permitted, everything right was neglected; and if a catastrophe were averted it would be due to something in the nature of a miracle. Now she went up to a native pastor and, talking to him rapidly in the vernacular, attempted to persuade him to go back with some of his men and clear the grounds.

But Fate was once more against her. At that very moment a trivial incident occurred which set a spark to the combustible elements which had collected.

A young girl from the mission school dropped a silver bangle. She stooped to pick it up. A loafer who had seen it fall set his foot on it, and as she was still bowed down he gave her a push. The girl fell and loudly cried her alarm; the loafer promptly picked up the bangle and hid it. Somebody attempted to rescue it; the man struck out and called, *Ta, ta, ta*!

Instantly the cry had spread like wildfire. The converts, lulled to unsuspiciousness, fled panic-stricken before the crowd, which pushed and struck them and openly tore the ornaments from the women's headdresses. Before anyone had time to think, the vast compound was half submerged under this new ragamuffin invasion.

Fortunately this crowd was a crowd of simpletons; and so, after very few minutes had passed, they paused wondering what they should do next. During this interval the mission

inmates had all managed to mass in despairing groups in front of Dr. Spike's house; and this time a hundred mission voices shouted earnest counsels.

Alas! When the balance was swaying this way and that, when the loafer crowd, frightened at its violence, could have been persuaded away, some of the ladies of the mission who had taken refuge on the upper verandah rushed towards Dr. Moss.

"The dyke is cut," they called, "and the water is pouting in at the south end of the compound."

A distant roar of voices gave confirmation to their words. And now the wondering crowd at last understood, and Eastern sansculottism sent up a cry of joy. If the junkmen advanced into the compound, if they who had done this devastating act mingled with them, on them would fall the blame of the whole business — on their heads would expiation be made. Thus did every man in that second crowd reason as they babbled to one another, and instinctively a great rush set in towards the junkmen to see what the junkmen would do next.

The mission inmates, paralyzed by this rapid and unexpected march of events, were now shrieking meaninglessly to one another. Like captives, they awaited their fate.

Virginia Bayswater, convinced that all was now in vain alone, stood motionless. Fear had at last gained her. It was no longer only the burning and sacking of the mission that the women awaited. It was something worse.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE mission messengers, despatched in such hot and unguarded haste, shared the fate of most messengers who are thrust unprepared into conflict with unrelenting circumstances. Two, by showing great common-sense, progressed steadily towards the accomplishment of their duty. Because they refused to be discouraged or defeated and resolutely pushed on, in the end they succeeded. But the others, being of no such stern stuff, were content ignominiously to fail, thereby confirming once more that eloquent theory that success or non-success is merely a tiny little matter of character, no matter what creed or colour may happen to be.

The very instant these youths had left the mission compound they had wisely separated and scattered over the country so as to avoid being caught and savagely beaten, as they knew they would be if they had run all together in a compact band.

For that the junkmen had many allies, and that this movement was the result of a long-debated plan, was soon made amply clear to them. As they reached and passed successive river-villages, each man found that not only were people already all astir, though the hour was so early, but that all were gathered together in anxious, gossiping groups. The most stupid could not but see that this movement, having been carefully prearranged and perhaps known to everyone in the vicinity of the mission, the entire countryside was now silently waiting to see how it fared, before joining forces with the attacking parties and utterly blotting out this home of a disturbing faith. A most grim outlook menaced the

devoted mission, and a great fear settled down on every man of the messengers.

Now they saw that even countrymen who had come from far away inland by night, carrying produce down to the river for the city on the opposite banks, were irrevocably halted on this shore, not by any threats, but by the hard fact that there were no boats on which to cross the river. As these hard-working peasants set down their loads and wiped the sweat from their dripping bodies, they heard with strange awe the tale from the riverine population.

Today there would be no boats! Not in a generation had that happened. The whole machinery of life on this great river was disorganized because the junk-guilds had issued orders and massed men and craft for this sudden attack. The very village sampans — greasy, well-worn boats — that carried on inshore fishing, might as well not have been drawn up in orderly lines on the muddy foreshore, since there was not so much as a boy to *yuloh* them. All had gone with their elders, every mother’s son belonging to the river had been impressed into this strange service save the very aged and the very infirm. The great loads of luscious green cabbages, the coarse white turnips, the thick succulent hunches of garlic, the fat strings of onions, now arriving in enormous basket-loads, carried by strings

of men who had marched to the river by starlight, must wait and miss the market and spoil. Such was the decree; and these hard-working peasants, listening awestruck to the savage talk they heard around them, sullenly stored their produce and soon served to swell the throng which was now making towards the mission. There were great numbers of such men; for in China barter and porter-age engage the major energies of a vast population once the crops have been sown, and the number who every day travel a score of miles to earn a few hundred worthless copper cash is quite beyond calculation.

The messengers, more and more alarmed, hastened singly farther and farther afield in the hope of reaching villages where this strange disaffection had not spread. But the sun was very high in the heavens before anyone of them met with success. Then one youth, who in his fear of being caught had at length made a great detour inland and had gone a very long distance up-river, found an old boatman to row him across; and a second man, having run for many miles in an opposite direction, providentially found a trading-junk just arrived from down-river and, ignorant of this local warfare, about to cross; and he jumped on board. And thus, slowly approaching the distant bank from two widely separated points, the two feverish men counted the minutes pass and wondered if they would be too late. The others, after wandering vainly for hours in the nearer villages and suffering in many ways, returned at last to the mission to announce their failure, but only to find their worse fears about to be justified.

In China it is well said that there is never any need for hurry or flurry — that is, except in very exceptional circumstances. It is, then, hardly in the nature of things to rise early when days are so uneventful and life so calmly ordered. So everyone, save peasants and pedlars, gets up late and hurries as little as possible. Thus it was that the messengers arriving finally at ten o’clock on the opposite bank had difficulty in finding anyone ready or willing to see or believe them. It was too early for tragedies!

The youth who had come by junk had been landed far down below the European settlement; and now, bravely disregarding the instructions which had been given him, he ran like a hunted hare all the way through the native city, straight to the Taotai’s Yamên. There, in those crowded courtyards of Chinese officialdom, full of petitioners and

ragged soldiery and innumerable understrappers, all gather together after their wont to await the leisurely treatment the day’s business, he made fruitless efforts to see or communicate with the Taotai himself. But the great man was still asleep, sleeping off the effects of his nocturnal opium, or, if he was just awake, he was amongst his womankind was not yet willing to be disturbed by the public business. The public was made to wait; did not the loitering throng in his courtyards vividly proclaim that fact?

But the messenger was so passionately determined to get a hearing (for there was much of his own flesh and blood in the mission) that the commotion he made was such that a deputy of the yamên finally consented to see him; and when he had learnt what was this

pressing business he became unreasonably angry, and commenced a long, loud tirade against the “faith-halls.” Yet all the same, because he was secretly afraid, he despatched his men to the riverfront with some expedition to learn if this story was true, and seizing his pen he wrote something on a slip of paper which slipped in to the great man himself.

Things were now moving fast, after the Chinese manner. Another order created some bustle in the courtyards; and a minor military official, with a dull-blue button adorning his official hat, came in to say that “several tens of men could be despatched very promptly if vessels could be found.” Then yamên writers, who until now had been drinking their first-tea peacefully and leisurely turning over papers, took down the account that was given them. They entered the details slowly and pedantically, asking innumerable questions and pausing to dispute among themselves in undertones how this, or that should be most diplomatically written. Still they worked, and as the native pen flies fast the details were soon complete.

The messenger at length, convinced that he had done his

best, prostrated himself for the last time before the deputy of the yamên and implored him once again to lose not a minute. Then, breaking hastily through the clusters of inquisitive people who were listening just outside the doors, he began once more his panting progress through the slimy narrow streets towards those distant wicket-gates which marked the beginning of the European quarter. There he intended, being now unguardedly excited, to raise an open hubbub and by his very violence kindle the fire of excitement so as to bring a prompt rescue. He was succeeding where the others had failed; that was his thought.

Of the near presence of his comrade he could know nothing. The other messenger, having started from a point far up-river, had been swept over with the current in his favour; and though his sampan was very small and leaky and his boatman very old and weak, he had reached the bank far sooner because of the current. Leaping ashore at the first available spot, he too had speedily run, and entering the European settlement had sought, regardless of his dishevelled appearance, the Commissioner at his office. In a loud, agitated voice he demanded the Commissioner.

The Commissioner was not yet there, the wondering servants replied; what did he want of the Commissioner so urgently? But already he had turned. He girded himself up, wiped the sweat from his face, and waving aside these importunate questioners, began the race once more towards the Commissioner’s private residence.

There were, however, other Europeans about, standing by a tall white signal-mast set in a plot of trim grass. They had noted this man’s arrival, and now, hearing who he was, they detained him with imperative gestures and eager questions.

Because they were Europeans he obeyed them. He began his tale. A big, nautical telescope was already directed on

the distant shore; and the group of Europeans, long apprised by the evidence of their eyes that something was seriously amiss at the American Mission, now urgently demanded evidence for their ears.

A riot? The junk-guilds had massed their men over there? The mission might he burnt and looted? The junkmen were full of savagery? Lives were in danger? As each question was more than satisfied by the answer of the now hysterical messenger, panting and sobbing his answers — because in the East hysteria is quickly induced by a gloating audience — the little group of Europeans stared at one another and mentally locked ranks. They were prepared for this always, it was the price which from time to time must be paid. Red blood united them to all white faces when danger grew. So be it, the time for action had come.

In the unavoidable absence of the Commissioner his second in command had been quickly sought for. All now clustered round him, expostulating, explaining, amplifying, insisting. The danger was imminent for all; prompt action might yet nip it in the bud. It was no time for half-measures; straight-forward retaliation alone paid.

The messenger heard the sharp argument proceed in quick English and listened round-eyed and satisfied. He it was who had excited them, he it was who alone brought the news! Then, as he listened, he heard sanction being given for some act which made every man in the group rub his hands.

"*Pertah Singh,*" called someone in uniform.

A tall Sikh watchman, with a red turban round his head, until now all eyes and ears in the middle distance, rushed excitedly forward, he too kindled by the leaping flame. He had suspected what was coming, he was always hoping that it might come; for several times he had been beaten in this yellow man's land because he was almost black, and his heart

cherished a deep and unreasoning hatred against all things yellow.

"Fire the signal-gun, full charge, three times!" said the Deputy Commissioner curtly, flushing with his unaccustomed authority.

"Yes, Sahib," answered the Sikh, rushing away.

Quickly he returned from an outhouse, now followed by a fellow-countryman carrying the charges; and together the two red turbans raced to where stood an old brass carronade peering quizzically at the river. Mounted on an archaic wooden gun-carriage, it alone adorned the vacant plot of grass enclosed by green wooden palings, where stood the tall white signal-mast. Thus it had stood for forty years, fit sign-manual of the Open Door, brought hither at a time when China was still vague Cathay to be hammered, hammered

open, and the door nailed hack by gun-made treaties. Oh, symbolic, well-polished carronades dating back to those old brigantine days, scattered along great river and endless coastline, how well you merit enshrining!

The two men fell on the gun, rammed home the charge and wad, tidied a bit, lighted the fuse. Then, as they quickly stepped back, there was a blinding flash and thick black smoke.

Boom!

Rapidly the two men jumped at the carronade again and rushed it back into position. The heavy charge had sent it racing back a dozen feet and made it stand awry. They cleaned and rammed home again, chiding each other in high-pitched chanting Indian voices, their eyes flashing, their hands trembling; for the song of the gunpowder had caught them, and the East flames as easily as that powder itself.

“R–eady !” chanted the second man in his drawling *lingua*, springing clear as the other lighted the fuse.

Boom! — this time somehow more savagely, as if the old

brass carronade had itself become infected and roared its rage at being impressed once more into warlike service. Sixty years before it had fought these yellow men; must *it* too fight again?

Once again the two men loaded, working frantically as the Europeans watched them; and then a third time.

Boom!

It was the riot-signal, the dreaded signal of the river the signal that all somehow feared because the imagination made a myriad yellow faces at once grin madly behind it. Now, just as if they had been apprised of the fact only by the very signal they themselves had fired, the Sikhs raced back to the armoury.

“That ‘ll wake up the Taotai anyway, damn him!” said the Deputy Commissioner irrelevantly, walking back hurriedly with the others to the armoury-doors, which were now wide open. Steel barrels and heavy butts made an inspiring clash; this was riot business with a vengeance.

“Mr. Smith, how many rifles have we got in order?” he inquired of a man in uniform.

“Twenty-four Martinis and thirty-six Sniders, sir.”

“Enough for sixty men,” said the Deputy Commissioner musingly. “The consulate has a couple of dozen, and the *hongs* some more. What with shot-guns everyone can be armed.”

He turned and contemplated the river as if now he half suspected rioters to rise from the waters because the riot had been proclaimed.

“Sniders are the boys,” remarked a very young man in a gleeful stage-whisper during this interval of silence; “those bullets are man-stoppers all right. Thick and as long as your thumb, you know. Down in Winking they used them a couple of years ago. Gods, how they drive home!”

He chuckled as he showed how they hit a man and crumpled him up.

The messenger, relegated to a secondary place during these rapid developments, now claimed attention once more. He had been told to find the Commissioner — find the Commissioner he must. “The Commissioner, the Commissioner, the commissioner,” he reiterated in a maddening fashion. He wanted the Commissioner. He had special messages for him.

The Deputy Commissioner listened to his rattling vernacular with growing irritation. Suddenly he stopped him peremptorily.

“Well, go and find him,” he said angrily, “go away, go away!”

Developments were coming so fast that, accustomed as he had been to years of humdrum office-life, this morning excitement seemed as bad as going without breakfast. It tasted just like that! Now he looked apprehensively in every direction, as if the harsh-mouthed gun had opened a veritable Pandora’s box.

For the *bund*, with its line of attendant hulks, its weeping-willow trees, its massive houses, representative of this outpost of European culture, hitherto so somnolent in spite of the advancing morning hour, had now been galvanized into sudden and spasmodic life. Chairs, borne by bearers half stripped, because they had been impressed into service with oaths and blows, were racing towards the signal-mast; ladies in dishabille, with children and *amahs* chattering madly beside them, emerged from every gate, and a running blue-coated throng grew and grew until confusion was everywhere.

The first moment of stupefied unbelief having passed, now there was everywhere open panic. “The riot-signal, the riot-signal,” everybody repeated, listening with apprehensive ear for sounds of the riot as more and more people came flying along. The well-moored hulks vomited layers of work-

stained cargo-coolies, who ran across the pontoon-bridges, or jumped into sampans tied up

underneath the hulks, with a mad disregard for life or limb. They were just like rats leaving a sinking ship. ” *Ta-chi-lai-la,*” they screamed to one another. And then they added “*Pao-a* — Let us flee! — in long-drawn outcries.

“That signal has shaken things up some,” said the man in uniform ungrammatically, who had returned to the telescope and was now sweeping the band. “Every mother’s son is on the quick run. Both the Commissioner and Consul have started, sir,” he added, picking them out by their uniformed coolies.

The Deputy Commissioner, with the prospect of his authority being quickly superseded, became additionally irritated and full of cantankerous energy.

“Now, then,” he called, “have the boat-officers got the a gigmen together? No, of course not! Shake them up, Smith, shake them up! The four gigs to be full manned and to wait at the jetty for orders. Serve out the rifles and pouches to the European staff, but to no one else. What is it?”

He had turned with a muttered oath as the Chinese clerks and writers and office-boys, who had been streaming out of the buildings and collecting ever since the firing of the signal, now approached. One and all they begged leave to go to their families, to go before the settlement wicket-gates were shut and barred, to go before the dense crowds had collected. They had their families to look after; they must go quickly or else it would be too late; in such times it was not their business to be here. And thus, all talking volubly, they nervously eyed the rifles.

“No,” said the Deputy Commissioner, becoming more and more fussy in his manner. “The Commissioner alone can grant you leave to abandon your work.”

He waved to them violently to leave him alone; and as

they would not go from him he went from them. Somehow he was beginning to doubt the wisdom of what a few minutes before had appeared as masterly decision.

The Commissioner was just alighting from his chair, and it was plain that he was in a towering rage. The messenger had met him halfway down the *bund,* and running beside his chair had poured into his ears a special message which had infinitely disturbed him.

“Who gave orders for the riot-signal to be fired?” he inquired furiously, as he came up, knowing well the answer.

“I did, Mr. Denning.” The Deputy Commissioner was plainly quaking in his boots.

“You- ” the Commissioner became purple as he suppressed a word, “I would have you know that you have done the most foolish thing possible. And I am not surprised!”

And with that, as if accepting things as he found them, he marched to the jetty and the armed boat-officers.

“The consulate will send one gig,” he said, “and it has been arranged that the hongs will send theirs. Let the men strip if they want to. They will have to row hard. Now about arming the gigs.”

He turned and was consulting a strip of paper, when a commotion made him turn involuntarily. Mrs. Jennings, a sun-helmet on her head, but otherwise merely clad in a nondescript bedroom garment of white, with an enormous army revolver strapped round her waist, had unexpectedly arrived. As he heard what she was saying, the colour on his brick-coloured face came and went.

“I guessed it, I knew it,” she was protesting loudly and excitedly to all around. “The Mohammedans are at the back of this, and when you start Mohammedans, even Chinese Mohammedans, there is no knowing where the end may be. Mr. Denning, Mr. Denning! ” she called to him violently as she hastened forward.

The Commissioner, as he measured her, knew that she was in one of her most excited stages. Unless he took was strong measures, there was imminent danger in this woman. He was frankly afraid of her, of what her tongue might say. Quickly he made up his mind.

“What is it, Mrs. Jennings?” he began smoothly, hoping yet to defeat her object. “There is really not the slightest reason for alarm in the settlement. The firing of the riot. signal has been done entirely without authority, against my wishes.”

A cunning expression swept across Mrs. Jenning’s face and she laughed shrilly.

“I have no doubt that you know, Mr. Denning—know better than anyone else up to a certain point. But perhaps even you don’t know beyond that point, and consequently we poor people may suffer for that lack of knowledge. I, for one, don’t intend to be killed for the furtherance of any Mohammedan schemes. Do you understand that, my good man?”

There was a supreme insolence in her manner which lashed him like a whip, but he knew that many curious eyes were watching him. It required a mighty effort to remain calm, but that effort was necessary. So now, putting his hands behind his back as if to remove temptation, he continued to face her with studied indifference.

“You are needlessly exciting yourself, Mrs. Jennings,” he said in a somewhat lower voice. “I beg you to control yourself. There is nothing in this movement which at all affects the settlement. The American Mission is menaced, that is all. If you will come into my office with me, I can at once convince you of that.”

His words were cut short by the dramatic approach of a bleeding man who ran swiftly past the others and threw himself imploringly at the Commissioner's feet. So torn and

dishevelled was he that he was hardly recognizable as a settlement Policeman.

"I tried to hold the east wicket-gate," began the man, sobbing piteously, "but they broke through and seized me and beat me, until I fell. Send men, Excellency, to the cast gate or else it will be too late." Then he broke down completely and bumped head against the ground.

"MacPherson," cried the Commissioner, turning and meeting this new development like a flash of lightning, to one of the boat-officers, "take your men at a double to the east wicket-gate and see that it is shut and barred. Stay there until you are relieved."

The place was now bursting with excitement, and steadily the hubbub grew. Almost everyone in the settlement had arrived, and all were now shouting and talking. They had exiled themselves here to make profits, not to die!

"Not a single steamer in port," everybody cried. "Not a gunboat within two hundred miles," others added.

The confusion grew worse and worse every second, as women and their children demanded that their husbands and their fathers stay by them and not go on any rescue work. The Consul, the Commissioner, and the leading men were holding an emergency meeting and trying in the midst of this confusion to divide up their forces so as to cover the situation until the arrival of the Taotai's soldiers. Gradually they got things in some sort of order, and, rapidly scribbling on paper, a general plan was made up.

Mrs. Jennings had remained forgotten during this series of interruptions. She had been so interested in following the kaleidoscopic changes that for a moment she forgot all about the Commissioner. But it was only for a moment. Now, going up to some of the terrified women, she began:

"He is a Mohammedan, a Mohammedan, I am sure. You can find confirmation of it in his house if you like — I saw

his women on his garden-party day. Now, if anything happens to us, I shall see that he never lives to tell the tale." She slapped her enormous army-revolver in a menacing way.

"Oh, Mrs. Jennings," they exclaimed, "how can you say such things!"

Mrs. Jennings laughed contemptuously and went on with her own line of thought.

“I hate the deceit in the man, and the way he has worked this whole business to suit himself. Mrs. Mandrell, you remember the night of his dinner-party? And do you remember the garden-party?”

Mrs. Mandrell nodded.

“Well, I knew then that he had made up his mind that if he didn’t get that missionary girl he would let things run their own course and promote his other interests, his Mohammedan interests. I know what he is after. I am no fool! He has his plans, very big plans. He has probably known all along that this was coming today. Brute, to frighten us like this!”

“I confess I don’t understand,” said Mrs. Mandrell feebly, “but then I’m not clever like you. How can Mr. Denning be so mixed up with Chinese?”

Mrs. Jennings opened her mouth to answer, but she saw the Commissioner in time and refrained.

“Mrs. Jennings,” he now said genially, “come in out of the sun, come into my office; I can convince you in a minute that the movement is confined to an attack on the American Mission. I have papers to prove it.”

“The audacity of the man,” murmured Mrs. Jennings; but, conquered by her curiosity, she followed.

In his office Mr. Denning threw open a dispatch-box and showed her the translations of masses of petitions from the junk-guilds. Whilst she read, he attended rapidly to some other business.

you see,” he said after a minute. “It is quite simple, it has nothing to do with us in the settlement. The crowd beat that fool of a policeman because he was hitting people to stop the traffic. MacPherson has already sent back a man to say that the gate is closed and that it is all right.”

He had risen now and went quickly to an ice-box. He drew out a couple of glasses, a bottle of whiskey, and a syphon.

“I am thirsty,” he remarked. Mrs. Jennings, less certain of herself in this severe office with its stacks of papers and books and its general air of authority remained silent. She saw him pour out whiskey — but she did not see what he dropped into one glass.

“You will join me, I am sure, in the exceptional circumstances of the morning. A whiskey will do you good.”

He did not wait for her answer, but carefully filled her glass with frothy soda-water.

“Your health, Mrs. Jennings,” he said, handing her the one and immediately taking his own.

They drank.

“Now,” he said presently, escorting her out, “you can tell the other ladies that your suspicions were unfounded. I am sure you are generous enough to do that.”

He threw a swift glance at her. It was not his words that were softening her.

“Yes,” she said almost dully, as they came up to Mrs. Mandrell and the others. “Once again Mr. Denning is right, and I am wrong. He has shown me his papers.”

The Commissioner smiled.

“I think you will have no trouble at all in the settlement. The trouble ‘s on the other side. I can guarantee it.”

He waved his hand and marched down to the jetty. He was crossing too. Everything was ready.

CHAPTER XXIV

“READY — give way,” shouted the chief boat-officer, as the last gig received its full quota of men.

The leading gig, in which was seated Mr. Denning, swung out into the stream, the gigmen bending to their work and bringing every muscle of their sinewy brown bodies into play. The other volunteer gigs belonging to the settlement were already slowly rowing just outside the line of hulks, waiting for this main contingent to come up. As at last the nine boats came together, all began rowing a will; and this imposing display of strength brought from the *bund* and the jetties rousing cheers to speed them on their way and carry them good luck. Mr. Denning, now smiling, turned and looked back and waved his helmet; and, because he sat there looking back, all the others did so too.

The receding settlement, hemmed in by the great native city, was a curious sight just then. The clean-swept band was dotted with sparse groups of men, women, and children, now dispersed from the central rallying-point, since there was no local danger, had resolved into family units. Dressed in white duck, and forming a sharp contrast to their blue-coated servants, who stood clustering around them, all seemed to be standing and gazing at the disappearing boats much as those who are marooned gaze at those who abandon them. The comforts of the solid, spacious houses standing behind these exiles in the handsome tree-grown compounds seemed of little account just then; the dominant note was the strange and utter weakness of their position. To vary the simile, they lived in a little oasis surrounded on every side by a great yellow desert; and if they thrived and

prospered in ordinary times, it was because the desert was benignant and threw up no cruel sand storms to blind them. To plant them thus, for mere purposes of buying and selling along coasts and river, had been an audacious policy; that it had been crowned with success seemed just now an irony rather than a matter for jubilation. All prospered to grow sallow and sick; for, being mere exotics, they could not expect to flourish without paying a heavy toll. The health which they brought with them from more vigorous climes sufficed, perhaps, to allow many to live the allotted span; yet that very fact was unimportant, since their impact on the mass was virtually nothing, and always did they remain ex-posed to dangers such as this morning had brought.

“And look at the native mass,” thought strange, dreaming Mr. Denning — “what a great, curious, fetid, yet prospering mass it is!” He could not keep his eyes away, though they were swiftly leaving the scene behind them. He looked, he looked, he looked… .

Far out in the stream the shore now presented a panorama as pregnant with meaning as it was dramatic with possibilities. The European settlement had now shrunk to a little half-a-mile oasis, hemmed in on both sides by the native city, which climbed far back into the

country and seemed capable of precipitating by a single effort this intruder over the water's edge into the yellow water. The city was alive with myriads of the blue-coated populace. They were clustering in dense crowds all along the waterfront, observing this little fleet of disappearing boats in one great, curious, motionless stare; they were standing on every house-top, still trying to explain to one another the harsh alarm of the signal gun; and doubtless they were choking every unseen street, the riot-rumour running high, and, because of the gun Powder flashes, making a myriad other rumours, always merely somnolent, become suddenly living, throbbing, solemn,

gospel truths. Restrained from overflooding the settlement by the feeble wicket-gates and by the discipline of accepted facts, the crowds contemplated with that strangely mingled Eastern curiosity and satisfaction this sudden interruption of the normal currents of life, all being prepared to sink back once more into somnolence, or to flame suddenly into war, just as tilting fortune might decree.

"Pretty heavy crowds, sir," said the chief boat-officer, turning for a moment, and sweeping with his eyes the distant scene.

The Commissioner nodded abruptly and turned at once. He was vexed, as he always was, if anyone invaded the privacy of his dreams. And he did not want anyone to suspect what he was always dreaming of.

"Give way, give way," growled the boat-officer in a different tone to his men, noticing the subtle reproof.

The men lengthened their pull a bit, and brought home their oars more sharply. The boat leaped forward, and the swirling current hissed. They were now approaching mid-stream, where the giant river is a domineering master, and shows his huge strength in a flood-like progress. The sweating oarsmen wrestled with this giant, as they had wrestled since childhood, when their mothers, holding them by their little pig-tails, had laughingly watched them begin to tug with their elders at the great junk-sweeps. *Runt, runt*, sang the rowlocks in the blazing sunlight — *runt, runt, runt, runt;* it was a long pull and a great pull to cross the river in such hot ungracious haste, and the little quota of armed Europeans in each boat watched with increasing respect the vast efforts of the gigmen.

Slowly, very slowly, they conquered the current; slowly, very slowly, the opposite bank grew up; but the bank was only being won at great cost. Their light keels had been swept far down-stream, and the forest of junk-masts which

their destination had merely shifted its position, still remaining a vague blur against the brown river-bank.

Hand me the glasses, I would like to understand how things are before we get in any

closer," said the Commissioner, putting out his hand for them.

He fixed them on the great fleet of anchored junks and looked long and carefully. The others in his boat, who ever since they had started had been using them continuously, sat silently awaiting his verdict.

"As far as I can make out," said Mr. Denning at last, "they have cut through the dyke and the water must be pouring in. But there are so many figures, and the junk-masts are so thick, that I cannot say. How long shall we take to pull up to them, hugging the bank?"

The boat-officer looked at the current and looked at his men. Then he measured the distance with his eye, and suddenly shook his head.

"Can't do it under thirty or forty minutes, sir," he said apologetically. "The current is tugging hard today, there must have been freshets higher up. The men are beginning to feel it badly."

"Thirty or forty minutes," exclaimed the Commissioner, now frowning and taking the glasses again. "We must hurry, no matter how much it exhausts the men."

He began speaking rapidly in the vernacular; and as the stroke half turned in his seat and gave a short call, the men bending to their work made the boat shoot forward more rapidly.

The boat-officer shook his head.

"Can't keep that pace up," he muttered. He was an old salt himself and knew what miles of current-tugging mean. The men had rowed like demons at the start; but even their hardy frames and iron arms were now breaking under the strain. The boat-officer had long been noting what the

Commissioner did not see — that though the oars bit the water sharply, they were no longer pulled through strongly. The rowlocks snapped as loud as ever, but that was an old trick, which set him smiling. The men were using that trick to hide their fatigue.

Fortunately at last they were gaining the opposite shore and the current was here losing something of its fierce swirl. A curve of the brown river-bank at length shielded them, and in the comparative slack water the boat-officer with a sigh of relief put over the rudder. Now, protected by the river-bank, they began stealing upstream with the inhabitants of meandering villages silently contemplating them, and the black water-buffaloes slushing out of the water in frantic dismay. Tall reeds soon obscured their view of everything save their immediate surroundings, and a sudden silence fell on all.

The Commissioner breathed deeply, as he marked familiar villages. Nearly two miles of

pulling — they might do it in twenty-five minutes. And so in silence the gigmen fought their way on.

At last, suddenly and somewhat unexpectedly they rounded a curve and there lay the anchored junk fleet in full and easy view.

“Hullo!” said the Commissioner, who had the glasses again. He stood up and balanced himself. “What ‘s that in the water?” he exclaimed excitedly after a few more seconds. “Head for it, man, head for it!”

The gig swerved in nearer the bank, and two arms rose out of the muddy waters and waved.

“Who is it, who is it?” The exclamation passed like wildfire from lip to lip, but it was impossible yet to say. The excitement which had died down in the interval again suddenly rose ; something tragic had already happened — that seemed clear.

“Please keep your seats and trim the boat, gentlemen,” grumbled the boat-officer, himself standing up with his legs far apart and the rudder-lines ion his hand.

But everybody was too excited to mind him. The Commissioner and three or fourothers were talking rapidly. Young Thompson, the keen-eyed sportsman, had seized the glasses and now suddenly called out.

“It ‘s Harland— young Harland, I’ll swear — but he’s so ugly with mud and blood that you can hardly make him out. God! they must have hammered him!”

The boat rushed nearer into the shallow water, the gigmen forgetting their fatigue in this new sensation.

“Hullo! Is that you, Harland?” bellowed the Commissioner in an enormous voice.

“Yes,” answered a very small voice, and the muddy figure languidly approached, half swimming.

“Stay where you are, man,” shouted the Commissioner, waving to him.

“Way enough,” called the boat-officer, standing up again with the rudder-lines in his hands. The bow-man shipped his oar and mechanically grasped a boat-hook as he heard the call.

“Look out for your oars,” growled the boat-officer once more, as the boat floated up to the unfortunate man.

It was indeed young Harland, much exhausted. He paddled himself to the outstretched boat-hook and seized it; the boat-hook was passed from hand to hand, and in the stern-sheets he was lifted aboard. There he sat gasping, the veriest picture of distress. Behind, the fleet of gigs which had been closely following in the track of the Commissioner's boat clustered thickly. Somehow it was oddly like a fleet of fishing-boats massed together to survey some curious marine find.

"Not much hurt, I hope, Dr. Harland," said the Corn-

missioner, as young Thompson and the little Dr. Woodman tore up handkerchiefs and commenced tying an ugly cut on his head.

"Not so much hurt as chilled through and through until I feel as cold as death," murmured the victim, as they stripped off his slimy clothing.

"God! what a mess!" muttered the boat-officer involuntarily, as a singlet disgorged mud and weeds.

Now the young man took a long pull at the whiskey-flask which was pressed on him; and as willing hands pummelled him and warmed him, his ashen colour gradually fled. The boats were speeding on once more; and as the poor victim looked ahead and saw the junk-fleet loom up nearer and nearer, the approaching shock of battle was sufficient to complete his recovery. He began detailing rapidly what had occurred, the whiskey and the surrounding excitement bringing back half-forgotten and picturesque American college-talk and making him gesticulate and laugh hysterically:

"It happened all suddenly. Old man Spike was on top of the dyke talking and waving his arms and trying to jolly them, I should guess, but I was down at the other end all alone giving 'em plain heart-to-heart talk. Gee, how I talked! You know, I am nervous with my classes—only been out here a year and a half, and haven't got a proper hang of the tones and rhythm and all that stuff. But I forgot all that this morning. Said I would hurt them if they didn't shift quick— told 'em straight I would pull a gun on them if they moved a foot up our dirt-heap. That held 'em fixed for quite a spell, but those boys were too all-fired to play patience. They began moving towards me, Indian fashion — tricky, you know — in twos and threes, calling all the time it was not going to be a show-down, only just a confab. The mix-up started so quick, I don't know what happened, except that I did pull my gun and got one man fair.

Then they rushed me, and we rolled down the bank, and I slipped into the water whilst they were handing it to me all the time. By gum, I thought I was done for, sure — one man used a pole. But they let me splash away at last. Pretty dead I felt, but a man has a lot of life in him, for all that. And so the current pulled me downstream to where you found me. That 's about all."

He shook his head wearily and made a convulsive gesture, as his audience murmured sympathy.

Young Thompson now took up the tale, and his slang was purely British. A wisp of snipe rushing suddenly out of the reed-grown bank seemed to lend point to his words.

“Cheer up, my hearty! We’ll pump lead into them all right and pay them back!” He patted his fowling-piece and young Harland alternately, soon slipping in cartridges. “On the back, you know, that ‘s where I shall give it — good old checker-board work. Going to get back a little of my own, for the trouble they give one nowadays when one ‘s out after the duck. Last week some villagers tried to hammer me, damn ‘em, because I mixed up their decoys. This time I get back on all!”

He stood up in the boat and shouted back to the next gig:

“Gresham, Pudsey! Buck-shot for the beggars! Load up and pass the word along. No conciliation!”

The Commissioner, frowning heavily, said nothing. Matters had long passed beyond his control, and he was secretly sick at heart. The broiling sun, beating down on the river, completed his misery, for he was very hot and very tired. In growing distress, in growing gloom, he awaited the end.
They were coming up fast now to the great fleet of junks, and could see plainly now that they were entirely deserted. But what was happening inside the dyke was still hidden from view. Only the great breach which had been made

was visible with the water pouring sweepingly in. The outlook was ominous from every point of view.

“What price turning a few men on to the junks and up anchoring and towing out as many as possible!” hilariously shouted young Thompson, now joyous with the near prospect of battle. “Serve ‘em damn well right if they lose their old tubs, some of them.”

The boat-officer rose suddenly to his feet, but it was not at young Thompson’s words. His keen naval eyes had seen what nobody else had noticed.

“Smoke, sir,” he said abruptly to the Commissioner. “What!” exclaimed the Commissioner, half rising.

A faint roar of voices reached them.

“They are firing the mission,” called everybody from boat to boat.

“Here, you son of Han,” cried young Thompson, deliriously tearing off his white duck patrol-jacket and plunging forward. “Let me stroke this boat. I’II drive her. God! we need every second.”

He jumped over the oar, seized it, and commenced pulling like a madman. For the first whisk of smoke had magically thickened; more blew up from other spots, it turned jet-black; it spread in the sky like a pall. The mission was being completely fired — the rescue was just a few minutes too late… .

Paul Hancock had started with scant loss of time, after his scene with Mr. Grey. He had rushed up to Ainsley Simon, exchanged a hurried word with the sick man, convinced him that there was no fear for their property, and then, hardly remembering his sun-helmet, hastened to the chair-shed. Promising the coolies a liberal reward if they excelled themselves, he had at once started on his perilous mission with nothing but a feeble walking-stick in his hands.

He had no idea what he was going to do — he could not even make up his mind whether he should cross the river at once or first go to the settlement. He was unutterably confused, it was impossible to think clearly. But as he sat in the light sedan-chair, with his nerves tingling and the palate of his mouth strangely dry, he slowly remembered all the horrible stories he had once heard about Chinese riots and rebellions long before he had ever thought of coming out to this country. They had lain forgotten in his mind — fantastic things concocted from the whispered narratives of previous victims. They had seemed too impossible to be really true, they had been banished from his mind.

But today, just now, at this crisis, they fell suddenly far short of what was possible — anything had somehow become possible in this land of ugly distances which make men mad. Some sinister Fate, rearing itself unexpectedly, seemed to be able to cast at will great black shadows over the land, to infect the entire populace with the fever of hysteria, to banish to some spot millions of miles away that vast common-sense, that acute philosophy, that strange rationalism, that *savoir vivre*, which in ordinary days were so abundantly manifest and which made life glide so pleasantly by. He could not explain it, he did not attempt to explain it, he did not want to explain it: he was merely at once stupefied and galvanized by this new knowledge which was so old — that the impossible was really at times possible, and that that strange political psychosis, later crudely named Boxerism, was an ever-present, somnolent force, inherently possessed of miraculous potentialities.

“Hysteria, hysteria, hysteria.” He repeated the word aloud, it so fascinated him. It was a hysteria which turned life inside out as if it were a garment, and mocked at everything just because the experience of ten thousand years proved that such mocking was mere midsummer madness. The

sweating back of the chair-coolie striding rapidly before him seemed to reflect the word back to him fantastically, as if the man's flesh had become a mere looking-glass on which to reflect a nation's faults. Yes, yes, it was true, eternally true: every man of them had in him the germ of that hysteria; it could burst forth suddenly into malignant life for reasons which no scientist could yet explain…

And then his heart almost stopped beating as he thought of what wretches sometimes did in this land to defenceless women; and then, with that thought, his pale face set as if it had been turned to stone. Virginia Bayswater — would she be touched? …

"Quick, quick! " he now muttered unceasingly to the panting men in their raucous language; and the chair swept on as if it itself were a living thing racing for dear life. The shimmering landscape, dancing before his eyes, contained familiar objects which had become unfamiliar to him; and the scattered toilers in the rice-fields were suddenly hateful to him.

Onward raced the chair at seven miles an hour — yes, he was sure they were doing that and perhaps even more; for the men were moving with that miraculous jog-step which annihilates distances and which is surely the supreme test of lung and limb. What machinery these men were in spite of their faults, what matchless human machinery to work in a shade temperature of 100º and a sun-strength of 145º!, And in this strange, mad fashion the country between the mission and the river flicked away and the river was reached.

He had not known what he should do, but before he could speak his men decided it for him. They headed, as of old, for the city gate; they passed the city gate, they were in the narrow crowded streets, when a rush caused them to stop and cry sharp protests. Paul leaned out of his chair to see what

it was. The thing always remained in his mind as if it had been burnt in by acid.

A Roman Catholic priest, from the Catholic Mission in the city, in black cassock and white sun-helmet, was half running, half walking before an unruly crowd that came down the street and plucked at him. The priest pulled himself free again and again from this insolent plucking and fled on, with the crowd baiting him and roaring its taunts. Suddenly he gained what appeared to be a blank wall. He flung himself against it, pressed something, a narrow aperture opened; he passed through like a shadow; the door clicked and there was the blank wall again. The crowd roared as if they had been stag-chasing, for the stag had evaded them. That was the way these priests had protected themselves against persecution during hundreds of years when they had been banned and proscribed — and still thrived.

"Turn, turn!" called Paul, who had witnessed this scene in paralyzed silence; and his men turned and almost fled with the chair.

In very few seconds they were beyond the city again and in the open country.

“To the river, to the river!” he called, and to the river they hastened. Hardly had the men set the chair down than he jumped to a mud landing-stage and sought for a boat.

There were two little boats there, but their owners eyed him insolently.

“How much to cross the river?” he cried.

The men laughed back.

“No one crosses today,” they said.

“No one, shouted Paul, pulling silver dollars from his pocket, not for ten dollars!”

The men rose with staring eyes.

“Come,” they said.

CHAPTER XXV

MEANWHILE in the devoted mission every slow minute that had passed had seen the confusion and the panic increase. The inmates, their converts, their pupils, all huddled together round Dr. Spike's house, now presented the pitiful appearance of a great flock of frightened and bedraggled sheep surrounded by myriads of fierce wolves. "Oh, why are we abandoned?" they moaned, as countless other unfortunates have moaned before them. "Oh, how has this happened?" sobbed others who had been overwhelmed from the beginning that they had not seen that everything had happened most naturally.

For the junkmen, with the strange allies whose numbers were so magically increasing, as the whole countryside boldly swarmed in, had now advanced with much shouting and confusion in great ragged bodies, splashing through the muddy water which was fast filling the lower end of the compound and waving their mattocks and their hoes in a menacing fashion. They shouted, they shouted, they shouted; and the populace, hearing them shouting, shouted back. And so the confusion grew and grew.

Yet no one of all these myriads had any clear idea of what they should do. Though their passions had been inflamed, and their ever-present enmity against these foreigners had settled down into fierce open anger because it had not been ,promptly checked, there was an Eastern *pliancy* even in their present excitement which a clever man could have utilized with surprising results. But the mission, unfortunately, had ‘ no clever men. All, from old Dr. Spike downwards, knew. nothing, really nothing, about Orientalism, in spite of their

long decades in the country, in spite of their avowed mission in life, in spite of the books which many of them had written to explain the Eastern mind to the Western. All had become by a few hammer-strokes mere timid men in fear of their lives, with all their surface knowledge totally submerged.

Miss Virginia Bayswater, who alone had kept her head, instinctively understood this, and because she understood it she silently wept. She wept also because, in a supreme moment such as this, instinctively the severe limitations of her sex — the special menace to her sex —struck at her very heart and almost stopped her breathing. She hated with a wild hatred the malignant fate which marks down half the human race as prey to the other half, where heat tends to make animalism supreme. As she heard the dreadful cries, as she glanced in her acute agony over the sea of heads, she tried vainly to make herself believe that the rescue must be really coming, and that this thick, sweating, panting humanity would soon be dispersed.

"Oh, Judy," she sobbed to Miss Moss, "our messengers must have been all caught, because otherwise they would never have abandoned us like this. Oh, Judy!"

“Don’t, Virginia,” wept the younger girl, “don’t you break down. You are the bravest of us all, you have never lost heart, Virginia! Virginia! They are going to try again to stop them.”

For Dr. Moss had at last made up his mind that they must agree to anything to save the mission. He had climbed up a ladder from the lower verandah of the house, and, waving and shouting to the junkmen, he invited them to push their way through and listen to him. Then, to cap this, on an inspiration, he held up a big white handkerchief; and the crowds, fascinated for a moment by this unknown emblem of surrender, buzzed its comments and stopped its swaying and pushing to gaze its fill. But that novelty was soon ex-

hausted and only a few minutes had been gained. The junk. men had indeed advanced, but they were suspicious and shouted refusals to any parleying.

“Come, come, come, come,” roared Dr. Moss desperately. “All will be settled. The mission itself will build your tow-path, the mission will compensate you.”

“We will not talk,” shouted back the junkmen.

Dr. Moss, feeling more than seeing how the pressure from the sea of people was increasing, renewed his calling and his promises. Alas! It was no good! Each man, relying on his neighbours to shield him, was trying to edge nearer. The little house was completely surrounded, and the crowds extended for hundreds of paces in every direction. They were hesitating for the last time… . Only a miracle could save n appalling disaster… .

Perhaps every one of the devoted band had been praying for a miracle, for just then a most strange thing occurred which caused the pressure to be relaxed. This is what happened.

Dr. Spike’s house stood quite detached and some distance away from the main group of residences. These had all been completely abandoned. But now the figures of two boys, mud-stained and half-naked, had suddenly appeared at one of the back-windows. These marauders were so interested in their work that they did not see how they were being observed. In full view of this great audience they were calmly throwing everything they could see into a big sheet they had torn from a bed. The looting had commenced… .

The roar the crowd sent up, and the great stampede it made in this direction, brought the startled faces of these two boys for an instant to the window, only immediately to disappear. Being discovered, they had instantly fled with what booty they had already gathered.

Now, with one voice the mob suddenly shouted, “*Ch’iang*,

ch’iang — Let us rob, let us rob”; and in indescribable confusion they rushed away in a

mighty wave, tripping each other up, beating each other down, in their new mad haste to share in the spoils. As those behind saw that nothing would be left for them where the first were running, they spread out instinctively like a fan, and included in their great sweep the school-houses, the storehouses, the native houses — every house. They would sack every building; they would pick this accursed place as clean as a bone. That they loudly proclaimed by their savage roars.

“Oh dear! oh dear!” sobbed Judy Moss. “I suppose it is better than their hurting us, but that all those wretches should take everything we have in the world for no reason is too cruel.”

But what she said was hardly audible. For now the converts, with that Chinese love for the most insignificant personal belongings which is so universal, were filling the air with their lamentations. Everything they owned would be taken, they cried; and so infuriated did some become at this prospect that they could hardly be restrained from rushing to protect their paltry goods and chattels in spite of all danger.

“Miss Virginia, Judy,” shouted Dr. Moss frantically, seeing their fury, “keep the women here, keep them here! Our only hope is to stand aside and let the mob wreak its vengeance on our houses.”

Vain hope, alas! For there was not enough even in that large mission to satisfy such frantic hordes. Hundreds of hands were at work in every house; every entrance was choked with struggling men. Brown faces and blue clothes danced at every window. Furniture was literally torn to pieces. A man captured a prize only to have it torn from him by a dozen others. An internecine warfare magically sprang up, not only between the different sections of the mob,

but between every man who had seized something and the dozens who had not. Becoming more and more infuriated as the grotesque struggle continued, it was clear that the mob would be satisfied with only one end.

It came suddenly. Some wretches finding a lower room entirely gutted, and seeing that escape over the verandah railings was easy, with mad cries seized matches, and tearing up the matting on the floor and flinging a lamp that was still standing where it had been left the night before on top, they set fire to what was nothing but a tinder-box in this baking climate. So swiftly did the flames leap up in the room that many in the rooms below had hardly time to escape. As for the luckless scoundrels above, some got the alarm only when the licking flames had already swept to the staircase; and so, pitching themselves down the verandah columns or creeping across to adjoining buildings, they were lucky to escape with broken bones.

It was fast becoming an inferno. For the mad fire-lust had spread, carried by the same men. Faster and faster they set fire to house after house, the confusion becoming worse

confounded, the pandemonium more terrible every moment.

“Let us kill and outrage them,” now yelled some, pointing back. “Let us kill and outrage,” repeated the mob. Blanched with terror, the women of the devoted missionary band fell on their knees.

Paul Hancock, running under cover of the mission wall, heard with sinking heart the terrible clamour which now arose. His large bribe had caused the truculent sampanmen to row him across the river as hard as they could; and they, had brought him to this opposite shore with a rapidity born of endless wrestling with the current. Jumping into the mud at a spot just above the masses of junks, he had run pantingly in the direction of the mission, hoping against hope.

Now, though the immensely high compound wall hid his view, he could no longer doubt it; violence was already being used… .

Too confused, too shocked, to know what he was doing, he ran blindly along under cover of the wall, seeking dog-like, by instinct more than by any exertion of his will, for some means of getting in. He knew that to go to the gates would defeat his own object. He would be caught by the mob; he must manage to get through the mob, and to do that he must clamber over this wall.

How was he to do it?

The wall was eighteen feet high, perhaps more. No one could hope to scale it without some help. He thought for a second that he would have to run back to his boatmen and supplicate help. But suddenly he realized that not only would their help be useless, but that they would refuse to give it. Alone, unaided, he must accomplish his task.

A tree — what a fool he had been not to see it before! But the tree stood back a little distance from the wall, and its longest branch scarcely overhung the wall. Yet he must attempt it, even if it killed him.

Quickly he ran to the tree and measured the distance. With luck, if he climbed up and then passed himself along an overhanging branch, he might just drop on top of the wall or he might not. He did not finish to think what would happen if he did not; but, pausing for a second or two to take breath, he jumped on to the trunk and soon with bleeding hands was hoisting his light wiry frame up. Thank God, he was so light, he thought; a heavyman, however strong, could never have done it. So, slowly and painfully, he lifted himself higher and higher, going more and more slowly as his breath and strength deserted him, and only managing to reach the first branches with his last gasp.

He paused a moment, and then lifted himself with a sob

astride of the branch that was to prove either his salvation or his damnation. Now for the first time he looked into the compound, and what he saw nerved him to attempt anything For though some houses partially cut off his view, though smoke was pouring up, he could see the water rushing through the damaged dyke, he could see great knots of people, he could see men still flinging things down from the windows of the houses.

With a silent prayer he crept along the branch, trying to diminish his weight by holding his breath ; and then, as it swayed lower and lower —

Crack went the branch, but *crack* full of the sap of life, and therefore breaking slowly and reluctantly and bringing him down on top of the wall with a blow not so full crud as it might have been. Yet he saw red and black and yellow and green, and the earth below waved to him in contempt. Still, always with his object in view, with the one purpose in his brain dominating him, mechanically he swung his poor hurt body to the right, clutched wildly at the coping, and dropped heavily into the compound, terribly bruised and yet not really maimed.

For an instant he lay huddled on the ground. Then he got on his knees like some wounded thing that has been beaten down by a hunter and looked up at the pitiless sky and the blinding sun, wondering what it meant.

“Merciful Heaven,” he muttered, as the blood trickled away, glad that he could even mutter. His helmet was gone, his strength was gone, his sense was nearly gone. Now only did he have his heart and stomach to sustain him; but though he sickened much, he still retained that resolution which from the beginning of time has swayed the fortunes of the world.

A minute passed in silent agony, and then the deathly sickness had passed too. Now rising, he crept quickly and silently towards the centre of the compound. Then rounding an out

house which had hid him, he saw the flames bursting from almost every building; and there quite near him, surprisingly near him, was the devoted band still surrounding Dr. Spike’s house. With a wild cry he abandoned all caution, and running with a mad swiftness which astonished him, at last he saw the figure he sought.

“Miss Bayswater,” he called, “Miss Bayswater, I have come, I have come.” Waving and calling, he ran and ran.

This bloody, muddy figure—could it be Paul Hancock? This phantom rushing into this nightmare—was it this young man again?

“Oh, Mr. Hancock!” sobbed Virginia Bayswater, her emotions overwhelming her, as he rushed through the blue-coated throng of converts, and she saw that it was really he—“oh,

Mr. Hancock!”

But he had forgotten her already, in his greater interest to save her. For he had heard the roar of shouts from the savage mob, he had heard the wailed words of the women converts as he had pushed through them, he had understood.

“Dr. Moss,” he cried, “there is no time to be lost, there is not a second. The women must be got in the house, the entrances must be defended — to the death, in any way they can. Dr. Moss, Dr. Moss — “

Now he backed his words with his hands. Others helped him. They forced the women, all else forgotten in this hideous menace, into the house. They shut every entrance on them, in spite of their pleas not to be separated; and the crowd, seeing and understanding this confused movement, jeered and roared all the louder. Now they swept once more forward in mighty waves of reeking humanity, calling hideously that if they could not possess the women they would burn them, that they would smell their flesh if they could not enjoy it …

The men tried to beat them back, but the ruffians among

the mob were too numerous. Now they swarmed on to the verandah, crushing back by weight of numbers and superior strength the resistance, flinging down men and then passing over them because they were filled with other thoughts. They had been turned by this insane struggle into mere lustful brutes, and now their hands were tearing open the very doors and windows. A wretch darted in, but was struck down; a dozen others took his place; their hands feverishly plucked at the women. The women swooning and screaming, the pandemonium more hideous than hell, all honour about to flee, when —

A new shouting arose, and then suddenly came the good, honest crack of guns, cracking flatly in the distance, but rounding quickly, as the guns ran nearer. For the shooting was the shooting of young sportsmen, now racing against one another with grim intent and firing into the brown mass faster and faster, as the yells increased and the knowledge deepened in them that they might yet be too late.

Bang, bang, right and left — *bang, bang, bang!* Almost miraculously the sounds rushed nearer and nearer, like a fire racing across a tinder-dry prairie. The bulky crowd now swayed like a storm-blown forest, each man seeking to escape, yet impeding by his frantic jostling that coward movement. Only on the outskirts could men run freely, and run then they did, like madmen. The others crushed together, fell on top of one another, and insanely beat each other down.

“Into the brown!” came the voice of young Thompson in a last shriek, ” oosen ‘em out, the swine! Into the brown, into the brown!”

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! It was more than human nature could stand. The stampede grew, as more and more men, struck and bleeding with shot, added their shrieks to the confusion. At last only a few dozen remained on the verandah struggling with the mission men, who now sought

to make captives of these. Young Thompson clambered over the end of the verandah.

“Stand clear!” he yelled, and then at twenty feet he gave them the two last cartridges
.
“No more,” cried Dr. Moss, as Thompson dropped his gun and drew a revolver.

“No more,” he shouted back, convulsed with rage and sun-heat, as he saw signs which must not be written — “no more! We ought to string up the damned swine all round the compound and shoot into them.”

But now the mob was wildly retreating, and all danger gone. Tears of relief, cries of relief, alone resounded. In a few seconds the blazing houses, the wounded wretches who were too hurt to move, the great litter on the ground, and the water-laden swamp alone attested the nature of the drama which had so long occupied this stage.

Mr. Denning had come up together with the boat-crews in semi-military formation. He had already begun busily to superintend the saving of the houses. The central spot he did not approach — it was as if he suspected the sombre looks with which every one regarded him.

Virginia Bayswater, pale, dishevelled, yet now collected, saw him and, as she saw him, turned away. Then she went up to Paul.

“I shall always remember,” she faltered, “that it was you who gained for us the few minutes — the few minutes that were more to us than life —”

“No, no,” he protested.

But as their hands met, as she sobbed with shame, their eyes said what their lips feared to speak.

PART TWO
CHAPTER I

Some time had elapsed since the terrible mission attack; the affair, without being in any way forgotten, had graddually sunk into that background where the passage of time inevitably pushes all things. People referred to it occasionally, but they referred to it wearily, because such things have occurred often in China, and it is perhaps not good to talk of them too much. And then, in that steaming climate, death does not always appear undesirable — at least so some say.

One afternoon Mr. Simon and Mrs. Simon and Mr. Grey were sitting on the verandah much as they had sat so many months before on the first evening of Paul's arrival. They spoke only occasionally, and when they did speak they treated matters by inference rather than by any more direct method. All seemed on their guard, and all unusually depressed. In the distance, at the extreme end of the compound, some of the mission boys were mildly throwing an old tennis-ball from one to another in spasmodic outbursts of energy and then as suddenly stopping. They seemed very different from other boys. They seemed to be doing this because somebody had told them to do it, not because they really liked it; and presently, when they all mechanically clapped their hands at a, good catch, their applause was wholly unconvincing.

Mr. Simon watched them with a far-away look and at last got up, leaving Mrs. Simon alone with Mr. Grey. They had all been resting after their work, and incidentally discussing Paul Hancock's departure that very morning. And now that,

her husband had left her, Mrs. Simon gave vent to several things she had on her mind which she had been afraid to say before.

"Well", she said, " it is very fortunate anyway that he should have gone so willingly, very fortunate in many ways. Ever since the riot he has been developing in a manner no one who had met him so few months ago would possibly have expected. The way he maintains his views in the company of his elders is really surprising. And the way he ran off the day of the riot was disgraceful. Yet Ainsley has a weak spot for him, and if he had refused to go on that round of mission-visiting, Ainsley would not have insisted."

For several seconds Mr. Grey chuckled. Mr. Grey was seldom pleasant; today he was wholly detestable. Yet in spite of this, Mrs. Simon, long suspecting the vice to which he had surrendered himself, had first shielded him and then, when she was certain, had condoned the offence because it was the only thing she could do. It is marvelous how even an intelligent woman may blind herself into absolute belief in one man. Mrs. Simon was not even intelligent. So she listened with interest to Mr. Grey's reply.

“A few months on a *kuatzu* and in native inns will modify many of young Hancock’s views, I should imagine. I think it is generally admitted that the inns of this province are the dirtiest and most flea-bitten in the world. And beyond, in Yunnan, it is worse. Roughing it, when all is said and done, is the best way of making a man find his right level. It brings him down to hard, unpoetic facts.” That was what Mr. Grey said

“Of course,” Mrs. Simon went on, ruminating over a vague sense of injury which had long been growing in her, because everything had turned out differently from what she had first expected, “what has probably spoilt him has been his money. It is highly unfortunate that such a young man

should have so much. Ainsley says that the death of mother has left him with more thousands of pounds than he cares to name.”

Mr. Grey gave an angry snort:

“Because it was his money that completed my house and the schools, he seems to think that he is in a position of authority in this mission. It was a very lucky thing that I remembered his agreement and pushed Simon to hold him to it, especially with regard to the traveling clause. That was an ugly surprise! Well, when he comes back, he may find some additional surprises. Our strength will be considerably augmented, and this haphazard system of working an important station will be at an end. My brother is by no means to be trifled with, and he writes me that Howard, who is coming with him from Pangtzu, is a very autocratic sort of man.”

Mrs. Simon sat thinking and breathing heavily. She was very slow, both mentally and physically; and a new set of ideas always baffled her until she had thought over them long and ponderously.

“Do you think it was wise to get your brother Charles here?” she inquired, at last, not understanding at all how this would suit.

Mr. Grey appeared not to follow her, yet all the same he frowned heavily. Of all things in the world, he disliked reproof in any form the worst. Presently he spoke:

“Wise or not wise, it had to be. He insisted on getting transferred from the interior, and he made it one of his excuses that after years of separation he wanted to be near his dear brother George.”

Mr. Grey suddenly smiled sourly, as if he himself appreciated the sardonic humour of that.

“He will have to live with you — you will have to live side by side,” said Mrs. Simon slowly.

“That is quite undecided,” replied Mr. Grey with a peculiar smile which baffled her still more. “I am entitled to some consideration after my many years’ work, and” — he paused as his face acquired a new look — “I mean to get it. I shall even get, I hope, more consideration than anybody expects.”

A long interval elapsed before either spoke again, and that silence was more eloquent than speech. It told better than any, words the story of narrow lives, of a self-sufficient and ignorant gospel, of a clinging to smallnesses, and of many other poor and petty things.

At length Mrs. Simon, made uneasy by the shadow of some coming change, rose heavily and walked away; and Mr. Grey, left alone, leaned back in his cane-chair in open satisfaction.

Things were going well, everything was going to suit him, he thought. He had now arranged matters in such a fashion that he alone held the key to each separate little problem. He had never breathed a word about his duel of words with Paul on the morning of the riot; he had locked the secret of those detestable moments in his own bosom. Because he hated the young man, he had made up his mind, if he ever spoke his suspicions, to accuse him boldly of a number of things. But he knew in his heart of hearts that Paul would never speak, since that would bring up the subject of his special solicitude for Miss Virginia Bayswater, and her name imported into the controversy. Oh, yes, Mr. Grey was a clever man.

Nor had he ever said a word to Ainsley Simon about the dissatisfaction felt for his mission policy; he believed greatly in keeping his lips closed when that method helped him. He loved dissimulation of every sort it made him happy. Some men are born that way, and can only live and breathe in an atmosphere of hypocrisy; and Mr. Grey, after all, as all

scientists know, was only the creature of certain base antecedents. He was indeed the friend of no one save of his own person, he cared for nothing save that which affected his own future. If he read a book, it was not really for the sake of instruction or pleasure, but merely to see if it contained anything which he could turn to his own advantage. If he talked, it was only to pick people’s brains; and when he wished to accomplish a given end, he used both his evil tongue and his pen to bring that about.

Yet there were some people who believed in Mr. Grey, perhaps because among strangers he never lost an opportunity of proclaiming, if not the purity of his motives, at least the vast concern he felt for the welfare of mankind. In all truth he was a detestable man, and in his present vocation a living irony such as is seldom seen.

Meanwhile, though, as we have said, the great attack had become a very stale affair, certain aspects were gradually taking on firmer outlines. The joint court of inquiry, held by the consuls and territorial authorities, had proved conclusively that it was the junk-guilds

which had inspired and directed the whole business; but that did not diminish the dark suspicion that Mr. Denning had been in some vague way behind it all. Because he was more than friendly towards the tenets of the Mohammedan sects, this would have been held sufficient to give reasonable grounds for a less gossip-ridden community to murmur aloud its secret convictions. And as a safe sanctuary for gossips Wayway had few rivals in the world.

“A truly deplorable charge,” proclaimed Mrs. Barchet Grand sententiously, morning, noon, and night. And Mrs. Jennings, as soon as she heard that this lady had accepted true the theory she had herself been the first to put into circulation, formed a sudden and quite unexpected alliance with

her. The shock the whole affair had given to her nerves was so great that vengeance was really necessary. Each day that passed increased her determination really to solve the problem.

“Let us probe the matter to the bottom,” she had said repeatedly, “let us follow up every clue.” And Mrs. Barchet Grand having promptly agreed, their probing had become so conspicuous that Mr. Denning had suddenly disappeared, going ostensibly on a shooting-trip into the back country.

This sudden departure for a long time disconcerted these two excellent ladies, for it materially spoilt the nature of the game and they looked around them vainly in the hope of finding someone to comfort them. Mr. Denning had no friends in the place, his staff was very reticent, and it at last appeared that his very whereabouts must remain cloaked in mystery.

But one day Mrs. Jennings discovered that a young man she had talked to at his great garden-party had been seen with him two or three times in the past. She tried to remember the name of the young man, but she could not. Then suddenly she recollected that he was in the English Mission, and forthwith she proposed to Mrs. Barchet Grand that they should take their sedan chairs and call there one afternoon to see what that would bring forth. And so it happened that Mrs. Simon, as she made her way across the compound after her conversation with Mr. Grey, saw with some astonishment the to ladies being deposited by their chair-bearers in front of her house Quickly she hastened up to them.

“Good afternoon,” said Mrs. Jennings in her most ingratiating manner, “I am Mrs. Jennings and my friend is Mrs. Barchet Grand. What a nice compound you have got! Those trees must have been growing there before you established the mission were they not ?”

Whilst they went into the house, Mrs. Jennings continued

to talk on so amiably that she quite captivated Mrs. Simon. Mrs. Jennings, though she looked upon missionaries as people engaged in a queer and somewhat unbelievable business, clever enough not to show by word or look that she was not in entire sympathy with their aims and ambitions. And one of the reasons she was now so persistently talkative was the fear that Mrs. Barchet Grand, forgetting their especial object in coming so far, might suddenly bring up her pet subject, and destroy with one blow the good impression she was making.

“I suppose all your labours for the day are quite over by now,” she ended with a bright smile.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Simon heavily, “we finish our classes at four o’clock and then until the evening there is an interval of leisure.”

She branched off, telling a large number of uninteresting details in a careful manner, so that no impression of sloth should attach to the mission.

“And the gentlemen of the mission, are they out?” inquired Mrs. Jennings, using what she called the peculiar idiom which people in these parts. demanded.

“Oh, no,” said Mrs. Simon decidedly, “no, they are resting after their work.” She thought a little. “If you will excuse me a minute, I shall ask the servants to bring some tea.”

In the hall Mrs. Simon took a scrap of paper from a table and wrote on it. It consisted of one word, “Callers.” Now, having found somebody to carry it, she came back more easy in her mind and resumed the conversation.

“My husband will be here in a minute,” she said, “and I fancy Mr. Grey will not be long in following him.”

Mrs. Jennings murmured something unintelligible and looked suddenly puzzled. Mr. Grey — she was certain that was not the name. And whilst she was still wondering, the

Rev. Ainsley Simon came in, to be shortly followed by Mr. Grey.

“How many are you in the mission?” asked Mrs. Jennings after a pause, unable to restrain her curiosity any longer, as no one else came.

“We are four altogether for the time being,” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon smilingly.

“We are only three,” interjected Mr. Grey.

“Yes, three, Ainsley,” added Mrs. Simon in a marked manner.

Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Barchet Grand looked at one another. What did this curious conflict of statement imply?

“I ought to explain,” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon in his old manner, “that we have just lost the fourth member of the mission temporarily. He has gone on a round of the stations up-river. Every year it is customary for a member of this mission to go up-river into the wilds to the out stations.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Mrs. Jennings.

“Now really,” said Mrs. Barchet Grand.

“Mr. Hancock left this morning,” added Mrs. Simon.

“That was the name,” exclaimed Mrs. Jennings. “I knew I had met him at Mr. Denning’s garden-party: he was quite a friend of Mr. Denning’s, I believe.”

Mr. Grey suddenly smiled and became talkative.

“I don’t think he was so much in the end,” he ventured, “though at the beginning he appeared to disbelieve the stories about Mr. Denning.” Mr. Grey checked himself. Mrs. Simon had glanced at him warningly, and experience had taught him that Mrs. Simon’s looks were somehow useful.

“Ah, the stories about Mr. Denning — you have heard them at the mission.”

Mrs. Jennings was smiling so intimately at Mr. Grey that Mr. Grey could not restrain himself any longer.

“I have known for some time from our catechists that Mr. Denning had strong leanings towards Mohammedanism and I fear now that he has completely succumbed.”

“Really.”

“He has gone up into the Mohammedan country, you know.”

“I didn’t know it,” said Mrs. Jennings, now not seeking to hide her interest, “and the whole community is anxious to know.”

“Are you sure?” said the Rev. Ainsley Simon, turning much surprised towards Mr. Grey. Mrs. Simon was equally astonished at this sudden knowledge about Mr. Denning’s movements; and now some other feeling mixed with her astonishment. What did this mean? Paul Hancock must pass right through the heart of the Mohammedan country.

Mr. Grey, suddenly become the centre of interest, showed no embarrassment.

“I am quite sure about Mr. Denning,” he said. “I knew he had gone up-river; and I heard just a week ago from native sources that he had landed at Ting-ling. That is the nearest route to Yunnan — the great Mohammedan centres, you know.”

“Dear me,” exclaimed Mrs. Barchet Grand, “that is most interesting. And what do you suppose is Mr. Denning’s object in going there?”

“I do not know, I can only surmise,” said Mr. Grey carefully.

“And what do you surmise?” put in Mrs. Jennings, looking at him sweetly.

“That there will be trouble — great rising perhaps,” said Mr. Grey slowly.

The Rev. Ainsley Simon was still frowning heavily when Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Barchet Grand, much satisfied with the result of their visit though they had not seen the young man they had come to see, made their departure. When he had seen the ladies to their chairs, he came back at once to Mr. Grey.

“If you had mentioned that this morning, Grey,” he said severely, “I should have never let young Hancock go.

“Why?” inquired Mr. Grey with well-feigned astonishment.

“Because there is danger to the boy if what you say is correct — because we should not let him run his head into danger. In a month he will be in Yunnan.”

Mr. Grey did not answer, but as he walked across the compound there was a peculiar smile on his face which was not good to see. He knew that it was too late to act, since no danger would make Paul Hancock return. Was he not a quixotic fool?

Mr. Grey soon banished him from his mind. He was at last free to concentrate himself on a most important piece of work. Victory seemed in sight.

CHAPTER II

THAT same morning Paul had stood unsuspectingly in silent contemplation of the mud-coloured boat which was to carry him on his travels. The craft was only thirty feet long and five feet broad, and as to accommodation, it boasted of single diminutive covered house amidships, where there would be just room for him to make his bed by night and sit upright by day. The covered stern sufficed for the crew, and in this close proximity for many days he and they would live and have their being. The boat had but one mast, chiefly to be used for the towing, but also furnished with a small lug-sail to be hoisted should the wind be directly aft. That was the boat.

It was very primitive, thought Paul, still only half used to the primitive East, still filled with gloomy memories of this river. And he was going blindly in it towards the unknown, because his contract, which he had never even read, stipulated that he should travel anywhere that was necessary, and because Mr. Grey had remembered his contract. What an irony! Then, as if to give himself courage, he smiled at his forebodings and suddenly marched firmly across the gang-plank. Though he suspected nothing, the rough boarding was somehow not unlike that grim historic plank on which cruel marauders once forced their luckless victims blindly into the sea… .

There was no one to bid him good-bye, no one to speed him on his long journey up the endless windings of this vast river; and though he professed to himself that he was indifferent, his stout heart suddenly ached anew as he seated himself on the roof of the diminutive house and tried to think that he did not mind. Yet he knew very well that everything had gone

wrong from the beginning, that the great problem had become more hopeless than ever.

“Come on, little Wang,” he called sharply to the little village boy who had become his faithful slave, and who, now almost in a frenzy of delight because this foreigner had made himself his master, was showing his new authority by loudly haranguing some grinning coolies on the bank. “Come on, little Wang,” he repeated in the vernacular, “hurry, or I shall leave you behind.”

Thus adjured, little Wang, suddenly affrighted, scampered on board. Soon the boatmen cast off; the tracking-rope, secured to the backs of a distant group of half-naked trackers, pulled taut; and they had swung free to the guttural comments of an inquisitive crowd. Now the ochre-coloured river raced and pulled at them, as the great rudder swung them slowly out and the trackers’ rope hoisted them forward; and soon, though it did not seem true, they began to make head-way at the monotonous rate of two knots an hour.

As the trackers, with their heads down and their bodies swinging rhythmically from side to

side, stamped their way forward, gradually behind them the little European settlement, the teeming, noisome city, the meandering anchorage of great trading-junks, the old river-hulks, the green weeping-willow trees — all these things slipped away and soon became blurred. Yes, they were truly off… .

Paul fetched a great sigh and now stood erect. There across the great river lay the American Mission, its charred buildings still unrestored, but now crowded with many ant-like figures engaged on the work of rebuilding. Yes, they were working hard at the rebuilding, working as quickly as men could be driven to work by the promise of good pay. The indemnities, already secured from a panic-stricken native officialdom — an officialdom perennially willing to purchase relief from such perplexities in hard silver — would soon

cause the wreckage made by a deluded peasantry to vanish. In a few months all signs of that terrible day's adventure would be removed, and the life of the mission would proceed as as tranquilly towards its appointed end as if nothing had ever occurred to disturb it. Already, owing to the inherent indifferentism of the East, he recognized that the affair had somehow faded to nothing more than a slight memory; soon it would be entirely forgotten.

"Good-bye," he murmured to the place, though all its inmates had long fled. "Good-bye," he whispered, thinking only of Virginia Bayswater, who had gone with the rest. Then, as the tracking-rope drew him reluctantly onwards and pushed the scene farther and farther into the background, he turned and seated himself once more.

He must steel himself, he thought for the hundredth time, against all such emotion as was now welling up within him; he was going on a long and distant journey and the future was a closed book. It was no use to worry or repine, it was no use to dream of what might have been had his imagination been the sole architect of his fortunes. He had elected of his own free will to follow this peculiar life, no one had persuaded him to it. He had believed in his own inspiration, and his inspiration had proved, after less than a year, to be nothing but a stripling's dream.

Suddenly he checked himself with a frown. He remembered what he had said to Mr. Simon when Mr. Simon lay sick and his loyalty to him demanded a last great effort Yes, yes. This was no way for a man to act. He had serious work to attend to— to travel right round a distant chain of stations and bring to them the cases which loaded his boat so deep. He had many weeks of hard traveling ahead of him, many weeks of solitude. Who knew indeed what the future promised?

And yet —

He clasped his lean brown hands and closed his eyes as his imagination suddenly upbraided him once more for not having been bolder with this woman who had somehow

crept into his life. She would have made it seem better — he was sure of that. Why had he not, before she had left, before she had bidden him that last tearful farewell in the presence of all her watchful companions in misfortune, gathered on board the old paddle-wheel steamer, — why, then, had he not spoken, why had he not said something to her which would have bidden her remember him until he returned?

Why—he did not know why!

Something had failed him — perhaps because he had steeled himself from boyhood to be so reserved. He had not had the assurance, the courage. Perhaps he feared not so much her possible displeasure as the shattering of his dreams, the tearing of that fine gossamer-web which he had always the power to weave and reweave by day and by night and which gave him such infinite pleasure. Yes, that was what he feared, that was what he had secretly feared all his life — not any mortal thing, but rather the breaking and ruin of his dreams, those dreams which he so dearly loved. Dreams from their very nature are always Damoclean — a single hair alone keeps the keen-edged sword of common life from cutting them to the ground — and that is what he knew. Dreams illustrate in a thousand ways the insecurity of human happiness; they are the great idealized Might-have-beens which can never be true in entirety. That is why he had remained silent. His dreams gave him sweet comfort, a sense of companionship; and that as a sweet sense. When this voyage was over, perhaps he would see more clearly, perhaps then he would know if he might speak

Suddenly, made almost happy, he opened his eyes and with a rapid movement unclasped his hands. Unobserved, the little boy had been watching him anxiously out of the corner

of his eyes, watching him with an animal-like patience, determined not to disturb him, though he was wrestling with a fierce desire for speech. Now, seeing that his master had looked up, he glided up to him and touched him on the arm.

“Rafts, master,” he muttered excitedly in his small guttural voice, pointing with his brown hand —“great rafts from the top of the river whither we journey.”

With an exclamation Paul rose to his feet.

They had rounded a bend, and the familiar landscape the cities of men had totally disappeared. The river now opened out in a vast expanse of tranquil yet swiftly flowing waters, hardly specked with the sails of a single craft, so broad as almost to hide the opposite bank — a veritable sea, a world of waters, coming from the unknown, and proceeding with tranquil assurance on a great journey which would only end at the Yellow Sea itself a thousand miles away.

Their boat appeared quite alone, abandoned to the sole care of mother Nature. Their boat was climbing up-stream, like one who is afraid, close to the bank, held like a child in

leading-strings by the trackers' rope. But far ahead of them, boldly swimming right in the centre of the stream, and looking at first like great, unreal floating islands — thrown here by some mirage — were two giant rafts, only carried imperceptibly forward by the current which rushed by their great bulk scarce able to move them. Smoke was rising from each raft in thin spirals, proclaiming the existence on these floating islands of large villages; for the rafts would have to travel just like this for many months before they would reach their destination and be broken up.

Onward and onward came the two giants, ever nearer nearer, though they moved so imperceptibly; and presently from each set forth boats, carrying with them giant sea-anchors of bamboo and matting that looked like broken kites salvaged by the boatmen from the muddy flood. Swiftly the

boats rowed away mid-stream until they had become mere specks There at last, dropping these strange-looking things into the bosom of the river, they made haste to return to the mother-craft. Only half understanding the explanations which were poured on him, Paul awaited the upshot of this unexpected development in ever-increasing curiosity. He could now see the men massing in dense blue knots far forward on the rafts, but beyond that he understood nothing.

Drum, drum, drum…

The rude sounds suddenly floated in the air louder and louder, as the helmsman of each raft beat a quick measure on a great drum to mark time.

Now he understood. The many dozens of strong arms had been assembled to man capstans — they had already commenced to work them. And now stamp, stamp, stamp, with their plaintive river-choruses faintly audible in the still air, the capstan crews were winding in, as cotton is wound on a reel, the stout bamboo hawsers which bound each raft to her sea-anchor. Slowly, oh, so slowly, as if *feeling* the whole huge weight of the unwieldly rafts on their very arms, the capstan crews worked, imperceptibly moving each raft nearer mid-stream and therefore away from the dangerous, out-jutting bank which seemed to stretch out, hoping to hold them prisoners for many a long day had they not a great care.

Drum, drum, drum, more sharply now, as the leadsman, heaving no lead, but wielding a great length of iron-bound bamboo, plunges down his measure into the river and marks how the waters shoal.

Drum, drum, drum. "Quick, quick, quick," calls the insistent drum, speaking with almost human voice. "Exert yourselves, sweat yourselves in hot haste, or else we ground, for here the river races beneath the surface and is dragging us in." … .

And so, more willing arms being impressed, the capstans turn quicker and quicker, and the

sea-anchors, gripping the water deep and firm, haul the giants steadily out of danger. Seeing which, Paul's boatmen talk, as they squat on their haunches, and watch with Eastern impassivity.

"Good Hunan timber," grunted one; "they will not hurry so much when they hear how prices have fallen."

"Fallen!" exclaimed another scornfully; "who says Hunan timber has fallen?"

"Yesterday I heard it," said the first man, "there is this year a glut; for ten days have we not been watching the rafts arrive?" And so they talked, always talking about markets and prices, always concerned about material things.

"Look at the animals, master," cried the little boy eagerly. "They carry pigs and sheep and chickens as cargo. Look at the animals, master."

It was true. The rafts, swept nearer by the inpull of the bank, were now visible in every detail to the naked eye. Not only were they crowded with huts, set closely together on their sloping banks, but they were crowded with animals herded together in pens and coops; and down steps women now came with their pots and pans to the river-edge to fetch water, or to wash their rice in all calmness, as if this strange village-life on the bosom of the waters was the most natural life in the world.

"What a strange world, little fellow, is your world and how little we understand it!" murmured Paul, patting the little boy. And the boy, delighted, smiled at him. Yes, it was a strange world — a world which grew in strangeness, in splendid strangeness, the higher they mounted.

For on the fourth day the distant hills had grown in size, and for the next few days they watched them grow always greater and greater. And after a week or so the hills had become precipitous mountains, and no longer was the river

surrounded by rich alluvial plains fledged with reeds and tenanted by great black water-buffaloes that rolled in the river slime and eyed their boat so angrily.

The country was becoming rough and wild. There were few signs of cultivation, they were entering a new zone. Rapid streams now flowed into the mother-stream; the mother-stream had greatly shrunk in width, and the current had quickened so much that to make a knot an hour was good progress for their boat.

That night it rained heavily, proclaiming the end of the plains better than the landscape did, and the new day opened overcast and chill. From a wretched village of reed-huts near by, the boatmen replenished their stock of food. Then they started off again, with all the men save the steersman landing to track. The real, hard journey had commenced.

Slowly toiling at their task, all that day the men forced the boat to climb a current which now swirled away with the ugly swiftness of a rapid. Ahead the river seemed lost entirely and the mountains barred all progress. And at night they anchored with the chill air of the mountains closing right down upon them, and with the endless music of the rushing waters in their ears. They had reached now not only a new region but a veritable new world.

Daylight came suddenly and tremendously, as Paul, waked from his sleep by the early stirring of his men, lay on his back, looking out through the trap-door of his deck-house, at the mountains. It came with elementary power, flooding the mountain peaks and banishing the brief night with a roughness almost cruel. Yet, as the sun kissed the mountain tops, as the yellow turned to pink and the pink to red, the light called on all men to witness that it was good and pure, and that this, its matitudinal hymn of praise, well deserved to be repeated by all true men.

Crouching there on his knees, Paul watched the boatmen

track the boat right into the very heart of the mountains with the mountains never yielding an inch. Still crouching in that attitude did he remain watching in awe the rapids swirling over the rocks and marveling at the strength of timber which could resist the fearful bumps and blows the boat now encountered. Into the very heart of the mountains they were madly going, right in, with the stream becoming ever more turbulent and great jagged rocks lurking like hungry crocodiles just below the surface of the water. How was it going to end?

Suddenly he arose with a cry of joy. For a cleft had appeared in the mountains, and a view had burst on him so beautiful and impressive that it was like a dream.

The river rushed straight through a chasm which was made through black mountains rising thousands of feet on either side. The summits were crowned with a rich vegetation, and on each summit was perched a tiny temple. Far, far ahead he could see a winding vista of the joyous waters splashing and jumping over rocks, and half veiled in a fairy-like mist. Down the gorge rushed cold, bracing air which seemed to be full of the spirits of the mountains, spirits rushing fiercely down to contest this invasion of its hallowed ground. The prospect was enthralling.

The trackers, climbing over slippery rocks, wading through shallow pools of quiet backwaters, were now pausing exhausted from their tremendous labours, when suddenly the steersman seized a gong and beat on it sharply.

It was time for it! At once, far up the gorge, appeared the figures of many raggedly clad men running forward swiftly and jumping over the rocks and stones like so many mountain-goats. They all ran near until they could see what manner of craft this might he; and then, as if by word of command, a number suddenly stopped and went leisurely back,

leaving the others to come on. The exact tonnage of

the boat had been measured; the exact hauling-power necessary had been duly assessed. Now the newcomers, veritable children of the cliffs, harnessed themselves to the tracking rope, setting free the boat's crew so that they might become pole-men. Splashing back through the water, the crew now manned the bows, soon shouting their readiness. The gong set its seal with an ear-piercing roar; and now once more forward they slowly crept, their lives in the hands of these new trackers of the rapids, though the pole-men were ready to fend them off rocks.

But they were safe, a hundred times safe, in spite of the roaring cataract. For the trackers were men of the rapids and knew every inch of the way. They had been born and bred to this work; they knew the inner meaning of each patch of rock-strewn water, they knew just how to haul and slacken so that the boat might swing out and clear each frequent menace. Their skill was endless because their lesson itself had been endless and would not be finished with death… .

Behind the line of trackers two or three other men were skipping over the rocks like cats, setting free the tow-line from the rocky corners on which it was perpetually catching. Still other men, called water-trackers, as naked as Adam before the Fall, were running quickly for a spell and then squatting on their haunches on rocks ahead like so many big vultures prepared to jump into the water at a moment's notice and free the line should it catch on a point inaccessible from the shore.

All that day Paul sat enthralled at this prospect; and in this strange way did they journey through the great gorges for many days, piling experience on top of experience and thereby earning merit for the future — if they profited.

CHAPTER III

IT was half a month later that Paul reached the first important stage in his long journey; and it seemed to him, because of the strangeness of all he had passed through, that half a year had really elapsed.

It was due to this disappearance of the normal that he did not notice at first the significance of certain developments which now came. He was still too confused, too surprised, too enchanted, by the marvelous river-voyage that had just ended to notice the intrusion of the prosaic. That he should have been started on this pilgrimage without a word of warning of what it really was, even from the Rev. Ainsley Simon, had left him amazed.

For it was the most unique voyage in the world, the culminating stroke of the picture received on every part of the river — that is, of a vast population wresting a livelihood from the forces of nature by opposing their own puny force to those forces, and yet, because they backed that opposition with immense cunning, extracting therefrom a constant and growing profit. No wonder, Paul had thought a hundred times as he sat on the deck of his little craft, surveying these classic scenes, that these men who had evolved unaided their own principles of life by sheer manpower, should scout the new doctrines from the West; no wonder they should look askance at those who, blind to what had been accomplished in this land throughout the ages, came hither puffed up with the pride of another triumphant yet contrary system, and egotistically said, “Accept this or perish.” Such words were the words of irresponsibles, since it was a thousand times plain that China would forever live on in her own way—

eclectic, as she had always been; adopting this, rejecting that, in obedience to some law whose working was most intimately connected here as elsewhere with Nature herself — that is, with heat and cold and the quality thereof, with the soil and the produce thereof, with the mountains and plains and the rushing streams and the winds of the heavens. It was the law: nothing could upset it.…

And on what a mighty scale was nature laid out here; it was Himalayan in its proportions — there was no other word for it. Often had it appeared to him, from the deck of his tiny craft, that he and his men were the sole occupants of some mighty tree-grown gorge whose walls rose up in sheer precipices for a thousand or two thousand feet, and on top of which might be perched a snug farm-house or a tiny red-walled Temple. Then sweeping the turbulent waters with his glasses, he would discover far ahead underneath some distant cliff a line of up-bound junks — for all the world like diminutive beetles — toiling very slowly onwards with their groups of half-naked trackers scrambling over the rocky tow-path ahead of them, and wrestling, wrestling, wrestling, like demented ones with this mad current.…

Or the silent gorges would suddenly be disturbed by the distant report of caronnades, fired off to advertise to the great crew of some down-coming junk that a fierce rapid was being approached and that every man must now veritably sweat himself to exhaustion. And then, as the unseen junk, heralded by this roar of sound which echoed, echoed, echoed, until one could really believe that the mountains were full of spirits and evil sprites — as the unseen junk suddenly swept into view, hurtling along on the seven-knot current like a storm-driven ship, there would be a fleeting, marvelous vision of a galley-slave, half-naked crew, working and shouting like demons, lashed for protection to huge sweeps made of whole trees, sweeps that stuck out in every direction like the legs of a strange beetle,

and *made* the craft crawl away from the dangerous rocks whirlpools that everywhere showed their angry presence.

Aboard such ships, dancing from oar to oar, his weight having no effect whatever on the huge tree-stems as he leapt from one to the other, would be the gang-master; gesticulating and shouting at the top of his voice; belabouring the bare backs of the men with his rattan, and thereby working them up to a frenzy of excitement and making them stamp on the loose deck-boards as fast as they could move their feet, It was “The Tempest ” without the Storm; at any moment might arise the cry, ” We split, we split, we split.” Therefore was it that they so bestirred themselves, for death lurked on the river for these big centre-keeping craft. And against the near menace of death even freemen will allow themselves to be striped… . Were not these life-long slaves?

Or, again, there was the direful spectacle of wrecks all along the fierce mountain-river, sometimes wrecks that had happened well, and found the junkmen encamped in a suddenly created village of straw mats, with their salvaged cargo stored beside them. There would be shouted talk, then, between Paul’s men and these unfortunates.

“Here it was that we split,” they would cry, pointing to some black rock scarcely veiled by the rushing water, and here they must wait for days and weeks, until perhaps their craft was patched, or some friendly newcomer anchored and rescued them. Oh, marvelous river-trip — to have done it is to have lived in discomfort and imminent peril, but it is to have truly rejoiced… .

The nights, too, were the strangest, most soothing, most poetic nights Paul had ever conceived. The river was so peaceful, so calming, so inspiring. To lie on the bosom of that great mother; to feel her breathing, her heart-beats; to know that she, ever sleepless and ever toiling, was yet ever

happy, and ever ready to face the morrow’s shine or storm; to feel her strength, — was somehow to win new life. Paul felt it all because he was at heart a poet, and only the poets can know the vast poetry of nature. He loved to lie, even in the chill, gazing at it all,

marking the pure light of the stars and the immense calm of the vaulted deep. Here, on the face of the waters, was the Old Testament — the Book of Life — to be read, beginning with Genesis and showing verse by verse how, because God saw that it was good, from the darkness and the void had there come light and a new firmament; and from these had been born life and happiness. It was so clear, so unspeakably clear, that there could be no need of any book at all to read that marvelous message save the book of nature. Oh, why, thought Paul, looking at the stars, had men in their narrow contrition covered *their* book in awestruck black instead of making it of pure white? White was the only colour, the colour of the stars and the light of the moon… .

On such nights all around was silent. Not a sound but the sighs and murmurs of the river. Sometimes it seemed to the man in his isolation that this strange silence would be rent by something fearful, furiously loud — something that would shake the river to its depths, scatter the mountains and tear apart the heavy flocks of clouds on the sky which were always crawling, crawling, crawling above the dim mountain-tops as if they would fling themselves down at last in weakness and cease their ceaseless toil. He could not tell why he thought that, save that the isolation amidst this grandeur of nature inspired tremendous thoughts. He understood then the poetry of the Hebrews, the real meaning of the thunder of Mount Horeb, and how when there was not thunder the little hills might well clap their hands. It was written here, it was written over there; it was for men to read. Only the blind could not know it

And when the mornings came and he awoke to find men starting, he did not want to start and lose it all. To stay on forever, that was what he wanted. Once when by mishap they touched a rock, and then another, and badly bruised and broke their side, it was necessary to stop for one whole day and labour to repair the craft. Then he silently rejoiced, and set off to climb the towering cliff above them; and having at last crowned it, he sat all the livelong day, motionless from sheer delight, gazing, gazing, gazing at the glorious mountain panorama spread out before him.

But the best of all things have to end, and so at last, after nigh half a month, Paul had arrived at the first important stage, and his strange troubles began.

He did not notice it the first day, for he was too busy arranging a number of matters and seeing what there was to see. He had arrived at a large city, famous for its temple and its riches; and this animation, this presence of men in such large numbers after the desert-like river-route, threw him off his guard and made him less observant than he would otherwise have been.

His business of dispatching some cases from here to a distant point being over, he climbed on the second day to a romantic-looking temple situated in a large walled enclosure of bamboo groves and orange trees. Outside was a colossal stone Buddha, in a great stone pavilion set open to the rivet. He climbed the long flight of stone steps accompanied by his boatmen, who, thankful to have concluded their perilous voyage, duly prostrated

themselves before the idol and burnt their sticks of incense.

Inside was a courtyard in which there were a group of other big stone Buddhas; the grounds were laid out in stone terraces, gardens, and fishponds full of goldfish.

Delighted with the quiet, he walked on, leaving his boatmen

at their devotions. And then, rounding a point, he suddenly came out on a stone platform, and an involuntary cry delight burst from him.

Below in a vast amphitheatre of hills and rocky cliffs was the city of shining white houses, extending as far as the eye could reach; while at its foot the river divided by islands into several arms, was crowded with thousands of junks of all shapes and sizes, moored in every bight and backwater.
Busy gangs of men, looking like ants in the distance, were loading and discharging the vast fleet of junks, laden with produce painfully brought from every point on the compass. Endless files of porters climbed up the long flights of stone steps leading to the warehouses, some laden with enormous bundles of cotton or charcoal, others weighted with black coal. Contrasted with the quiet solemn temple-grounds so romantically situated, this was a scene of extraordinary interest, and Paul remained as if spell-struck for many minutes. When he turned, it was with a start that he discovered a strange man standing motionless at his very elbow.

“What do you want? ” said Paul quite roughly, as he looked at the man’s forbidding features.

“Nothing — like you, I gaze at the river,” that was all he said, but there was insolence in his speech for all his words.

So Paul moved off, trying to banish the memory of that lowering face in the fascination of the beautiful old temple, with its cool halls and shady garden, admiring the manner in which art and nature had here been made allies to soothe the brain, weary of the outer world.

Presently the rich, deep, quiet-sounding temple-bells tolled out an evening message over hill and dale; it was infinitely soft, infinitely soothing. He remembered then the wonderful description given by De Quincey of the region in which poor Joan of Arc received her education and her inspiration. These sweet slow-ringing bells were like the Old-World bells that

pierced the forests of Domremy; forests that were so haunted by fairies that the parish priests were bound to read mass on their brink once a year in order to keep the fairies in decent bounds… . If in the fourteenth century there had been fairies in Europe, why in the

nineteenth century should they not linger in Asia? Why not, indeed? Gentle creatures of the imagination, they belong to every spot where simplicity remains. Only when simplicity is banished do the fairies flee.

He was watching now the few worshippers assembling. As the deep chanting of the priests arose, and their incense filled the air, once again was he struck with the resemblance to the Roman Catholic services, that resemblance which had so disconcerted, so embarrassed, the early Jesuit Fathers. Yet somehow it was more peaceful, more dignified, more filled with a quiet spirit of trust in the immanence of God, than the offices with which he was so well acquainted. There was no continued marching to and fro, no changing of vestments, none of those other things which now incorporated in the offices of the Church of Rome have their origin in old heathen altars. It was strange, very strange… .

Paul turned to find the taciturn man at his elbow once more.

“What do you want?” he inquired once more, this time as sternly as he could.

“I watch the priests as you watch them,” answered the man, not moving.

Paul flushed. What did this mean, what did this signify? With difficulty he restrained himself. He eyed the man in doubt. Then he drew himself up and pointed down to where lay the city.

“I go now, I go alone; do you understand?”

The man made no word of answer. Whether he followed or not, Paul never knew.

CHAPTER IV

SOME things leave an ugly impression on the mind, for no reason than that they are themselves ugly. The thought of them cannot be banished; they are at once irritating and disturbing, because they suggest that underneath this placid surface of daily life on which we sail, just as under the surface of a smiling sea, there lurk the most ugly things. Ordinarily there is no occasion to think of such things; but let the extraordinary occur and at once the mind occupies itself gloomily imagining the horrors of the deep.

Paul, always keenly susceptible to all new impressions, awoke on the third day of his arrival completely rested from the fatigues and excitement of his strange journey, but with his mind full of the peculiar pertinacity with which the strange man had pursued him. For in spite of the double rebuff he had given him at the temple overlooking the river, the man had again followed him—had followed him the next day down to his boat, whither he had gone to give some instructions, and then had followed him back to the inn wherein he was lodged. It was quite possible that he had been watched in his very room, for already Paul had noticed a peculiar trick being used — that of moistening the finger, rubbing it against a paper-window, and thus noiselessly making a perfect peep-hole. This was a land of Paul Prys, where everyone was overpoweringly interested in the doings of his neighbours, and where it only needed a moistened finger-tip to satisfy every mordant curiosity! Paul had not troubled to see whether he was really being secretly scrutinized in this disconcerting manner; he was not of those who oppose to the curiosity of their neighbours a counter-curiosity equally great.

Yet why was he being watched, he wondered, as he dressed himself the third morning. He was convinced it was not the usual idle curiosity with which an autochthonous race always views the stranger within the gates; there was some other motive. Not being of a suspicious disposition — fe Englishmen are really suspicious and that is why they are often judged stupid — this surveillance annoyed him rather than oppressed him. His objects were so plain and simple and so unrelated in any way to objects which might occasion alarm (he was distributing cases according to a very manifest memorandum), that he became convinced that some very special motive underlay this spying. He was no prowling mining expert whose activities might arouse the facile susceptibilities of a population full of childish views regarding the dangers menacing any disturbance of the earth-surface; he was no sportsman intruding on native preserves; he was no trader forcing through his merchandise under the Palladium of extraterritoriality — he was nothing but a young man traveling with several thousand copies of books and prints to be handed over to scattered stations. He could have called to his aid the mission servant who had been sent with him, or even his own small boy; but to have done that would have immediately started a train of gossip which might defeat his object of discovering what really lay behind it. He decided to keep his own counsel for the time being, at least.

The question of starting now presented itself to his mind. He had delivered over to a native firm half his consignment to send inland to points which were out of his way; now he had to go on to two widely separated and very isolated stations, one of which lay on the very borders of the Empire. He had first proposed to rest here a week, not so much to recover from the fatigues of river traveling in such cramped quarters as to prepare himself against still further fatigues. There was ahead of him a most formidable bout of mountain

traveling through country which, if not very wild, was at least savage of aspect, and, according to all accounts, furnished with nothing save the rudest necessaries of life. Ainsley Simon, an old and experienced traveler, had warned him that it was very necessary to rest for a number of days after each long bout, in order to reaccumulate the vitality which is unconsciously used up on such journeys. Paul decided suddenly that he would ignore such advice and start at once.

Full of this new idea, he walked rapidly through the crowded city-streets down to the river, and sought his boat. He frowned with annoyance when he saw what had happened. The previous evening his craft had been lying snugly anchored just off-shore. Now she was careened on the muddy foreshore; her cargo of small wooden cases was neatly stored under a roof of matting, just as the shipwrecked craft along the rapids had stored their cargo; and, worst of all, the bottom had been ripped out of her, and the crew was very busily at work, with all the skill that comes from generations of boat-building, with their preparations to fit a new bottom into her. It was easy even for the layman to see that here was several days' work, perhaps many days' work.

"Who told you to begin this work?" inquired Paul angrily, as he watched the men sharpening their tools.

The elder — the captain, called in the picturesque vernacular "the old great man" — finished what he was doing, and then, rising from his haunches. very deliberately, he pointed one gnarled hand at the boat

"Heaven willed it," he said simply. "Last night she was making water, her bottom injured from the rocks. Today we repair her."

He gazed reflectively at his craft, cleared his throat, and then thoughtfully spat. Once again, as had already happened a hundred times in his short sojourn in this land, Paul had the feeling that he was confronting the unsurmountable wall of a

vis inertia more powerful than all the fiery force in the world. Of what use to argue, of what use to protest?

He hid his feelings with an effort, and sought refuge in sarcasm which he embellished with an excess of gesture.

“Curious is it,” he remarked, “that the boat should leak only on the second day of our arrival, and more curious that you, who have been paid by me to carry me and not to idle, should begin this work without my knowledge.”

“The old great man” did not show surprise or any other feeling. After the manner of the land he talked slowly, back, skirting the edge of truth, but never really touching it.

“In the rapids I knew she leaked,” he said, “but I feared to make you fear and so kept silent. For two days we were tired from our labours; so we rested. Now that we are rested we work. In a few days —”

Paul interrupted him. He had made up his mind.

“It is good,” he said briefly. “You are very reasonable. But since this river is full of craft and bad men, for safety
I shall take my cases back to my inn. Little Wang!”

He turned and called to his own little boy, who was watching him in the distance.

“Get porters and we will have these carried up to the inn.”

In China you wave your hand, and the penurious precipitate themselves to earn your silver. So in a trice the cases were seized and shouldered, and the caravan of lean-flanked men stood there in Indian file prepared to march, against prompt payment, to perdition itself should their employer so will. And thus Paul allowed them to stand for a minute, so that his victory might be measured.

For he had turned the tables on the “great old man” so completely that the latter was at once a picture and an amusement to contemplate. Torn by conflicting emotions, desirous of speaking and protesting, and yet not knowing

how to do it, the beaten man again and again opened his mouth and yet never managed to speak. Paul, having enjoyed this triumph to the full, suddenly turned to go.

“Tomorrow morning come to the inn and we will talk business,” he said; “just now I must go.”

He waved his hand to the waiting Indian file, which at once broke into a chant and quickly jog-stepped away. All the long road to the inn he smiled to himself; and his smile was not disturbed even by the sight of the evil-looking man openly following him. He had made his plan.

“Little Wang,” he said to the small boy later that afternoon, “are you ever afraid?”

He had again gone out with him to the wooded temple-grounds overlooking the river, and they were seated in a pavilion.

“Afraid,” echoed the child, looking puzzled, “afraid of what?”

“Of anything.”

“I am afraid of being beaten,” he announced gravely. It was plain that he was seeking the answer that he thought would best please.

“No, no,” said Paul laughingly. “I don’t mean that. I mean, are you ever afraid of being hungry, of being lost?”

The small boy looked at him with doubtful eyes.

“Before, when I was smaller, I stole when I was hungry. That is very easy. I do not understand the second part. I have no home.”

He made the confession with all the marvelous simplicity of a sun-kissed country, where men, though they fear the wrath of Nature, fear it only because Nature is their very mother; because they wander about lying down on her broad bosom when they are tired, because they tear food from her when they arc hungry. And since they are so close to elementary things, they are never foolishly afraid of her as

is the man who calls himself civilized, and whose world consists merely of pinioned streets.

Paul suddenly realized that it was vain to use a neatly minted coinage in a country where barter is still the rule, for most words are small coins that are valued only by those accustomed to their regular use. With a flash of intuition he became elementary.

“It is necessary to run away from this place,” he said simply and earnestly. “Now I wish to run only with you and my cases, leaving the boat and the servant from Wayway here. No one must know that we have left until we are far away. By night-time you must hire a boat. Can you do it?”

“Yes,” said the boy, who was almost a man—man because cruel experience is the maker of men. “Yes,” he repeated in a very wise way, because those who have starved are always wise.

“I shall wait for you here,” said Paul.

“In two hours I shall return,” said the boy, starting down the stone steps at a run.

Paul came out from the pavilion only to see the ugly-looking man watching eagerly for him. The ugly-looking man seemed plainly relieved to see that he had not vanished in some mysterious way. And the afternoon passed away with him always watching Paul, watching him wander about the temple with evil eyes. At sunset the small boy returned.

“The boat is engaged,” he said. “She lies at the eastern anchorage.”

“Good,” said Paul. Then he turned and showed the small boy the distant figure of the ugly man squatting on his haunches, and just then apparently looking at nothing, but really watching closely, which is a very old Chinese trick.

“Who is that man?” he asked.

The small boy shook his head.

“I do not know, but he watches you.”

“Why does he watch me?”

Because he is paid.”

“Paid,” exclaimed Paul, surprised not only at this complete apprehension but at the matter-of-fact attitude.

“He must be paid — someone pays him and he watches. At the inn there is another man.”

Paul took two or three quick steps and then stopped. Another man — he had not even suspected that.

“Are you afraid now?” he inquired.

“Why more afraid now?”

“Because, if those men watch, they mean to harm me — they may hurt you.”

“Ah!” said the small boy reflectively. He studied the ugly-looking man with more interest, as if to surprise his secret. Then he added:

“We must escape quickly in the night. I know how. I shall lie to them, to both of them differently. One smokes the drug, he is a *yellow-face*; so at night he must sleep. Now with the other we will do like this.”

He began telling a marvelous little plan — a plan founded on a close observation and

study of human nature such as men in the West acquire only after forty or fifty years of life and perhaps not even then, but which is nothing at all wonderful in children where the senses are being endlessly used.

But the little boy never knew that a message written on a pebble was thrown into the inn that same night, and was the real reason why they got off so easily.

On the pebble were three small hieroglyphics.

They said. “Let them proceed.”

CHAPTER V

AN authority on the religions of the Chinese, writing in such a remote past as fifty years ago, began certain diatribes with these amusing words: “The real religious beliefs and practices of a heathen people are hard to describe intelligently.” In this opinion a great number will today smilingly concur, since it is a fact that gradually but irresistibly the standpoint of mediaeval bigotry is waning in popularity.

For, let us inquire, what constitutes a heathen people? Is it clay images? Then the great Roman Catholic Church is heathen. Is it belonging to a non-Christian faith or to no faith at all? Then Jews, Mohammedans, Deists, and Atheists are heathen. But these four important classes are always specifically excluded, because (unlike the Roman Catholics) they have no clay images.

The problem becomes perplexing. What is this will-o-the-wisp? We must trip undismayed after it.

Originally, it is well to observe, a heathen was a Gentile—that is, a man who was not a Jew, with the further implication that if he served Jehovah he did so by forbidden methods, and that, in consequence of his erroneous faith, he was practising moral abominations abhorrent to the true people of God. Now, Christianity having arrogated for its adherents the proud distinction which once belonged only to the Jews, it has very logically followed that Christianity has also arrogated for its adherents the same old prejudices of two thousand years ago. Hence it follows that the Chinese, because they are not Christian, are heathen. There is no flaw in this logic; it also has the unusual quality of being amusing.

For the word heathen undoubtedly conveys, apart from its theological odium, a moral reproach. It means unenlightened, barbarous, bad, wicked, sinful. In a very comforting sense, therefore, it implies those who differ from us. How grateful should we all be! The poor Buddhists, who believe that it is not only cruel but sinful to kill living things no matter what they may be; who have made of their Nirvana a heaven far more wonderful than the narrow little personal heaven of Judea, which is just above the clouds and over which reigns the anthropomorphic God; who have laid down a Rule of Life admirable in its tenderness; who have had the audacity to antedate by several centuries the Christian monastery, Christian celibacy, the Christian dress and caps of the priests, Christian incense, Christian bells, the Christian rosary of beads, the Christian lighted candles at the altar, the Christian intonations at the services, the Christian ideas of purgatory, the Christian praying in an unknown tongue, the offerings to departed spirits in the temple—these wretched Buddhists are heathen! Poor, pitiful people!

Yet there are some few crumbs of comfort. Even our good, old-fashioned, mediaeval writer (who wrote fifty years ago) admits, perhaps a little reluctantly, that in two

remarkable particulars the Chinese differ from other pagan nations —that is, in the absence of human sacrifices and the non-deification of vice. Nation that has been civilized for four thousand years, show your gratitude! But we wander astray; it is time to proceed less contentiously.

It is a remarkable and noteworthy fact that while Buddhism and Taoism and Confucianism have been much written upon, the history of Islam in China is almost completely unknown. This is partly due to the fact that though the Chinese annals are clear about the Persian and Babylonian religions which traveled across High Asia in the remote

past to the shores of the Yellow Sea only to perish, none of their books, as far as has been ascertained, record a single word about the introduction into China of the Mohammedan faith. Yet it has been well said that this faith has taken deeper root in China than any other foreign faith; and there can be no doubt that, for steadfastness of purpose and influence on the social and moral character of the Chinese, it has had no foreign equal. Some short description of such a little-known and most curious subject may not be deemed irrelevant since it enters into this tale.

Many people know in a general way that Islam spread over Central Asia during the ninth and tenth centuries during the period of Mussulman conquests, but it is not generally known that within a century after the Hegira the Mohammedan sect was powerfully established in China, and that from those early days very far-reaching politico-religious as well as commercial relations gradually grew up between the Chinese and the Arabs.

This strange movement, bringing extreme Western Asia into close contact with extreme Eastern Asia, must be traced in the first instance to the political turmoil and unrest to which China was subject after the fall of the last purely Chinese dynasty of the Middle Ages, the T’ang dynasty, which ruled over all China long before Charlemagne had thought of welding all Europe together again in one great and holy empire.

For hundreds of years after the fall of the T’ang Emperors in the tenth century, Cathayan, Nüchen, and other Mongol-Tartars invaders cascaded into the disrupted Empire, and governed much of the Northern country as Emperors. The history of the Northern country thus became inextricably mixed with the changing fortunes of the warring peoples of Central Asia. The great horde of Ouigours, which controlled the steppes, figures largely in this much

mixed history; and Arabs and Persians, coming across High Asia and mixing with the Ouigours and other Tartar warrior-bands, sometimes fight Chinese armies and sometimes lend to them their valuable aid. Those were days of quick ebb and flow, of perpetual clash and ruin, of sudden conquests and of more sudden declines. An Arab-Tartar admixture thus becomes common along the border regions of China, and it is recorded that Arab missions show the remarkable nature of the new faith which they introduce by declining to

kneel to the Chinese Emperors, on the ground that the men of their state kneel only to Heaven and do not kneel to a king. It was in the eighth century that this remarkable gospel first reached China.

It is, however, not until the twelfth century that the history of Mussulman relations with China becomes clear. From the moment that the great Mongol Emperor Genghiz Khan commences his gigantic struggles, a flood of Mohammedans of all kinds, Arabs, Persians, Boukhariots, and Turkis, scattered themselves all over China, in a way that had never happened before and has never happened since, because these Mongol conquerors, being unable to trust the native Chinese with high office, brought in these aliens to help them in their far-reaching work. Saracens were as well known in those ancient times in China as they were at that same time to the European Crusaders. For of the many prominent generals and ministers of the Mongol Khans, a great proportion, as is shown by their names, were Arab or Persian or Turki Mussulmans; whilst in imperial Peking, a Persian in the thirteenth century first established the famous Mussulman observatory which made the Mussulman almanac become the Chinese almanac

Nor does all end here. In this fighting thirteenth century Mussulman gunners were brought post-haste from Persia with all their families to reinforce the conquerors, to assist

in sieges, and generally to play a commanding role. So numerous did these men of Islam become that the great Kublai Khan gave them a Mohammedan college. Thousands of Mussulman families were settled on the land and greatly prospered. It was these Arabs and Persians who brought to China the mediaeval science and art of the West.

The collapse of the Mongol Khans, and their ultimate expulsion from China to make room for the native dynasty of the Mings, immediately affected the destiny of Islam.

In the early days when their power was at its zenith, the Mongol Khans, sweeping across High Asia and winning endless victories, had established numberless principalities from the Yellow Sea to the Red Sea — kingdoms which were bound together by family ties. Many of these principalities had become Mussulman; all had some influence on Peking; and so intimate were these politico-religious relations that though the Dragon Throne in Peking had become lost to the Mongol Khans, it was not to be supposed that this would be lightly taken.

It was not. An intermittent warfare raged for many years; and at length it was only by entirely closing the land-routes to Central Asia that there seemed any hope of destroying this peculiar influence.

The native Chinese were equal to this task. They did everything possible to discourage intercourse and to discredit their rivals; and at length, by means of this policy, they turned all Central Asia into open enemies. Yet at the same time these native Emperors were active in fostering the sea trade of the Indian Ocean, from Africa to the Malay States —a

remarkable and little-known trade — and those states, being mainly Mussulman states, the religion of Islam, in spite of all difficulties, continued to flourish in China through a new contact with distant co-religionists. Hitherto the contact had been solely by land; now it was achieved by

means of the sea, and trading Moslems settled freely at the sea-ports. Sometimes even today you will see a man with a pure Arab face in such a port as Canton. He is the descendant of Arab traders; his benign and intelligent countenance and gentlemanly bearing tell their own story.

Still, in spite of this commercial activity, during the whole term of this last purely native dynasty of the Mings, because of the new character of the rulers, the history of Islam in China is unimportant, is virtually a blank. These native rulers cared nothing for Central Asia; they ardently desired the whole history of China's relations with that fiery region to be forgotten. And their will was law.

But in the seventeenth century, about the time when the Parliamentarians of England were cutting off King Charles's head, a new horde of Tartars had commenced a new conquest, and soon had established a dynasty which endures to this day. These were the Manchus of Manchuria. And no sooner were these new dynasts known, no sooner was their fame as conquerors carried across High Asia by the caravans, than the Mussulman states and Arabia sent tribute. It is curious to see how blood calls to blood, even after a lapse of centuries.

Forthwith begins a new era, as if to proclaim the consanguinity of Tartar and Turki. Little by little the old overland relations are resumed. Tartar fights Turki, and then Turki and Tartar combine. Gradually closer contact grows up with Kokand, Bokhara, Badaksham, Afghanistan, and other states which proclaim themselves tributaries of the Dragon Throne. At the same time many Mussulman priests wander across Central Asia. Mosques arise m Northern China, in Southwestern China, in Manchuria, and the Chinese Mohammedan becomes a well-known figure. The blood of the lusty Turki mixes much with Chinese blood for the women like them as husbands and their children

are many. No distinctive dress is adopted, or, if it adopted, the habit soon passes, and save for the big nose and the occasional donning of the white turban of the Sunnites on the Festivals, no stranger would know them apart from the mass of the population. Also, save in the two border provinces of Kansuh and Yunnan, where Arabs and Ouigours were directly introduced as soldiery, Chinese Mohammedans have been very peaceful. It is only in these two border provinces that there have been two terrible rebellions.

Today it is said there are twenty millions of Mohammedans in China, twenty millions spread over the length and breadth of the land, but massing more especially in the North and the Northwest and the West and the Southwest. In times of famine thousands of boys

are always bought and brought up in the True Faith. Quickly the figures are growing.

Yet they remain a simple people.

If you ask a man, “Have you read the Koran?” he will blush and say, “I have read only the preliminary books.” Perhaps he does not know that the Koran has never been wholly translated. The preliminary books are called the Pa’erh, the Imani, and the Ho-t’ai, and one and all speak fervently of the immanence of God.

If, wandering among these people, you further ask the jesting question, “Do you eat pork?” they will smile and perhaps not answer at all. They think you must know, everyone knows, that their people have their own meat-shops, distinguished by the sign of the blue cap, where pure meat, like Kosher meat, is sold, and where the pig is looked upon as accursed.

Are these Mohammedans of China entirely happy? Yes, for they are never persecuted. Why are they not persecuted? Because, though they have not been absorbed, though they preserve themselves in separate communities, though they

mass round their mosques, they do not rely on foreign arms or on foreign treaties for their protection. When they revolt, they do it of their own accord. Their Emperor is the Emperor of China; but this has never interfered with the fact that there is no God but Allah.

To secure political obedience there are a few regulations—regulations which sound quaint and unbelievable in Western ears, but which are full of meaning in the East. One is that the roof of every mosque must be one foot less in height than the Imperial temples; another is that the Imperial inscriptions and tablets must be exhibited in the ante-hall; and a third and very modern one is that the Dragon banner of China must be displayed beside these. By such simple signs is the divine right of kings held proven.

If you ask a Chinese official, “What will you do if the Mohammedans revolt again?” he will merely answer, “They will not revolt.” But if you persist in your question, this official will at length say, “Then we shall kill them.”

Admirable solution! It has been twice adopted in the past fifty years, during two terrible rebellions.

Will it ever be adopted again? Time alone will show. The Chinese are good rulers of men; they really kill only when absolutely necessary. That is a fundamental law.

Meanwhile the future remains quite hidden. Yet we have said what it was here necessary to know about Chinese Mohammedans.

CHAPTER VI

ALL that day Paul had been smiling and congratulating him self on his dexterity in shaking himself free from the untoward elements which had threatened to envelop him and to arrest his journey.

He did not suspect as yet what might have been the object with which the two men had been kept spying on him: he had not connected the careening and repairing of his boat with this other development. He had vaguely imagined that it was to someone's interest to delay him, but what that interest might be had not very much troubled him. In spite of the dread affair of the American Mission, he could not bring himself to believe that China was ever really dangerous if one showed common caution; and as his journey had proved that the wilderness was as safe as any town, it was not so very strange that he should be so confident.

Now, too, that he was on the river again, he was happy. His faithful little henchman could hardly be kept from dancing with delight. Since the mission servant had been summarily left behind with the order to return to Wayway, on the small boy rested the responsibility of being courier—of making bargains and therefore of making money. Already he had made a little something with the boat bargain; every transaction would yield to him its toll.

The first blow to this mutual satisfaction came that evening, when, having journeyed well and quickly, with no longer any rapids to bar their progress, and a vast and splendid tableland around them, the boatmen tied up their boat for the night. Paul had gone on shore for a walk, and

being in good spirits he had wandered far into a country that was no longer tilled. They had journeyed so quickly that they were fast approaching untamed regions, and of villages there were few signs.

When he came back, the small boy was waiting for him some distance from the boat. Immediately he came near, he gave a peculiar little gesture of warning and spoke softly.

"These men eat no pork," he said, watching narrowly to see what effect his words would have. "I had some pork from the inn with me, and offered some to them. They refused it. Ugh!"

Paul did not understand his evident concern; so he smiled at him.

"What of that?" he inquired, looking over the little boy's head at the knot of men gathered round the cooking-pots in the stern-sheets of the boat.

“The ugly man who watched you ate no pork; the second man at the inn, whom you did not see, ate no pork. I know it, I saw them refuse it. Who would not eat pork if he could? Ugh!”

“Well,” said Paul wonderingly.

The small boy looked round carefully. There was no one within eyesight or eyeshot.

“They are all *Whei-Whei* — Mohammedans,” he announced in sudden gloom.

“Mohammedans,” exclaimed Paul, “Mohammedans!” The little boy nodded his head.

“In a few days we shall be in their country, where there are many of them. I know — the people at the inn told me.”

Paul took two or three steps, stopped short, and then came back to the same spot. He was thinking very deeply, at last he was full of perturbation. In his anxiety he clenched and unclenched his fists in a manner which was wholly new to him.

What did this mean, what did this mean? It was now self-evident that his departure from Wayway must have been carefully noted, that his boat had been dogged, that a regular conspiracy perhaps surrounded him. Or, if he had not been dogged, since that was hardly necessary on a river where you can proceed only in one direction or another, a careful watch had been kept, and spies had at once reported his arrival in the great water-city he had just left.

Yes, he was sure that must be true. Though he could not find the right connection between each incident, it was clear to him that all could be linked together in some perfectly natural chain which had been designed to bind him.

But why — to whom was his voyage so interesting—what could possibly be important in his movements? In vain he racked his brains; he could find not only no reasonable solution, but no solution at all. Of course, he knew that the junk-guilds which had undertaken the attack on the mission were Mohammedan — that is, a great number were Mohammedan — but that was no explanation at all. They could not know who he was, they could not want to hurt him; he had been in no way implicated in the whole affair. He had rushed madly to the rescue, but then so had half the residents in Wayway; and to Chinese, in such a case as that, all men were the same and not to be distinguished one from the other. No, no, it was not that. There was no one in the world who had any interest to hurt him.

Suddenly the colour flamed across his face, and he began hurriedly pacing up and down. He had as completely forgotten the existence of Mr. Denning as if that gentleman had vanished into space. But now, as a flood of recollections rushed across his mind, he began

remembering not only all that had been said of him, but the passionate words which some had not hesitated to utter in his hearing after the climax of that terrible morning. They had implicated Mr.

Denning; they had said that if he would only tell all he knew there would be a heavy account to settle… .

And then suddenly another figure rose up, and as he remembered that pale weeping face, a stern expression gave to his features a strange and unnatural look. Though he pushed the thought away from him again and again as unworthy, again and again it returned. He remembered Mr. Grey's insinuations, he remembered what he had noticed himself, and he knew that many momentous things must have happened… .

Yet what had that to do with these Mohammedans? In vain he tried to find the connection between them and that strange dreaming man who had suddenly become hateful to him. Who had instructed these people to watch him, and, above all, who had prepared the clever trap of making him abandon his own boat and take this particular boat?

For he saw now that he had jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. There was some plan behind it all that he could not fathom; and as his eyes mechanically surveyed the strange lonely landscape, his heart sank.

"Little Wang," he said to the boy who had been watching him anxiously, not knowing what was passing in his master's mind, yet silently awaiting his verdict —"Little Wang, how was it that you found this particular boat? Tell me."

The boy threw out a hand with one of those roughly picturesque movements which come natural to vagabonds.

"When you told me to find a new boat, I went down to the river from the temple and walked along the foreshore. There I inquired where the Gold River boats lay, for each part of the river has its own boats. They told me, and when I approached, these boatmen were there. 'Do you want a boat?' they inquired. 'Yes,' I said, 'but my master is a foreigner.' 'It is the same,' they said, ' if he pays

well.' Then we arranged the price as you instructed me. That is all; it was quite simple."

"Oh, ho, little Wang," said Paul thoughtfully, it was not as simple as it looks. Indeed it is very complex. Somebody who does not love me is spying on me, somebody has an interest to delay my journey. Somebody may have an interest to hurt me, who knows?"

"We will trick them again," said the boy with Eastern calmness, now that, his mind being unburdened, he could think of the future. "We will find a better plan."

Paul sighed and yet found courage to pat his head.

“Perhaps,” he said, somehow heartened by this vast assurance. “For though we may not be able to find a better plan I am going on to the very end, just as we originally decided. For me there is no turning back, we must go on to the end. But it is necessary to be very careful. Watch all the time and listen. Then we may learn where we must be on our guard.”

“I shall watch and listen,” announced the boy unemotionally. “The Mohammedans are very simple.”

CHAPTER VII

WHETHER it was that these particular Mohammedans were such simple folk or not, it is impossible to say; but it is sufficient to record that no incident of any importance whatever marked this new bit of river-traveling, nor did any secret drop into the wide-open ears of Paul's faithful little boy.

He was always listening, always prowling about, always on the *qui vive*; but it was to no purpose. The men talked and grumbled together continually about the high price of living, about the state of the river, the cost of cloth; but of other more fateful things, even after they had eaten, they said never a word. They were a sober and hard-working crew; they seemed to live only in their work; there was no fault to find with them. Theirs seemed a simple tale.

As the days went on, Paul became openly puzzled beyond measure. He wondered more and more if he had not been pursuing a mare's nest; he hoped that it was so. For instance, the men who had shadowed him in the great river-city, they had left behind might have been thieves who were trying to settle on some plan how best to rob him. That was a reasonable supposition, a supposition he tried to think was justified. Or they might have been ordinary loafers, such as abounded in every part of this strange country, with no evil intentions in the world save the vague desire to extract a livelihood by a peaceful rascality, like the lazzaroni of Naples, who prefer to lie in the dust and whine for money to standing on their feet and honestly earning it.

Paul, arguing in this wise, had practically given up his suspicions, when on the tenth day, as they were arriving at the anchorage of the little town where they would have to

abandon this boat and travel overland, he noticed in the fading daylight a group of men seated on the river-bank. Why he noticed them at all he could not say, but for some reason they attracted his attention; and even when he walked to the other side of the boat and began studying the river, they stayed perpetually in his mind.

The river had become very different from the vast turbulent stream which, bursting through the great gorges up which he had traveled, made its way across the great alluvial plains of Central China, vastly swelled by the waters of a thousand tributaries and totally unchecked save where man had dyked it in. There, during its course of a thousand miles, it was a mighty thing, the very soul of the country through which it passed; a river supporting a population numbered not only in millions but in tens of millions, almost in hundreds of millions; a river quite without equal in any other part of the world; a fierce, savage river, rising up often in its wrath and drowning myriads because they had encroached on its province.

Here it was nothing at all; it was a small stream such as might be found fifty times over even in Europe, where there are few rivers worthy of the name. Now narrowed to a few score yards, the current was so gentle that the men aided their tracking with sail and oar and made rapid progress. At intervals, perched on mounds above the banks, were small villages, each with a miniature idol-house, painted red and raised high on four piles, safe above any possible floods. And just as the river had become so small and so insignificant, so nature, from being majestic with giant cliffs and sky-scraping peaks, had become commonplace and unattractive.

In spite of the river-villages, it was evident that here the land was scantily populated. Such people as Paul had for days along the river-banks seemed to belong to a less industrious race. Stone and brick cities, such as had been

common lower down—cities that overhung the river — were practically non-existent. It was plain that they were passing from the heart of China to an outlying limb.

That was probably why the group of men, squatting stolidly on their haunches, had attracted Paul's attention. They seemed well dressed, and therefore out of place. And so Paul, vaguely thinking of them, wondered why homogeneous China should really have so many hundreds of shades of differences, not only in general aspect, but in men who a year ago had all appeared the same to him.

Now the small boy's eyes were sharper than his master's, just as his ears were sharper. Whilst Paul had gone to the other side of the boat, he had caught a muttered comment from a boatman; and forthwith, because of that, he had peered at the group on the bank with all the intense concentration of the East. They were a hundred yards off, eighty yards, fifty yards off. Then it was that he frowned and with cunning nonchalance sidled up to his master, who had now passed to the bow.

"Master, white-caps," he said in a low voice; "look!"

Paul, without so much as showing that he had heard him, turned his head slowly. The four men on the bank had risen to their feet and were standing, shading their eyes with their hands and looking straight at him. Each one had a white turban on his head, it was quite unmistakable. Paul and his small boy continued to observe them, but said not a word. It was evident that the boatmen were much excited.

"Where are you going?" shouted one of the men on the bank presently. They had to shout, since the boat had taken their trackers aboard, as the villages made their passage along the water-line difficult, and rowing was here sufficient.

"To the city," called back the boat-master, pointing ahead to the confused anchorage which now came in view a mile higher up.

“Is there only one foreign guest aboard?” shouted the same man again.

“Yes,” cried back the boat-master.

The turbaned men had grouped themselves round their leader, and were plainly discussing the matter in excited accents. Paul stood up and cleared his throat.

“*Hai*,” he called in the native manner. At once they desisted and turned.

“What is it?” called one back.

“Were you sent by the foreigner?” shouted Paul, whilst the small boy watched him amazed.

No answer came, but the white-caps went very close together.

“Were you sent by the foreigner?” repeated Paul, calling more loudly than ever. The challenge was so evident that one of the men took it up.

“We don’t understand your talk,” he replied in a sullen voice.

“That I cannot help,” shouted Paul. “But I have a message for you. Tell your foreigner that I am coming and that I have nothing to fear.”

Then, as the men stood there amazed, Paul seated himself again and pretended to be entirely absorbed by the prospect of the river-shipping which they were fast approaching. He had made a chance shot; it seemed to have hit some target.

It was too dark to attempt to make his way into the town that night, so Paul determined to pass a few last hours on the river in this same boat. There was a mission station in the city, and in charge of it was a fellow-worker to whom had to be delivered almost all the remaining cases he had on board.

The boatmen soon threw overboard their four-pronged anchors; and as the chains rattled across the copper guards,

Paul in spite of the new development which had come, gave a sigh of relief. In any case, no matter what happened afterwards, if he delivered over to the little mission in this city this second consignment he would have got over the worst part of his duties. There would remain only a dozen of the smaller packages, and one more point to reach. Then he could turn back.

By the fitful glare of a native candle he cousulted a calendar. More than a month had

passed since he had left Way-way; even admitting that nothing delayed him and that everything went well, more than another month must pass before he could hope to get back. It might be even two months; for Ainsley Simon, who had covered the same ground often but who always traveled slowly, said that on one occasion nearly half a year had elapsed before he had got back to the comparative civilization of the settlements again. Half a year — what a time to spend!

The tinkle of a native guitar roused him from his reverie, and he came out of the rough house of mats amidships in which he had been sitting to see what it was. A boat, brilliantly lighted with lanterns adorned with fantastic characters, had drifted down on his boat, and in it were seated two or three singing-girls, highly rouged and gaudily dressed.

The flower-boat had a steeply arched awning amidships and a high-peaked stern, and showed by the gleam of light that came from its smooth deck how beautifully polished it was. The girls sat demurely in a group, whilst immediately behind them was an old man who now commenced playing on a fiddle.

Presently from somewhere hidden came the sound of wooden castanets, and then the rhythmic beat of a drum; and at once one of the girls, accompanying herself on a guitar, began singing in a high plaintive falsetto.

On and on sang the girl, sometimes reinforced by the

voices of her companions, sometimes singing stanza after stanza quite alone. The moon had now risen, and its silver light was flooding the waters of the river, and showing up the dark picturesque outlines of the many moored boats and junks. Everyone seemed sunk in sleep, and save for the girl’s voice there was not a sound. Floating very slowly round, the brilliantly lighted flower-boat seemed in the midst of this peaceful, nocturnal river-scene the very incarnation of human vanity, attracting men as the flame of a candle attracts the moth, because the light promised something darkness can never give…

On and on sang the girl, and Paul, irritated though he was at this strange persistence, sat motionless in the shadow of his deck-house as if he had been fascinated.

It was so strange. The sharp black almond eyes of the girls had long picked out his shadow, though he did not know it, and with the cunning of a race that believes in the efficacy of persistence as does no other race in the world, the girls made their boat circle slowly round his, thus chaining his attention. How long would they have the audacity to persist in these manœuvres, thought Paul, never stirring an inch. He could not know that other people were awake, wondering, with the phlegm of a materialistic nation, why he allowed this entertainment to proceed so long without a sign of approval. On and on went the rhythmic beat of the drum, the clatter of the bamboo castanets, the jumping fiddle, the clang-clang of the primitive guitar. Would it never cease, thought Paul, now upbraiding himself for having come out of his deck-house, yet not daring now to move.

Yes, it would cease. It had ceased, with such dramatic suddenness that the ear, relieved of this burden of sound, suddenly felt the void in the atmosphere. The flower-boat, steered by unseen hands from the high-peaked stern, had drifted silently right alongside Paul's boat; and the girls

with engaging gestures now bent far over until they were very close to him.

"*Lai*, *lai* -Come, come," they called softly, pointing back at the soft-cushioned divans in their deck-house.

"*Lai*, *lai* — Come, come," they repeated again, thinking that he was only reluctant.

Paul suddenly aroused himself. Standing up, he pointed one angry hand at them.

"Go," he said violently, "go! I have wanted nothing of you. Here is payment for your songs."

He threw some coins across to them, and, inconceivably agitated, flung into his deck-house out of sight.

The boat stole silently away.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN he woke in the morning, his mind was still preoccupied with this latest strange experience. Must he connect it with the turbaned men, with the general feeling that he was not only being watched and followed, but actually marked down for summary treatment, if he persisted in his travels?

He did not know, he could not know. But though now he was openly unhappy, still he remained more than ever determined that he would go on, and not change by a hair breadth his circuitous voyage. Imperceptibly it had become in his eyes a test of his worth, of his steadfastness of purpose; and in measure as difficulties and dangers loomed up, so did his determination increase.

He was still busy breaking his fast when some shouting brought him out of the deck-house. A small boat was fast approaching, and in the boat was seated the strangest-looking man he had even seen. He could not doubt that this was Maddon, the missionary in charge of the station in this town.

The man was sitting gravely in the centre of his sampan, as if he were the most ordinary person in the world, yet he was surely one of the most extraordinary. On his big head was an ordinary Chinese cap tied under his chin by two blue strings. From the face an enormous red beard projected, as if it had been stuck on for purpose of masquerade. An old European coat covered a Chinese calico shirt, and round the waist was a heavy leather belt held in place by a huge metal clasp of native workmanship. The nether garments seemed as fantastic and as miscellaneous as the upper

ones; and to complete the picture the man was leaning his hands on a big stick sufficiently formidable to fell an ox. As the sampan rapidly swept alongside, he stood up.

“I am Maddon,” he announced briefly, “and I have no doubt that you are Hancock.” He did not wait for an answer, but jumped on board. “I have come out every day for ten days looking for you. I have had a letter from Grey and two from Ainsley Simon about you.” He stroked his beard and looked at the young man pensively. “By the bye, in the last letter Ainsley Simon tells me quite imperatively to turn you back if possible. I don’t quite understand his last letter.”

“Turn me back — when did you receive that letter?” Paul started: was this at length a clue?

“A few days ago. You know the native courier-post gets here from Wayway in less than fifteen days; the men run overland, over the mountains, over rivers — over everything.”

The red-bearded man waved a comprehensive arm. Paul was about to speak, but his companion continued.

“By the bye, you mustn’t notice my costume. Everybody I happen to see finds it queer; but I have been in the interior for twenty-five years without ever coming out, and now I wear what suits myself. I hate to feel cramped. See how free I am in this.”

He dropped his stick on the deck and stretched his arms far apart and then swung out a leg. “I can do anything in these clothes and I like the feeling. Now are you ready to come on shore? There are the usual number of cases, I suppose.”

He turned to his own boatman and spoke a few words. They slipped from his mouth with the ease of water running from a tap. Here was a man who had been completely assimilated.

Now in silence the two men watched the score of small compact cases being trans-shipped, and there only remained the question of paying off the boat. That was soon finished with, and they proceeded ashore. To Paul’s surprise his boatmen seemed to have not the slightest interest in his movements. He could not know that here, in this region, he was as easy to trace as the river itself.

“Not much of a town,” said Maddon, as they landed, pointing to the filthy litter around, “but you must remember that even limitless China has its limits. You are rather more than five hundred miles from Wayway. Waywav is more than a thousand miles from the sea; and from here due southwest in fourteen marches you have reached nobody’s land. Are you interested in traveling?”

He looked at his young companion indifferently.

“Yes,” said Paul, “I am,” though he would have liked to say that already he had had as much as he wanted.

“Hum!” said the red-bearded man, “I used to be, but I am tired of it now. I can think better when I am quiet.” In that sentence he had expressed his whole life.

The conversation was not resumed until they had reached their destination. A heavy gateway hid the entrance to a very modest compound, in which was a diminutive native house adapted to European needs by a few minute changes, and a tiny chapel. The one imposing thing was the gateway, and the red-bearded man smiled when he saw the effect this discovery produced on Paul. It was monumental.

As soon as they had dismissed the porters, the owner of this odd station began to talk.

“I have put all the money in the gateway, you will notice,” he said. “It is really

extraordinarily strong. It would take the most determined crowd in the world at least eight or ten minutes to break down. That is just the time I would need. Look here!”

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He brought Paul into his sleeping-room, and showed him flag of stone on the uncarpeted floor with a heavy iron ring set in it.

“That’s a trap-door. Underneath there is a short tunnel running across the street to a shop owned by one of my converts. At the back of his shop there is a big yard which leads to a creek. The creek runs directly into the river. In fifteen minutes I could reach the river by this route and be absolutely safe.” He stroked his big red beard and looked at his companion pensively. “What do you think of that?” he inquired.

“You are certainly well prepared for riots, but are they so common as that here?”

The red-bearded man slowly shook his head.

“No,” he said, “they are not so common here, because for ten years I have been the only white man in the town. But this country is subject to rebellions, which are very different things, and may be bad for me, since Christian-baiting is a common pastime. Last year, for instance, we had a so-called Blue Army of Righteousness. The Government being only an expression, the Chinese theory being that people must be left to govern themselves, it so happened that the people decided they were unhappy. So they rose, put blue turbans on, refused to pay taxes, and killed a few tax-collectors.”

“And then?”

“It fizzled out eventually, but they were holding this town in force for several days, and they might have burnt me out and killed me just for sport. My trap-door and my heavy gateway would have been useful.”

“Why did they put on turbans? Are the Mohammedans numerous here?”

“They put turbans on in this country very often when they revolt; it has nothing to do with the Mohammedans.”

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“But are the Mohammedans numerous here?” persisted Paul, remembering now how he had not yet discovered anything valuable about this people.

“Perhaps — I don’t know,” said Maddon. “I have never been interested in the matter. Are you studying the question?”

“No — oh, no. But I have seen Mohammedans about, and my boatmen were certainly Mohammedans.”

The red-bearded man shrugged his shoulders. “There are ten thousand sects in this country. I never bother myself about anything save my own business.”

Paul desisted. He saw it was useless questioning him. This was evidently a man who had acquired his own peculiar outlook on life, and who was completely indifferent to everything else. He might not be exactly mad, but he was not exactly normal. Yet how was it possible to expect that he should be exactly normal, reflected Paul, seeing the strange conditions in which he lived and which he confessed to having lived in for twenty-five years — a whole quarter of a century? It would have really been much stranger had he remained quite like other men; it was his abnormality which made him possible.

And the talks which Paul had with him during that and following days confirmed this. His astounding methods for propagating religion in the manner he thought fit, his bizarre dress, his curious absent-mindedness and indifference—all proved that the conventionality of settled places is the sheet-anchor of society, and that that very word, orthodoxy, is an enormous political as well as socio-religious asset, because it implies that nobody is thinking, thought being immediately destructive of uniformity. Such a conclusion hardly redounds to the credit of man, but then the real truth seldom does; and it is merely the firm determination to accept and believe in certain generalities which touch the border of a number of

general truths but do not properly establish them, which is the basis of all society.

“Do you know one of the hardest problems I have to contend with?” said Maddon at the beginning of one of his discussions.

Paul shook his head, and then he heard, better put than he could ever put it, what he had already vaguely thought. His companion was seated cross-legged on a bench, smoking a pipe of native tobacco exactly as a man of the country would have done. It was his boast that he cost his mission practically nothing, and looking at his rude costume, his great shock of hair, his rough surroundings, that was easy to believe.

“Well, it is this. To any people of the stamp of Europeans, Christianity and all it teaches — its parables, its Rule of Life, its philosophy — is perfect idealism — is the picture of a world which the unimaginative and very definite-minded European accepts as the only equivalent of heaven on earth which it has ever been possible to conceive. The Eastern atmosphere of the Bible, from the first page to the last, is redolent of a world about which the majority of white man-kind will never know anything at all. Now it is admittedly easy to invest with a vast significance things which are strangely poetical, things which appeal to the imagination through the imagery with which they are described, things which are distant, vague, sublime, tragical. Do you see what I mean? I want you to, because what I am attempting to define is idealism, which is the first goal in every great religion. Well, my difficulty here is that there is not one word in the Bible which really suggests any

idealism to these people. They understand and admit the sense and value of every word in the Bible because they are Easterners and because the Biblical world is really their own world. And just because they understand it so well, it has no mystery, no idealism, for them; and that is precisely what every

people in the mass must be given. For instance, the parables and the miracles, which are so puzzling to many minds at home—here everybody understands them at once; and when you have finished explaining them, you are overwhelmed with the feeling that you are a clumsy outsider telling these men what they have always known much better than you will ever know. It is because we have transplanted this imagery, made of it an exotic, set it in gold and jewels, and wafted it up to the clouds, that it has become what it is to us. It is for us a system of practical idealism; and when we bring back to the East, after twenty centuries, this perfected idealism, we are immensely surprised to find that it has nothing to give the native mind which it has not always known. Look at what I am forced to do with my annual shipments of mission literature, look at what I shall do with your cases."

He swung himself to his feet, drew his keys from his pocket, and unlocked a small room. Through the door Paul could see that the room was full of the small cases of books which were so laboriously despatched to this distant point. And suddenly he remembered with a movement of surprise how Mr. Denning had also shown him long, long ago a similar room. The coincidence was odd and striking.

"Do you know why I bury them like that? Because they hinder my work, they do not help it. I rely entirely on word of mouth now, and I have a register filled with hundreds of names of those whom I have reached. If you like, you can hear me preach in the streets; sometimes it is rather remarkable. Here, as in Palestine nineteen centuries ago, it is the man that counts more than the doctrines he teaches; personality is the whole thing. One of my difficulties is to refuse the gifts which reach me after my preaching. I got a whole drove of pigs once! Am I surprising you?"

He looked at Paul in his vague, absorbed manner.

"You are interesting me beyond measure," said the younger man slowly. "You are the first missionary I have ever met."

"Ah," exclaimed the other, getting up and striding up and down, aroused by that praise, "you are thinking of the others now — the manner in which proselytism has really settled down elsewhere to an educational and hospital system — that is, to teaching and healing in a practical way. That is what it largely is round the settlements, that is what it has drifted into. Some say the Americans are largely responsible for that, with the big money-gifts they get from their countrymen. But I doubt whether it is not simply an advance along the line of resistance; it must be that. We are set on teaching them Europeanism; that is what it is in plain English. The big conference which will soon open at Pangchow will

decide nothing, you will see, because these things cannot be decided by rules and resolutions. Well, some of us manage to be different. You will find Marvin and Stanion much the same as myself."

They returned to the subject again and again during the succeeding days; and after each discussion Paul was filled with the most curious feelings. He could see the truth in this man, he could understand every inch of his mental attitude, he could appreciate the manner in which he set his face rigidly against any copying of the accepted methods.

Yet through it all he felt that it was a *tour-de-force*, something which could not last, since it depended on the man and on the man only; and at last he knew why Ainsley Simon tormented by doubts had been forced to fortify himself by compromise.

Oh, the great, mighty question of the Unknown God!…

CHAPTER IX

AS far away from this region where Paul had wandered as Paris is from Berlin, and yet only a stone's throw in vast China, the decennial conference was about to open at Pangchow.

For weeks past men and women had been journeying from the ends of the great Empire to this conference in the most diverse manner. Some came from distant inland places, where it was necessary, before any more modern method of travel could be found, to sit for days and days in a swinging sedan-chair, coming over great mountains, fording streams, and exposed to the inclemencies of an obdurate climate. Others had traveled from the far northwest for hundreds of miles in rude carts along ruder roads which powdered them with unending dust — a mode of travel which is ruination to the nerves of the nervous. Yet others had come by native boat; dozens had been able to use steamers or at least steam launches; and a few, being very poor and really self-supporting, had actually traveled within sight of Pangchow itself, bravely seated on screeching wheelbarrows (which are the very cheapest conveyance in the world), oblivious to everything save the ardent desire to be present at this great meeting.

All this heterogeneous collection of men and women — heterogeneous in dress, in outlook on life, in sect — were united by one bond, their cause.

Briefly, Protestantism was felt to be at stake. The efforts of thousands of these men and women spread over half a century had won just one hundred thousand adherents in China and no more, and there had not been wanting countless

critics of a propaganda which after an expenditure of so many millions of money had won such meagre results. Also there had been very many riots recently, and though few lives had been lost, the feeling had become widespread that something must be radically amiss with a proselytism which produced such untoward results. Now it was one small thing, now another, which precipitated each explosion, of popular wrath and sent up mission after mission in flames. Though it was possible to explain each such regrettable incident, though it could be conclusively proved in each separate case that the local populace had been the aggressors, the uncomfortable feeling remained that the first cause, the fountain and origin of each, was the presence of missionaries. Then the pressure of the public opinion in the European settlements was against them more than ever, and this disconcerted them. In spite of the mutual antagonism, in spite of the mutual contempt, men and women of all shades of opinion and of all beliefs recognized that the subtle bonds of race somehow bound their interests together and made them inseparable; and because this was so neither could really afford to ignore the other.

From every point of view, then, the big meeting was important. For besides this great

question which interested the general public, there were the more particular and private questions which affected the activities of each separate affiliation. For instance, the mapping out of districts into zones where a particular kind of Christianity should have a monopoly had not been attended with altogether happy results. In the zeal which had been displayed at previous conferences to deal effectively with the vital question of overlapping, as it was euphoniously termed, actualities had been lost sight of in the quest after idealities. It had been found in practice that it was idle to suppose that this method was really workable; for if successes were gained by one mission in one neighbourhood,

it was only logical and human and Christian successes should be followed up and that preachers that those pastors should be allowed the freest hand. Thus sometimes it had happened that a district duly pre-empted by one sect had been incontinently invaded by members of another sect, who, refusing in their enthusiasm to admit for 0ne moment that earthly and temporal decrees could carry wight with them, had by their activities brought much discord and discontent just when they seemed on the brink of great successes

Other questions, less pleasant and less easy to handle, since they involved these delicate issues about which every man thinks differently, had also to be decided. The sneer flung out by the denizens of settlements that “rice-Christians” (*Anglice*, Christians who became Christians because it was an easy way of winning the daily rice) were the only kind of Christians made by the Protestant Church in China, though in many cases palpably foolish and spiteful, contained nevertheless a formidable substratum of truth.

Nor could it have been humanly possible for it to have been otherwise. When a system, or a series of systems, aims at detaching, unit by unit, people from the hoary frame in which they and their ancestors, down to their remotest forebears, have been enclosed, it most naturally follows that the social ostracism and practical disabilities which such a tremendous action entails should be recompensed in some material way. Often the finding of the daily rice really became a most vital question. The question of the stomach is a very terrific responsibility, as all those who have been hungry well know.

Thus in a hundred different ways difficult questions had not only arisen in the past, but were constantly arising afresh. And in one most important particular Protestantism seemed a house divided against itself, not because of the great variety of its sects (a state of affairs which is very understandable

to the minds of the East, since the East itself has a myriad sects), but because of the two radically different schools. The older method employed had been to gain adherents as the Church of Rome had gained them in the East — by temporary enthusiasm, by quick baptism, and by the eternal hope that time, setting its seal on this conversion, might do the rest. The newer method rejected totally the efficacy of a system which slid round the great difficulty — that is, the question of the mental fitness of a people who for a hundred generations had been sunk in harmful practices to receive like a bolt from the blue the

revelation of Christianity without a long and careful preliminary training. Educate, educate, educate — that was the sole watchword of the new system. Schooling must be the first means, and through the schools the real mind of the people would be reached.

That was now the avowed policy of all the American groups, and the English groups, in spite of their conservatism, in spite of their disinclination to endorse such a peculiarly secular Christianity, had been slowly forced into line. Common-sense — Anglo-Saxon common-sense, told them that there was straight thinking to be seen in this method; and though religion is essentially a matter wherein common-sense has but little place, latter-day proselytism has awaked in every part of the world to the knowledge that methods do and must change. So now it was merely a question of how far the new method might be allowed to go, and it was just here that the gravest divergences of opinion existed.

Then backsliding had to be most minutely handled. It was a regrettable fact, which no one thought of denying, that even men who had become good and sincere Christians, once they removed from the vicinity of the church which had received them, gradually lapsed into their old ways. They were like drops of fresh water thrown into a great Dead Sea. It was almost physically impossible for them to persist

in their Christianity, not because of any violent (for the Chinese care nothing about the religious beliefs of their neighbours), but in the face of the social differences which such an alien creed enforced. Ancestor worship was but one small thing; there were dozens of other things, where wife, daughter, sons, relations, and the neighbourhood were united against such converts. If it had been a mere question of dying for this faith, there would have been less difficulty, dying being a violent act which vast numbers of people all over the world can face with equanimity. But it was no question of any such violent act; it was a question of resisting the erosive effect of surroundings—an erosion like that of the sea, which often defeats all human ingenuity.

Such were a few, but only a few, of the questions which would be considered both publicly and *in camera* by the great conference *in the course of six days*. That nothing could possibly be settled was only natural. Yet what many required was not so much a settlement of such matters as a fortifying of their own faith; that was the great underlying motive of their streaming towards this distant inland city in a pilgrimage, which, to the mind of any thoughtful person, was of a most remarkable character in that, apart from the religious aspect, this simultaneous gathering of all Anglo-Saxondom in the heart of a distant continent was a message of hope for the innate altruism and solidarity of that race elsewhere. That they were prepared to meet one another, prepared to discuss in relation to their applicability to an Asiatic people many of the very questions which had driven from the shores of old England to the shores of New England a valiant generation, was itself a matter for supreme congratulation. It was also a spectacle to hearten those who see in the historic sense something more than an attachment to a vanished past, something which ardently hopes for a valiant future.

So, dimly perceiving something of these things and almost pitifully concerned about the other things, this great company had slowly gathered — the very poor and humble back-woodsmen from the back blocks of China almost childishly apprehensive, because contact with their more conventional brethren of the great settlements awakened in them the strangest feelings. They settled here, there, and everywhere as best they could, anxiously awaiting the day when the meeting would be declared open — some counting the days, because every day meant more expense, and even trivial expenses were hard to face.

And to this gathering, fully armed as the representative of the Wayway English Mission and the linked out-stations beyond, came no other person than Mr. Grey — a Mr. Grey become strangely confident, a Mr. Grey indifferent to his hidden vice, because he knew now that it would remain completely hidden, and that there was not a shadow of proof against him. He was sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently disagreeable to have grasped long ago that in the common business of life altruism and virtue play no part at all, and that in missions, as in other walks of life, it is the uncompromising type that ultimately conquers.

Mr. Grey had not been idle; he was never idle. For many months he had been conducting a vehement confidential correspondence with the headquarters of the society to which he belonged, laying down numbers of principles for consideration and a very definite future policy. And just because Ainsley Simon had somehow forfeited confidence Mr. Grey had been greedily listened to. Now, confident that the victory which he coveted was almost within his grasp, he had become truculent in his bearing towards those who were more humble than he; and this attitude speedily won for him much authority. In the organizing work which preceded the conference he busied himself exceedingly, and his

confidence in himself won confidence from others. He found himself, not unexpectedly, nominated chairman of sub-committees, and he soon showed that possession of the chair had a meaning and a reality for him which it does not for all. He domineered over the sub-committees, and in a very few days even the backwoodsmen knew him by name.

So, when the great meeting publicly opened, his position was assured. His paper on the discipline of missions followed one read by a gentle grey-haired veteran, entitled “Are Missionaries needed in China?”— a paper which dealt with many matters tentatively and breathed throughout the spirit of compromise. After such a grand but troubling interrogation Mr. Grey’s definite, precise, and well-formulated methodism seemed full of more than ordinary worth. Standing up coldly, he somehow commanded respect.

He deprecated, in no uncertain language, the habit which was becoming so widespread of yielding something to native prejudices, and of no longer insisting on that punctilious observance of European prejudices which really formed the bed-rock of their menaced position. He boldly attacked everyone who had differed from him in previous papers; he took issue with those who insisted that evangelistic work had not received adequate

attention and that methods need now to be recast. “There is too much subjectivism,” he declaimed in a passage which held the audience enchained because it was so insolently prejudiced, “there is far too much subjectivism today. All our leaders seem in favour of a large measure of subjectivism, which means that each man is to be a standard to himself and a slave to his ever-varying moods. There is an urgent demand for some standardization in many matters which have too long been left uncared for; and if we are to present a united front to the enemy, if we are to defeat insidious Orientalism, we must give to our forces a more military discipline. The voice

of authority must be raised in every district; our brothers and our sisters must unite, if not of their own free will, by order and command.” And so on and on.

When he sat down, he was received with the applause which is always accorded to those who awaken dread; and then it was that he permitted the shadow of his curious grim smile to pass once more over his hard face. He was winning — he was winning, he knew. A little more and the victory
would be openly assured.

A lady speaker followed — a lady speaker who gave a clear and clever account of a school for the blind which she was conducting by herself, unaided and unsupported. She told how the poor children she taught were filled with such thankfulness that without question, without hesitation, they had accepted from her the Gospel as a truly inspired and holy word. She told little anecdotes which were truly affecting — little anecdotes which were good to hear just because they were full of tears. Her genuine feeling, her gentle sincerity, touched all hearts; and Virginia Bayswater, sitting far back among the rows and rows of women-workers, for the first time felt in her a glow of enthusiasm. Oh, yes, if it were all like this how easy it would be, how wonderfully easy! Here were faith, hope, and charity; here was, in its purest form, the essence of all those good things which are the all in all.

And then, just when spiritual exaltation was coming over her, the voice of the lady-speaker abruptly stopped; the dream vanished, and once more the shadow of Mr. Grey and all he postulated fell across her heart.

For now the small-souled fanatics were quickly following one another with passionate and apochryphal accounts of how the words which they had spoken in many distant corners had won instant victory. Here was the morology of missions, the curse of missions — for emotionalism and hysteria

are not real religion, but the vices of religion; and these men were openly parading their viciousness.

“Hundreds wept and believed,” declaimed the fanatics, “hundreds were gathered into fold.” And yet the organizers of the conference, who had the arithmetic of converts at their

fingers' tips, never so much as frowned. "There is progress everywhere, a demand so great that the supply is unequal to it. More workers are required, thousands of additional workers," chanted the fanatics.

And so the days of the open conference passed quickly away, with that great company of men and women always gathering at an early hour and sitting through endless hours of debate with fervour and resolve.

And when it was all over two pieces of news created much interest. Mr. Grey had been appointed head of the Wayway mission, and the Rev. Ainsley Simon was invalided home for good.

Virginia Bayswater heard this news with tears; for she herself had just been told that she was not returning to Wayway, but was to be left behind in Pangchow. To her the world seemed just then a very cruel place.

CHAPTER X

EVEN such an absent-minded person as this strange man Maddon had gathered from Ainsley Simon's warnings, carefully worded though they were, that there was some special need to turn back this tall young man who had floated momentarily into his life and proposed to march out of it on his sandalled feet across the mountains. But a long life of solitude inevitably makes men unable to understand those dangers which loom up so large before men of the cities. It is only the city-bred who wonder how it is that the forest, which shelters the lion or the tiger, is also inhabited by gentle deer; men of solitude know that all things may live together, only the fools and the weak succumbing. Watchfulness is the guardian of life; this is the universal law.

So this strange red-bearded man did not at all see why, because the southwestern frontiers of the Empire were likely to be torn by open rebellion in a few weeks, a peaceful traveler should not go his way towards those frontiers. Every year somebody had done exactly the same thing; there was nothing new in it. He himself was so accustomed to carrying his life in his own hand, and saving it by a few adroit moves like a fencer who is master of his foil, that it seemed to him singularly stupid to take all the trouble to write warning letters. However, as he had been told by Ainsley Simon to do so, after a fashion he did try to persuade Paul to turn back. But, of course, it was to no purpose; and so it happened that some days later, having seen him with his packmen several miles on his road towards the mountains, he was unemotionally bidding him good-bye. "It will take you twelve days to reach Marvin," he said

thoughtfully, "and even then you may not find him. Marvin is always traveling, and traveling suddenly and erratically. He says that comes because he lives at such a high elevation. It is eight thousand feet, you know. Stanion, however, you will certainly find a week later. You ought to get back in a month or two. I shall send your letters off tomorrow without fail. Good-bye."

And in this abrupt manner was Paul launched yet farther into the unknown.

And it was the unknown in the truest sense of the word. He had become so accustomed to the river and the river-boats, to the endless chanting and calling of the boatmen and the trackers, that now he felt more than lost. To march on foot at the rear of a line of pack-carriers was a solitary and cruel sort of penance, he thought. The giant river had become his consoling friend; it had showed him countless moods and aspects; unconsciously it had not only taught him much, but it had soothed and rested him. And now the friend was gone for good.

Even the faithful little boy, who seemed at home anywhere, who had appeared indifferent to all changes, was now secretly affected. He realized that his master had to go on since he

was traveling to do this distributing work, but his manner plainly showed that he had become suspicious of danger. Now, as the giant line of blue mountains steadily came nearer and nearer, he became more and more silent until he hardly spoke at all. Only when they loomed up very near did he give voice to the promptings of his heart.

“Master,” he said, plucking at Paul’s sleeve, “do we go right to the top of the mountains, through the mountains, into the wild country?”

Paul nodded his head.

“I do not like the mountains,” said the boy in a sombre and suspicious manner, as a man of fifty might have done.

“In a few days we come to a small mission,” replied Paul. “From there we turn north again. Then after some travel we come to the river again, and after that we shall soon be back in Wayway and my work finished.”

Unconsciously he must have said all this with little confidence, for the small boy now shook his head with the inherited wisdom of countless generations of nature students. “Perhaps we shall turn where we do not wish,” he said in a darkly mysterious way.

“What do you mean?”

The boy pointed to the mountains and then to the line of pack-carriers, who were now resting on the roadside, idly talking.

“They say that beyond there a new king will arise and that his armies will be more numerous than any yet seen. All will be captured to obey him, and all who do not obey him will be killed.”

In spite of himself Paul smiled. There was a grand Biblical simplicity about this programme which made a very direct appeal. And yet the age of simplicity has vanished, even in China.

“Why do you laugh, master?” said the lad, looking up at him doubtfully. “It is true; I have heard the men say it many times, and when they have entered the mountains they too will become afraid and perhaps run. You will see.”

Now he stared at the mountains with the peculiar awe-struck stare of the East when anything appears fearful. The pack-carriers, too, were all looking at the mountains, as if they possessed the quality of evil magic. Presently the boy went on:

“All along the river these men say there are many Mohammedans watching, waiting for the arrival of arms, waiting also to report all movements. Up in the mountains lies

much Mohammedan country, though there is much desert too. A generation ago they rebelled and half of them were destroyed, but now they have gathered strength and will fight again. I am afraid, master. It is not good to go into the mountains."

He had come very close now, and whispered this as if he were really afraid of being overheard. Paul smiled at him and then suddenly became grave.

"Nevertheless, I am going," he said, "perhaps just because there is danger. God helping us, we shall get through."

"But why go where there is danger?" The boy asked the question with eyes round with wonder.

"The great interrogation," murmured Paul to himself, "the great interrogation, which I myself cannot answer." Suddenly he heaved a sigh and rose to his feet.

"We are going on," the said resolutely, "because I was sent to make the journey and I will not turn back."

They did not talk of the matter again that day or the next. For the next day they had begun climbing upwards, and all possibility of turning back had vanished. The higher they climbed the wilder did the country become, until soon all trace of cultivation ceased. There were only now the rest-houses along the bridle-path, marking the regular stages of each few hours' march — rest-houses which provided the coarsest fare, which Paul was glad he was able to supplement from his own slender stores. And no sooner had they crossed the first line of mountains than the rest-houses showed a tiny little change in the features of the men who had charge of them. It was plain that those bold noses and powerful jowls and open eyes and deep chests had been transmitted by forebears who had originally come from quite another part of Asia.

"Do you notice it, Master?" whispered the small boy

tremulously. "There are all Mohammedans now, who take off their turbans when strangers approach, so that it shall not be known. They are bad, silent men."

That night the little boy's spirits rose for the last time, for they reached a small village where the Chinese government kept a tiny garrison composed of twenty soldiers. To simple minds the soldiers gave comfort; but to the sophisticated, of whom there are not a few now in the world, they merely emphasized that sapient Chinese saying, "The mountains are high and Peking is far."

For the military gentlemen wore anything but a satisfied aspect. They seemed to be very

indifferently pleased with this country, and lived a prey to all the threatening horrors of civil war.

“We shall flee when trouble comes,” they announced simply to Paul that night, after talking about local conditions. “The warlike character of the Mohammedan mountaineers makes it vain for us to preserve neutrality.”

They did not know that they had compressed into that single amusing sentence half the history of China; they thought that they were only showing how human and frail they were. Presently they questioned Paul.

“Why do you travel in this bad country?” they inquired.

“Because I have a duty to perform,” he answered.

“You must be paid much,” they said.

“I am paid nothing,” he replied.

Red-bearded Maddon had warned him not to disclose his vocation; but he saw that the pack-carriers had already talked.

“Is it true that you are a teacher of religion?” they inquired presently in utter indifference.

“Yes.”

“Your religion is good,” said one of the oldest presently. “I was once in service in a northern province, and I broke

my leg.” He bared the limb and patted it affectionately. “Near us was a mission, and they carried me there. They cured me and kept me for one month and would take no payment.”

“*Ai*, *ya*,” chorussed the others; and presently they were listening to some simple truths of this faith which was causing such a subtle commotion and which took no payment.

When morning came, the soldiers did not want Paul to depart.

“Here we can protect you,” they said in their simple way, “for when the trouble comes we can all flee together.”

“Must the trouble come?” inquired Paul for the last time just before starting.

“Yes,” they answered, “our government is bad, for even we are scarcely paid.”

Sapient analysis of a vast problem! And with this Job's comforting Paul passed on in his strange pilgrimage.

The mind soon adjusts itself to everything, and in the cold mountain air no dismay born of sultry plains is possible. Paul was feeling almost happy now; for though the men at the rest-houses were always silent and even sullen, they did not molest him. Perhaps he would really get through.

"In two days we reach the next mission, little Wang," he said gaily. "Are you afraid of these mountains still?"

"Not so afraid."

"Why?"

" Because I know them," which is a somewhat excellent explanation of the nature of fear.

Now that they had reached the highest altitude villages began to reappear. But they were a new kind of village — villages flanked with watch-towers, and with extensive ruins encumbering the ground around them; villages, therefore, which kept open pages of half-forgotten history so that all could remember what had once come to pass. Horses also

were to be seen — many small mountain horses, and a few big horses whose sires must have come from very far away.

"Buy some horses, master," said the small boy with that enthusiastic simplicity which ascribes to the European the power to do all things at will.

"Horses cost money; I have only enough for the journey."

"It would be easy to steal some," murmured the lad pensively, stopping and watching a small mob grazing unattended on a hillside. He stood there so long that Paul had to call back to him. He was, in all truth, very close to nature.

Onwards they traveled, and Paul now noticed that the road — the road once made by the somnolent government which here only existed in name — carefully avoided the villages, sometimes passing them at a distance of a mile.

"Tomorrow we shall arrive at Tamba, where is teacher Marvin," said Paul the last evening.

"Tomorrow! It is good," said the small boy.

"Are you tired?" inquired Paul kindly.

“Tired,” echoed the boy, who looked only a child and was yet a man. “No! I have walked since I can remember long distances, and never have I been tired.”

At grey dawn they started, eating much because they must travel far. In the middle of the day they passed by a lofty mountain covered with large masses of rock, partly buried in old masses of snow, so sheltered that the sun could not melt them. Thereafter they entered a great valley thoroughly cultivated and of mild temperature. It was clear they were getting near Tamba. In the distance they perceived a large village flanked with watch-towers which had the appearance of castles.
“We are only three hours from Tamba,” said the pack-carriers when they paused at last to rest and wipe the sweat from their faces.

“Only three hours,” exclaimed the little boy. “It is good, it is good.” He capered on his sandaled feet.

The village and the watch-towers grew larger and larger, and from the environs it was easy to see that the village was rich. Nobody appeared, however; and the striking difference of this upland country from the real China of the alluvial plains was thus made manifest.

Gaily talking, the party advanced, going more quickly now because this long lonely march was drawing to an end. But suddenly, when they were a few hundred paces away from the first flanking watch-tower, there was the report of a gun, and there issued at once from the village a formidable squadron of cavalry who dashed rapidly forward.

The mass of horsemen, all armed with matchlocks and long lances, seemed disposed for a skirmish. Riding knee to knee, they swept quickly down on this group of innocents. Their martial humour disappeared, however, at the blind terror which their dramatic appearance had inspired. The pack-carriers, every man face down in the dust of the road, were uttering the most piteous cries. They implored mercy with never-ceasing voice.

The leading horsemen swept contemptuously by them, pricking at them with their lances. They had another object. In an instant they had surrounded Paul, who, pale but resolute, strove to moderate the paralysis of fear which had forced the small boy in the dust at his feet.

The end was coming in the appointed way. He was almost glad.

CHAPTER XI

A HORSEMAN, spurring along the rude mountain road in utter recklessness, carried the news of the dramatic capture of the white man and his carriers to the town of Tamba, now in open insurrection.

The coming of this galloping horseman was no surprise to the men who sat in perpetual council at the central mosque. They had known all about the movements of everybody of any importance within a radius of hundreds of miles ever since the beginning of this year when they had secretly decided to revolt, if all went to suit them. That this particular white man was traveling hither had been within their exact knowledge for many weeks, just as they knew where all other white men were traveling in their territory. They could have stopped him long before had they wished by killing him, but that might have excited comment. Also such clumsy methods, from their nature appeal only to fools. So what they had done was merely to see that he was quickly shepherded by their own people from the moment he had issued out of the great river-gorges and shown that he was really going to put his head into the lion's mouth after this unaccountable and senseless manner.

Now the council sat idly talking, as they waited for an answer to a message which they in turn had sent into the town from this their revolutionary headquarters. They did not care at all about the capture; but as they themselves could not turn it to any advantage, they cleverly sought for advice which might do so. The Chinese, in all stations of life and in all circumstances, are always willing to use the advice of others — if it suits them.

So, when the answer came, they quietly nodded their consent. Six characters scrawled on a piece of rice-paper had said, "Bring him to Tamba at once."

The horseman, long sufficiently reposed, leaped at once onto his shaggy mount, and bringing his thick riding-stick repeatedly down on the animal's flanks, started his violent progress once more. A bell, suspended round the pony's neck by a piece of thick red cord, jangled loudly as he galloped, and advertised to all it might inconvenience this hurried passage along a dangerous road.

But there was no one traveling, and the horseman did not have to draw rein once. So the men in the medieval watch-towers of the outlying village caught the sound of the jangling bell long before they could believe that it was their comrade returning. But as there could be no other messenger on the road, they promptly signaled from the watch-towers to the village, and the village made ready. And thus it happened that when this hook-nosed descendant of a race that had perhaps wandered hither from Arabistan many centuries ago dashed in on his sweating mount at breakneck speed, the captives and the escort were already awaiting him in the village street.

The reading of the message caused a change of plans. The wretched pack-carriers, with their loads still strapped to them, were led back to the outhouses where they had been first confined. More horses were brought out, and Paul was told unceremoniously to mount. The piteous cries of the little boy, about to be left behind, made him speak. Then it was that he asked curtly that the small fellow be allowed to go with him.

Perhaps it was the fact that these were his first words which impressed his captors. In any case, by way of consent, they simply flung the lad on a mule.

“Can you ride? ” they inquired of the small boy; and

because he cried a negative, quickly they lashed him to the rude wooden saddle with leather thongs.

“If you fall, you die,” they curtly explained.

“Start!” called the leader; and with a shout this squadron of irregular cavalry, which was worthy of better things, broke into a canter, driving the two captives in front of them with lowered lances.

Night had fallen before they reached Tamba, but that was no hindrance. A short halt was called and a dozen torches fired; and in that flaring, dancing light, with the thick shadows melting and forming like ghosts along their rough path, they at last entered the town. Without a pause, the men rode straight to the big mosque, trotting through the massive gateways stirrup to stirrup.

In the great courtyard of that high sanctuary many were waiting for them. Great flares of oakum and pitch were burning here, giving a ghoulish appearance to the dark lean men who stood about in groups in idle expectancy, and lighting up the small gaudily roofed minarets as if this had been a theatre. Some few of the men in this great waiting company carried arms; but most of them had nothing save their resolute appearance to show that they were devoted to a cause which their leaders wished them blindly to undertake.

The clatter of these many hoofs caused the inner doors to be thrown open, and many elderly turbaned men — two or three even wearing the green turban — now appeared from the flanking houses that ran round the courtyard like so many barracks. Their gravity and their silence were curiously impressive, for this religion of Mohammed never fails to make men.

Without a second’s delay the two captives were hurried up the steps of one building and there roughly halted.

“*An-ssu-lia-mo-erh-li-kun,*” called the man of the cavalry band in their musical greeting of bastard Arabic.

"*Wo-erh-lai-kun-men, ssu-lia-mo,*" came the quick answer in the same bastard tongue.

"Who is this?" inquired one man in authority with a short laugh, as he saw the small panic-stricken boy, cowering in terror because he had been dragged into a drama which horrified him. "Who is this?"

"His *tu-ti* (disciple)," replied one of the escort, pointing to Paul. In a land where all have disciples — priests and beggars, and thieves and artisans, and harlots and robbers — that was more than an explanation. It was a justification.

"He is not needed, lock him up," said the same speaker shortly. And with that they led the weeping small boy away.

For a few seconds there was a sharp interchange of remarks, and then Paul himself was silently led into the mosque itself, no one questioning him, no one indeed speaking a word to him. With a sort of haughty indifference the men saw this chance captive pass through their midst; today he was with them, tomorrow or the next day he would have disappeared. So now he was left to gaze in peace at the temple of a religion which is quietly growing apace throughout a vast Empire and whose future is believed to be many times greater than the future of Christianity itself.

He had never before been in a Chinese mosque, and his eyes now quickly noted the strangeness of it all, and the manner in which religion always unconsciously fits in with each particular environment. Outside he had seen how towers rose like small minarets, but they were minarets which had made an open compromise with Chinese conceptions and were as unlike the minarets of Arabistan as rocks are unlike chiselled building stones. Inside, however, though the shape of the building was Chinese, the appearance was utterly different to the Chinese temples he knew. Yet at once he noticed that, like the mosque of St. Sophia, where

the Turks have not troubled to remove the Christian inscriptions from the walls, the Mohammedans of China have not troubled to remove the urns of sacrifice and the Imperial texts which must be placed at the threshold of the temple of the native religions. Though they were preparing to revolt, they left them there, knowing that these things have no meaning.

Apart from this the mosque was naked in its bareness, in its lack of all those tawdry gewgaws which other religions affect. As they led him forward in his stockinged feet, he saw that the inner roof was purely Moorish in its aspect, and supported by countless low colonnades. Arabic texts were strangely scrawled in letters of gold on the sky-blue ceiling. And in the far background, instead of the Dragon banner of China, a green flag of the Prophet now stood draped. As Paul looked back at it all, in the dim light of the hanging

lamps, with the memory of the crowds of strange turbaned men without, the scene seemed as unreal in his eyes as if it had been a phantasmagoria from the Arabian Nights. Then suddenly, with one word of command, the men told him to enter a small room which opened off near the praying-wall. And as he did so they took their departure. There he would be a thousand times safe.

For a long time he sat motionless, thinking hard. He was confused, tired, torn with conflicting emotions, oppressed with vague forebodings. And yet his interest had been awakened as it had never been awakened before. He had never believed that Mohammedanism was such a hidden power in this land. It was unbelievable, it was not true, it was mad, and yet there was this great outward and visible sign. He felt almost glad he was captured, for he felt no real fear regarding his ultimate fate.

Gradually, however, as the reaction from the excitement of his capture and his hurried ride became more marked, he

felt inexpressibly tired; and yielding to an impulse which became irresistible, he fell back on the carpeted floor with a feeling of immense relief.

How long he had been asleep he did not know, but at last the sound of approaching voices roused him. Nearer and nearer came the voices, talking loudly as if in some heated argument; and then, as he drowsily listened, suddenly something made him start up fully awake.

That voice — he knew that voice but too well — he had guessed right… . It had come to this!

Yet how should he act? Still confused by his fatigue, he could not think clearly; but instinctively he knew that the moment of trial, the moment for which all that which had preceded during the weary weeks of travel had been mere preparation, had finally arrived.

Still in doubt, he cautiously peered out. Four or five men were standing talking with their backs towards him under the dim light of a hanging lamp some distance away. They were grouped closely together, but he had no difficulty in recognizing at once that giant frame. The unbelievable thing had come true.

Here was nobody less than Mr. Denning in this strong-hold of Mohammedanism!

Yielding to a sudden impulse, with a few rapid movements, Paul roughed his hair over his eyes, turned up the collar of his coat, and placed himself so that the light of the spluttering lamp would be behind him. He did this instinctively, without knowing why he did it. It was just possible that the shock of surprise would be of some help to him, and he felt that he had need of every possible ally. Now composing himself as best he could, he awaited the end.

The discussion, whatever it might be, was evidently not very amicable, for the voices went on and on and many

minutes elapsed before there came the stereotyped Arabic words of farewell. Then at last a heavy foot-tread approached.

“Ahem,” said a deep voice, as the well-known gold-rimmed spectacles suddenly came in view and were searchingly fixed on the recumbent form.

The beard which had grown on Paul’s face during the many weeks of travel was alone an effective disguise; and in that uncertain light no one could have recognized even a dear friend. Mr. Denning was suddenly puzzled and embarrassed.

“I have not the pleasure of knowing who you are,” he said, plainly ill at ease because of the silent manner in which his arrival was received. “But I suppose you are of the dominant race.” He chuckled for an instant and then went on: “The people in this town wish you no harm; but they want to discover why you came on here, when the only foreigner living here, a missionary, was quietly evicted a month ago and when there has been ample warning everywhere. Also they are not quite agreed yet what should be done with you. Several are in favour of extreme measures.”

To this curious speech there was no answer. An expression of anger flitted across Mr. Denning’s face, but he speedily recovered himself and went on:

“Now, as I am well known here and a friend of these people, I can be of help to you if you furnish me with a proper defence. Possibly I can save you from trouble and inconvenience. These people have no quarrel with foreigners, they only wish them to keep away; they are on most friendly terms with myself, and if you place yourself in my hands —”

The sequel was curious. Paul suddenly rose, seized the lamp and held it high above him.

“As I am very evidently in your hands, Mr. Denning,” he began, but he never finished.

For, as he spoke, the big man paled and fell back a step. Then partially recovering himself, he came rapidly forward and towered over him.

“*You, you*,” he exclaimed — “you again, you here! This is not the first time you have crossed my path. And it is hundreds of miles away from the spot I last saw you.” He clenched his fist and went on almost passionately. “What are you doing here, what are you masquerading here for? It can only be that you are spying on me. I let it be known weeks ago in Wayway that there was trouble brewing up here, so as to prevent fools from the

missions traveling this way. I even let your own people know directly. I told them clearly. Ah!”

He suddenly made as if he would strike, but with a last effort he mastered himself.

“Speak,” he said hoarsely, “speak! Why are you here?”

And then Paul spoke:

“Not to spy on you, not to see; indeed, for no other reason than that I was sent by the mission to journey round the stations and expected to find one of our men in this town.”

“You were sent?” interrupted Mr. Denning incredulously. “You were sent?”

“Yes, I was sent,” said Paul steadily.

“Then how comes it that the warning I directly gave counted for nothing?”

“What warning?”

“Weeks ago Grey had a letter from me. Grey heard from me when I was still in Wayway.”

“Grey?” Here was a venomous surprise.

“Yes, Grey,” repeated Mr. Denning.

Now he saw wave after wave of emotion crossing the younger man’s face; he saw the bitterness and the disdain,

and he suddenly understood. For a moment he stood silent, his own feelings suddenly checked by this new and strange discovery of treachery ; and then he contemptuously laughed.

“I see it, I see it all! It is a pretty world, is it not? The crude little plot is as plain as a pike-staff. And this is the man who is one of your companions, colleagues, allies! And because he is that even now you will not speak — you will not admit what a rogue the fellow is. Well, it is none of my business. What is my business is my own welfare, and common-sense forbids that I shall let you go until I am sure that I shall not suffer. There are times when one must be elementary, and this is just one of them. Now let me see.”

Something in this young man’s manner stopped him. He was ominously calm.

“Fortunately for myself,” said Paul slowly, “I guessed something of this — that is, I guessed from indications that you were not very far off; and because I guessed it, I have

taken certain steps. Now should I not return — in brief, should I be killed — my letters will furnish valuable clues." He hesitated for a moment and slightly flushed. "I have sent them to a reliable quarter where they will be quite safe, unless I never return."

Mr. Denning came very near.

"What do you mean," he said in a low voice which trembled with emotion — "what do you mean? Whom have you written to? Do you know I have it within my power to give you a taste of things you have never dreamed of? Do not trifle with me—whom have you written to?"

For a moment the two men eyed one another with fearful intensity. Then something made the younger man remember himself. Now he spoke still more calmly, almost humbly, though his voice vibrated with suppressed feeling.

"Mr. Denning," he said, "I have never been afraid of

threats, never that I can remember; and now, though you have me in your power, I am less afraid than ever. My letters are my personal business; they cannot concern you. I merely repeat that, becoming suspicious as I traveled higher and higher up the river, at last I became convinced that the possibility which you once mentioned to me long long ago was about to become a fact, and that the Mohammedans were going to rise."

"But if you thought that, if you suspected that, why did you persist and come straight on here?" The big man looked at him incredulously.

"Why," echoed Paul, "I do not know why. Ainsley Simon sent two letters to bring me back. Perhaps it was that which forced me on — or something else."

He dropped his eyes and suddenly thought of that curious impulse which had first brought him to China.

But Mr. Denning was strangely perturbed; this was a new complication he had never thought of, and he wished to unravel it. So he spoke on:

"Then you answered Ainsley Simon, you sent him those letters you speak of. He will have told his wife."

"No," replied Paul very simply. "I wrote nothing to him."

"You wrote nothing to him," echoed Mr. Denning, persisting in this interrogatory as if his life depended upon it. "Then since it could not be to Grey and it was not to Simon, you — "

Suddenly he broke off and a new expression crossed his face. Now his eyes blinked rapidly, as if he had become afraid of what they might tell.

“Ah,” he said at length, “I believe I understand. I always suspected it, expected it — ” He began pacing up and down in his old way, forgetting where he was, forgetting everything. “That was more than clever,” he muttered,

“that was subtle. Perhaps you did not see how subtle it was. You have written to her?”

An expression of pain crossed his face as Paul bowed his affirmative, and then a sudden weariness seemed to overwhelm him. That he should have been so beaten stripped from him all his strength and skill. This lad, this boy, had done it… .

He looked around as if seeking for a chair, and then, as his eyes mechanically communicated to his brain that there was no such thing, very slowly and heavily he seated himself on the carpeted floor. Now bowing his head, he clasped his great hands, and appeared buried in thought. He had tried to forget this, and it had been brought back to him in the midst of the desert and these aliens. And because he looked like that, Paul suddenly realized that this towering man had really been forced to acquiesce in everything that had occurred and had played no active part at all. It was all very strange.

“That is very subtle,” Mr. Denning murmured again, as if the idea fascinated him. “It is more subtle than you yourself have imagined. It shows how just one move is always sufficient to win in any game — just one little move! For do you understand that you have tied me by my pride, and now, though it brings harm to me here, though I myself directly suffer for it, I shall have to let you go. But you must flee, your mission business must be abandoned … .”

Suddenly the younger man pitied him, and forgot all the bitterness of the past; for no man is proof against the quick sense of pathos aroused by the sight of a man, or even a dumb animal, utterly baffled. Here was this man at the end of his life engaged in an unworthy quest which he had persuaded himself was worthy. Here was this man marching to an unworthy end. He must be stopped.

“Mr. Denning,” said Paul gently.

“Yes.”

He answered that single word as if he had suddenly become old and listless, as if he had become numbed. The spontaneous concern of the younger man deepened. There appeared to him something cruel in the fate which luring onward this man of great brain had made him enamoured of an idea that was surely insane. This was no place for him, no place for him at all.

“Mr. Denning,” he said earnestly, “if you are going to secure my release, if you are able to see that I am allowed to go, why will you not come with me before it is too late to come, before matters here have gone any farther? Take my poor counsel and come away.” He laid an imploring hand on his shoulder.

“It is a counsel of perfection,” interrupted the big man with something of his old humour, looking up at him momentarily, “but it is a counsel which I cannot follow, because — ” He stopped short.

“Because,” insisted the younger man, still not abandoning hope.

“Because things have gone too far and I have committed myself too deeply. And it would be a cowardly betrayal to go back, for I have aided and abetted these people. If the worst come to the worst, there is one speedy end.”

Suddenly, as if ashamed of such confidences, he scrambled to his feet; but as he stood erect in the dim light, his face shone as if it had been dipped in water. His quick ears had caught a distant sound.

“The *P’ang-ta* — the first hour of prayer — has come,” he exclaimed; “I must leave you. I have made up my mind, and you will not only be released but escorted to a place of safety that I can secure. One thing only I ask of you — which I believe you will do — keep silence. Forget that I exist — forget.”

He raised his hand almost sternly to check any reply. “Good-bye,” he said.

He had gone before there was time to protest; he had gone to his fate. Around the great mosque had suddenly become full of the whispers of the footfalls of the assembling faithful.

Paul, conscious of his insignificance, conscious of the ordeal he had gone through, conscious once more of the fact that the problem of this country was insoluble became filled with curious remorse.

For an instant he stood there motionless, anxiously listening, hardly breathing. Then something seized him body and soul, and suddenly he fell on his face and wept.

CHAPTER XII

How exactly the rest followed he never knew. But it is a fact that he and his little lad, summarily released and escorted to the end of the mountain plateau, as Mr. Denning had promised, had the road sullenly pointed out by men who refused to speak and who merely told them with gestures to go — out of this country, into the country of sunshine, away from them.

So go they did, marching rapidly, spurred by the knowledge that real safety lay only in flight. All along the great mountainous plateau they met bodies of armed and turbaned men hastening to the meeting-place of Tamba, where the last decisions would be made. The fires of sedition which were being lighted would soon be burning fiercely like the signal-beacons they saw on the hill-tops at night; and the ram-shackle, dolorous road-side inns were being so fast deserted that sometimes they could scarcely find food at all.

At length, however, much fatigued and yet full of health, they had traveled far away from the Mohammedan country and into the country of the ordinary Buddhist unregenerate. Always avoiding the great river which would soon be surrendered to armed bands on myriads of junks, they marched steadily away to the north, as they had been told to do. The time glided into weeks and then the weeks mounted up and up, until they had been marching nigh on two months.

They were getting near the end, however, for their immense detour had at last carried them into a region totally unaffected by the fast-rising storm. Here everything was normal; there was not so much as a rumour of trouble to be caught; and so now they at last boldly turned south east

and made straight for the river at a point hundreds of miles below their own town of Wayway. Where they were they did not exactly know.

Late one evening from an eminence, however, they caught the glint of distant waters; and the little boy clapped his hands.

“It is the Long River, at last, master, as they told us at the inn,” he cried, as they hurried on. And next day they reached a river-town and boarding a junk they learnt they were only a few hours from the mid-river city of Pangchow.

“Pangchow, Pangchow,” said Paul to himself unendingly, as he watched the men sail the junk. How much time had elapsed since the conference? What had happened at the conference? Had she gone away, gone back to Wayway?

But he had lost all count of time, all count of everything save the overwhelming desire to

get back to surroundings that were familiar to him, to get back to somewhere he could rest. And so it was like a man in a dream — or, better, like a soldier back from a long campaign (which is much the same thing) — that he saw at length the European town of Pangchow, with its handsome facade of houses fronting the river, its slowly moving, well-ordered life, rise up before his eyes. Then it was that his raggedness became clear; and as he looked at his sandaled feet and nondescript garb, he became almost afraid.

But Pangchow has resources, and when he had finally mustered up sufficient courage to go ashore, it was a matter of a few hours to find himself civilized again.

Then he set to work to make inquiries, and then it was that he heard a piece of news that made his heart stand still. It was not that the Rev. Ainsley Simon and Mrs. Simon had passed down-river some time ago on their way home; it was not that Mr. Grey had been made head of the mission; it was not even the report that he himself had been massacred.

It was that Virginia Bayswater was here — had been put into a Pangchow mission.

Three minutes after hearing that he had excused himself and was hastening as fast as his legs could carry him to her. And as he had nothing to send in to her, he merely scribbled on a piece of paper, “I have come back,” and with his heart thumping waited for her in a sordid little anteroom of the house where she was staying.

“You, you,” she whispered, as she opened the door and they met. She could say nothing else, but the tell-tale colour on her cheeks said all she left unsaid.

“Yes,” he answered, still clasping both her hands in his.

“You have come — you have come back.”

“I have come back,” he gravely answered.

She sank into a chair, still looking at him with half-unbelieving eyes, as if he had been a ghost, a resurrection. It had been so long… .

“I thought you were lost,” she said at length, with a sob.

“I was nearly lost,” he answered gravely.

“Tell me about it,” she said. “I thought from what you wrote to me that you would never come back. I thought you mad to go on — yet I understood it.”

She watched him as he began talking, hesitating at first but soon becoming animated. She watched him as only a woman watches a man, and because he felt her eyes on him he talked well and was happy. And so he told her how he had really been afraid on this long

journey, and how he had persevered simply because he had somehow felt that it was all necessary to his future. And then he told her of Mr. Denning, and how even in that strange conspiracy he seemed pathetic rather than wicked, merely drunk with a foolish dream which he refused to abandon. And as he talked of the dangers he had gone through, his smile of cool courage made her heart leap within her breast. Once again she knew

that he was brave, and that which through all the ages reaches the human heart most surely is courage.

“And if the Mohammedan conspiracy goes wrong that poor man is going to die of his own hand,” she murmured at last, her eyes filling with tears. “That he should come to that!”

And now that he had finished, it was her turn to tell him what she knew; and then it was that the full measure of Mr. Grey’s contemplated revenge became suddenly clear to both.

“He said that there was little chance for you to escape — he told that to everyone here as well as to me,” she ended.

“He told you that!” exclaimed Paul.

“Yes,” she said, “and not only that, but after he had returned to Wayway he wrote friends here that his worst fears seemed justified.”

“The curious villainy of the man,” said Paul slowly. “He has all the cunning of the worst kind of villain, the man who masks his villainy under a sanctimonious hypocrisy.”

“He is cruel — that is what I hate most,” she replied.

Now the man sat thinking deeply. Because he was near her, because she was at last within his reach, the smallness of it all, the foolishness of it all in a great, illimitable, wonderful world, suddenly smote him. He saw how it was not for him to pronounce judgment, he saw how things would some day judge themselves and the guilty meet their fate.

“Let us try and forget all this,” he said at last, rising to his feet. “I am never going back to Way way, I am blotting out the memory of it all; and Mr. Grey must be blotted out with the rest. I have a contract with the mission, but Mr. Grey will now be prepared to forget it, I think. I have learnt a great lesson which it will take me many years to understand; I have learnt so much that I do not know how much it is. A long time ago, you know, I set myself a curious

test, a test which has been at once satisfactory and unsatisfactory. I thought it possible for a man, even if he were very young, to discover the true facts in life. Now I know that everything is only fragmentary, and no story ever complete.” …

He stopped abruptly and walked slowly to the window as if to consider some far-off thing. She, sitting behind him, thought that he had forgotten her, and because she thought that, presently she spoke:

“And will you go away then for good? Will you leave this country?”

He was too simple-minded, too inexperienced, to understand the ring of anxiety in her voice. And so at first he answered as if his future was the only future in the world.

“No,” he said abruptly. “No. Mr. Denning, poor Mr. Denning, said a good thing once when he said that we must work on the national strain in our characters out here more than on anything else, and that that was the only thing that was needed. Now I have a plan, a plan I am going to put into operation if I possibly can — I have the means to do it, you know, plenty of money.”

He stood thinking dreamily, and then slowly he walked back to her. He had made up his mind at last.

Her eyes fell wonderingly on his shapely head; and as they noted the dark fatigue of his features, she put out a soft hand which he gently seized. He was still only a boy; she wondered whether it was right.

Suddenly he spoke:

“Are you willing, in spite of every obstacle, in spite of the difficulties which we ourselves see, to try a great experiment, to be my partner in my new experiment? I know what you would have once said, a few months ago, but do not say it now, after all we have both gone through.”

For a moment, but it was only a moment, she remained

so still that his heart sank and his old fears returned. Then her pale cheeks became pink, and as she leaned towards him, her bosom heaved.

No words were spoken, but in the silence that passed he read her sanction, and on her lips he set the seal.

THE END