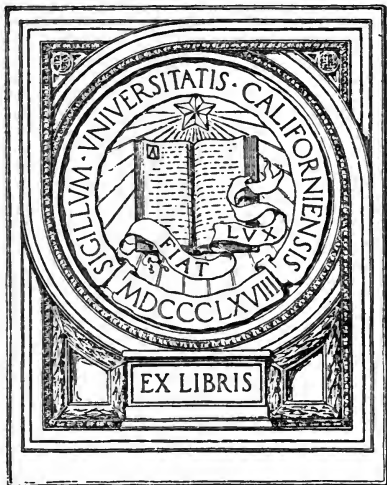


THE VERMILION PENCIL



HOMER LEA

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VERMILION
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A ROMANCE OF CHINA

BY

HOMER LEA



NEW YORK
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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AND JOSEPH S. BERRY

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To
My Father and to Fred Phillips
This Book is Dedicated



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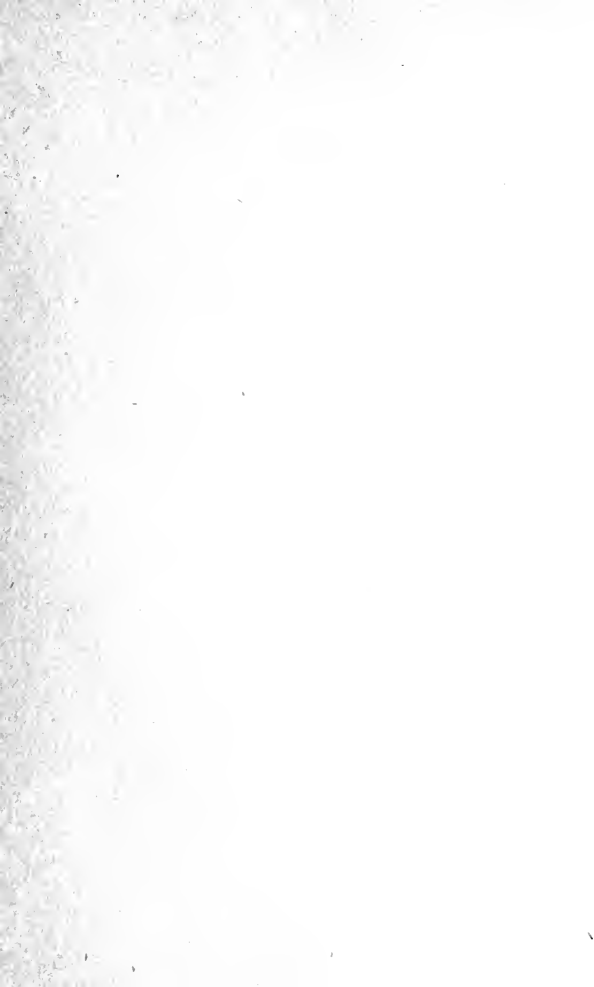
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PROLOGUE



THE TYPHOON

FROM the city of Yingching an old road runs northwestward to the mountains of Loh Fou—that indescribable mass of grandeur and mystery, in whose gorges unnumbered monasteries slumber, from whose peaks and cliffs temples gaze benignly down through the somnolent shadows upon the thoughtful progeny of Panku—the World-Chiseller. This slab-worn road, after it leaves the suburbs clustering around the East Gate of Yingching, follows right-obliquely across the rice-fields to the foot of the White Cloud Hills.

To the residents of Yingching these hills have always been a source of delight, and for uncounted ages multitudes have crowded at sunset the towers and pavilions of the city walls to watch their glens and slopes become veiled in a filtering of delicate shades—lilac, amethyst and violet, until, through a deep of purple, they vanish into night—a fluttering of gorgeous shadows.

Up over these hills the old road climbs laboriously until it disappears through a gorge of its own wearing. After crossing the southern slope it winds through deeply wooded ravines in whose

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alcoves Buddhist and Taoist monasteries sleep away the fretful ages of man, forming retreats for scholars, who come from Yingching, to escape in their brook-splashed groves the clatter and nagging of men.

This ancient highway struggles on through the White Cloud Hills, mutilated, uncertain; past the great monastery of Kingtai below the southern summits; past reproachful ruins in whose crumbling shadows solitary monks remain to propitiate the spirits of those that once dwelt in their cloisters; past the Silvery Rush Brook whose foam the banished statesman, Su Tungpa, compared, some centuries ago, to human greatness. Crawling, halting along its deepworn way the old road gropes through gorges, over mountains, across torrents and under the splash of cataracts until it reaches the green, undulating plains of Tsang Tsing. Thence it goes straight through canebrakes, past villages and tombs, under orchards of lichee, past ruins hid beneath creepers and cities old and new.

Below the market-town of Chingkwo the ancient way crosses the Lung Mun River, and, entering the mountains of Loh Fou, is untangled into a hundred strand-like paths leading to monasteries that are hidden among the shadows of every gorge, and to temples hung on the shelves of cliffs. One path goes to the Monastery of Fa-Shau, in its deep pit of shrubs and lanwhui; another climbs

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up among boulders and cataracts to the Temple of Wa-Shau, thence three thousand feet higher to the Royal Monastery of Putwan, while yet another threading path goes on a thousand feet above where the Temple of the Moon clings to a mountain peak and whither companies of chanting bonzes go from the monasteries below to offer up prayers when the harvest moon is full.

The antiquity of this old road extends back beyond the records of men, but it is known that, centuries after its trace had been deeply scarred through the White Cloud Hills and across the plains of Tsang Tsing, it was made into a king's highway and paved with granite blocks, eight feet long, two feet broad and often a foot in thickness. Yet the long bare tread has not only eroded them away, but hills have been worn down and cañons have been made by these century streams of men's feet, treading to and fro and dwelling by it for so long that their comings and goings are unknown. For babes were born on this way and reared by its trace long before the she-wolf suckled Silvia's twins on the old road by the Tiber's bank. And like the road of Cenis, it has been traversed by armies of different ages; it has resounded with their triumphant march; it has echoed with the furtive footfall of their flight; the pageants of Emperors have passed over it—and long files of sighing beggars.

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One September afternoon on this old road, past the ruins of Kingtai and near the southern summits of the White Cloud Hills, were seen neither porters nor farmers nor beggars nor the retinues of mandarins. The road was deserted other than by two men climbing slowly to the summit.

The sultry heat of the afternoon was choking, and at short intervals the men halted to gain their breath and wipe the perspiration from their faces. An oppressive, nervous lassitude weighed down the air; neither from bush nor tree, from hillside nor glen, was to be seen or heard a living creature.

The two men, approaching the top of the White Cloud Hills, were as silent as their surroundings, and, until they reached the summit, when the Valley of the Chu Kiang and the City of Yingching lay below them, they appeared as unconscious of each other's presence as they were apparently oblivious to their surroundings. But when they came to the bare mountain top, the manner of the older man changed; anxiously he scanned the sky, the horizon, the fields and the river below them as if to find in the wide estuary of the Chu Kiang some cause for alarm.

Nothing could have been more peaceful or beautiful. The sky was cloudless, the horizon faintly hazy, while the slanting rays of the sun cast a golden sheen upon the great river and the

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rice-fields that extended from it to the hills. These fields, in different shades of green and brown, interlaced with canals, were like a great shimmering, silken quilt stitched together by threads of gold. Far eastward, on the left, they merged into banana plantations, orchards of olive and lichee; westward they ended at the edge of the eastern suburbs of Yingching.

The city, seen from the summit where the two men stood, appeared a vast expanse of reddish roofs, shaded here and there by groves of banians. A great old wall encircled the old city, but dimmed by distance, its broken merlons were not seen nor the ravages of war, nor the erosions of a thousand years, nor the veiling draperies of maiden-hair fern that hung from the chipped interstices. These huge, aged and lichen-warted walls loomed up black, impregnable. Outside of them the eastern suburbs could be seen extending from under the East Gate obliquely in direction of and along the bank of the river, while the western and southern suburbs were hidden by them. Above the city, on the heights where climbed the northern wall, rose the Great Sea-Guarding Tower. Just south of it, within the walls, was the wooded peak of Yueshan surrounded with the clustering courts and temples of the Goddess of Mercy—that many-handed Goddess, who is so great in pity and compassion, saving from misery and from woe, and who is ever

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listening to the cries that come up from the world. Below the Temples, near by, in the centre of the city, two pagodas pierce the sky, one round and tapering, the other octagonal. Geomancers squinting up at them, say that this city is like a junk; that these two pagodas are her masts and the broad, five-storied tower on the north wall her stern sheets, and that the city is thus sailing southward, toward the island of Honan, which lies on the other side of the river, or beyond where rice-fields shimmer and the sky-line is serrated by low, ragged hills.

Here and there over the estuary of the Chu Kiang in the midst of their paddy-fields and orchards, lay walled towns and villages, half hidden under banians, while on the distant river bank, directly opposite the two men, the Lob pagodas point skyward, like great fingers, and on their left the pagodas of Wampoia and the Golden Lotus pierce the sky.

It was the peace, the dumb, inanimate peace of this scene that alarmed the older man. The river, usually teeming with a vast number and diversity of craft, was deserted other than now and then when a boat crept furtively along its southern bank. The fields were without men or oxen; the city and all the tree-veiled villages, which were scattered about among the fields, were silent, and a thin blue haze hung motionless over them.

For some time the two men looked down upon

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the delightful yet ominous panorama spread out beneath them; the older man troubled and uneasy, but the youth affected in no way, neither by the beauty nor the dumbness of it.

When they began to descend the elder left the old road sloping gradually along the hills toward the city, and led the way down by a steep path that, on reaching the level, meandered along the paddy banks in the direction of the river. But before they came to the river's high embankment the sun had set, and as they turned westward along the top of the bank the older man suddenly stopped. Directly over the part of the horizon where the sun had disappeared hung a great halo, the under part of which gleamed red, the top was shrouded in black while between scintillated iridescent colours; below the black lay a cold mottled grey and above the red glowed a pink like the cheek of a young girl.

For some moments these colours hung distinctly over the misty horizon then commingled—the corpse-grey with the cheek of the maiden—and over all, the pall of black. The halo became ashen; wavered—vanished.

As the youth started to go the older man placed a detaining hand on his shoulder and pointed toward the skyline where but a moment before the halo had hung.

Presently from where the sun had sunk were

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seen spreading enormous rays of light. Upward they unfolded, stretching finger-like, clear across the sky until they dipped their tips below the eastern horizon. At first these great fingers shone red as though dyed with blood, then vermilion, changing gradually through all the gold shades to an orange-saffron. When the finger-rays burned red, the intervening spaces were violet; when saffron, the sky was a pale green.

The youth watched dreamily these fingers tremble, coruscate, and change.

“It is God’s benediction,” he murmured.

“Or the Devil’s,” growled the other.

The two men waited until the great crepuscular rays, changing every instant their gorgeous colourings, had disappeared, leaving a red diffused light blotting the western sky, while a faint spectral mist crept along the eastern horizon. Troubled, the older man watched this whitish haze creeping along until it covered the eastern sky, then he hastened toward the city and the youth followed meditatively after him.

When they reached the edge of the suburbs they found all the field workers, women and oxen passively huddled about their mud-walled dwellings. Boatmen had drawn up their sampans and fishing craft high upon the bank. And in the doorways frightened faces peered uneasily down the

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river while everywhere rustled that restlessness, a fretfulness that is known by its silence. The children alone made their accustomed noises. Nothing could disconcert them. They played tag with Death and cried:

“You are it!”

As the two men entered the suburbs these children were in the midst of that bubbling, which marks the end of a day's play. They were having unusual sport.

Along the coast of Southern China, among the many warnings that foretell the iron whirlwind's approach none is more peculiar than the actions of dragon-flies, which seem to seek the companionship of men. They swarm into villages, fasten themselves on every projection, even lighting on the heads and shoulders of the inhabitants. Children, regardless of what they portend, seize upon them, and tying strings to their long abdomens, turn them loose amid laughter and cries. It was this easy conquest of the myriad-eyed monsters that aroused their wild mirth as the men approached.

The mothers of these gamins were burning incense-sticks in stone basins beside their doorways, and sometimes strips of red paper on which were written prayers. In the sampans and fishing boats, women were also making propitiatory offerings—the boat's prow serving as an altar. In one place

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on the river bank, a party of old leathery boatwomen chattered garrulously over a stone slab on which were placed a row of bowls containing rice, fowls, sweets and wine. Near by stood a large paper boat and a basket of miniature boats. One of these old women took two pieces of wood shaped like an half pear and engraved with a number of characters. These she tossed into the air so that they fell before the stone slab. Five times were the symbols cast, then the old women launched the bright-hued paper-boat and set fire to the basket of small boats. The smoke ascended in a straight, unwavering column.

Standing by the water's edge, the older man continued to look intently down the river; neither noticing the children at play nor the prayers ascending from the thresholds, nor the offerings of the boatwomen to the gods of the winds and waters.

Suddenly a breathless expectancy fell upon those that were waiting and upon those that were sending their prayers heavenward in fragrant smoke.

Far away, somewhere to the east and south, came a gentle murmur. At this sound some crowded into their houses; others came forth. Only the children did not heed this murmur, which at times became a moan to cease a sigh. The people on the water front and along the eastern rim of the suburbs peered over the rice-fields toward Lung Mun and down the river to where it broad-

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ened out into a vast expanse of yellow waters. What they saw filled them with terror.

Across the eastern horizon opened an enormous crack. Many looked into it for an instant then ran and hid themselves in their hovels while those that remained shuddered. This abyss into which they looked commenced several degrees above the horizon; the bottom black, the top ashen; the river, bearing on its mighty current the boat-women's fragile offering, disappeared into it.

The crack widened. Awestricken, the people crowded together on the suburb's edge and water front to watch it open.

The thin blue stems of sandal-wood smoke, ascending from each doorway shrine, wavered.

The sky became overcast.

Suddenly the crowd swayed: backward, forward, backward, then scrambling, vanished—a drop of rain had fallen.

For a moment there was twilight, which was ghastly—then night, which was impenetrable.

A gust blew in from the sea and it was like a blast from a furnace. This sirocco that came from the ocean was the first breath of the typhoon.

The elder seizing his companion by the arm pulled him along the narrow streets toward the city. In the blackness they could see nothing but the dying embers of sandalwood dully glowing in spectral clusters by each threshold. These red,

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weird eyes peering out into the darkness blinked and grinned joyously. They were friendly with the hot wind and the harder it blew and the more they winked the more they coaxed the two men along the tunnel-like streets.

Suddenly the wind ceased and rain began to fall slowly in great drops. One by one the lights of the doorways went out. By their glow it had been possible to distinguish the alignment of the houses, but now what lay before them was cavernous. They were in a black labyrinth of winding streets: some leading into the river, while in the floors of others were wells; some extended a few feet, then ended. Familiar as the older man was with these suburbs, he stumbled along uncertain; the youth lagged. Both were stifling, for the scorching wind had started again with increasing severity, causing them to cover their faces with their silken sleeves.

There are winds that freeze, winds that burn, winds that tear and cut, but this wind that precedes the typhoon, chokes. It fills a man's nostrils with so much burning air that he gasps for breath; he staggers, sometimes blood oozes from the eyes and ears, he strikes at the wind, claws the air, starts to run, stumbles and falls to the earth. Skeletons have been found with skulls clasped round in bony arms—strangled by this breath of the iron whirlwind.

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The older man, aroused to the danger, stopped, and pounding on a door begged for admittance. There was no answer, and they crouched together on the threshold.

Presently the wind began to hesitate, to ebb, then it became quiet. But as they hurried along the black street a sound like a cough fell upon their ears, distant, piteous, wind-torn. They listened, and what they heard was terrible—the muttering of a typhoon.

Perhaps if the howl of a hell were known, the muttering of the typhoon, though dulled by distance, might be compared to it. As the Great Wind approaches this muttering grows louder and louder until it becomes a gigantic gibber; when at hand, the heavens are filled with multitudinous screams, howls, laughter, moans, and shrieks—a stir of sounds that is frightful.

The outer whirlwind now seized the men. Sometimes they were picked up by its clutching fingers and hurled forward; again they tried to move and could not; reaching out to see what opposed them they felt nothing; turning a corner they were often thrown against a wall and glued there as flies.

They had made but a short way in their struggle when the blackness began to lighten and become livid. Everywhere shone a ghastly glimmer, which was more impenetrable than the black night.

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With this light the wind and rain increased in violence.

Suddenly out of the livid blackness a flame darted: for a moment there was silent hesitancy, then the heavens burst into a conflagration. The typhoon was upon them. Floods now fell from burning clouds and tongues of fire spat out torrents.

In time, the thick mud walls of the surrounding houses began to collapse, undermined by the water tearing along the narrow streets. Sometimes a wall fell outward and the lightning showed terrified families crouching upon the floor; when it flared again there was often only a pile of brick, a heap of shattered tiles.

Thus they were driven from the shelter of one doorway to another and as the houses began to fall more frequently, they were kept in the middle of the streets breasting the storm with that strength remained to them.

The older man, dragging the youth along by the arm, struggled in the direction of the great city wall under whose sheltering corners they could alone find safety. But to get out of this suburban labyrinth was difficult, doubtful, since its windings were becoming more choked and impassable by the debris of falling houses. Sometimes they made their way forward only to find the street blocked and themselves exposed to the full

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swish of the storm. They retreated, but eventually their rear was also choked with houses that had fallen after they had passed and which formed just such a barricade as had turned them back. Hemmed in with houses falling first on one side, then on the other, they stumbled backward and forward in a continually narrowing space. At any moment an overhanging wall might crash into the street and then it would be empty.

No one can hope to wholly describe a typhoon, that great wind, which is to the cyclone of the American plains what the tornado is to a little whirlwind adrift down a dusty road. Slaughter as well as destruction marks its path, for the typhoon is made up of flames and floods as it is of winds, and what escapes death or ruin from its cyclonic breath is devoured by its fires or swept away by its torrents. No one hopes in a typhoon, and men flee but a little way from it.

Nothing is more frightful than this iron whirlwind, nothing more wonderful. It has the cunning brutality of the inanimate and its treachery; the bloodthirstiness of some gigantic beast, the grandeur of God. It is horrible, yet sublime.

This monster of nature is born somewhere out of the huge womb of the South Pacific, upon whose bosom it strays aimlessly and recklessly about, romping, wrestling, growing, until it gets into a

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temper and buffets its mother, the sea. Becoming cyclopean, it spits at heaven—petulant it departs.

Like a loosened monster it allows itself every liberty, and wanders with the greatest ease in any path. It sucks up the sea and snatches lightning from the clouds; it fills its belly with floods and its breast with fire. Headlong it falls upon every obstacle; ships become as dust motes in its breath. It devours towns and babies with the same ease, the same glee. It laughs and screeches simultaneously. It is full of joy and rage at the same time and its joy is the more terrible. Sometimes it gets into traps and difficulties from which it can scarcely extricate itself; then it becomes frantic, shrieks, lingers and mutilates.

But in spite of all this gyratory brutality, this iron-toothed monarch of all winds cannot ravage far from the sea, though in its blind rage it never hesitates. Falling upon the coast it hurls ships into rice fields or upon hillsides; the sea front it covers with wrecks; fishing fleets are crunched into splinters and towns are strewn about as picked bones.

So the two struggled feebly against this monster backward and forward in the midst of falling houses, until finally, bruised and bleeding, they tottered into an open court surrounded by high massive walls. Near the centre of the court stood a low crucifix, a tub, and two black stones. Against

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the windward wall was built an open shed, and into this beyond the crucifix they tottered and lay exhausted, while the typhoon raged and destroyed around them. The lightning burned steadily and the noises, which once muttered and cried about them, were lost in the terrifying grind of the iron wind; a wind that picked up great logs like rice straws, and sometimes sent rice straws with such force that they pierced wood as steel needles—a wind that in its antics screamed, and in its butchery laughed.

The two men under the shed lay still, apparently oblivious to the storm wrack until the older man rose to his knees and began to feel around for his companion. Beside him, lit by the lurid glare from without, were a number of headless corpses, and among these lay the youth.

“Where are we?” he asked meditatively when the older man had aroused him.

“In the Execution Grounds.”

“What are these?”

“Corpses.”

“Ah! their souls may now be with God.”

“Or in Hell.”

The storm was abating; the moans and cries from the heavens ceased; the lightning grew less violent. Suddenly all became an absolute calm and the men crept out from among the corpses under the shed.

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A faint, uncertain light glimmered in the darkness above them; enormous black masses of clouds could be seen rolling close to the earth, but directly overhead was a circle of clear sky, darkly blue, and almost in its very centre shone a star of marvellous brilliancy. The youth gazed up at it in gratitude.

“It is the Eye of God.”

The elder also regarded the star, but said nothing.

“Let us go,” said the youth, “the storm has ended.”

“Not while the Eye of God is in the heavens.”

For some time they stood still and silent, watching the low black clouds roll around the clear circle of sky.

“What is that?” asked the youth thoughtfully, pointing to the low crucifix, the tub and the black stones showing dimly under the pale light that came from the Eye of God overhead.

“*Lingchee*,” growled the older man; “on that an adulteress salutes the world and passes on.”

For a long time both looked meditatively yet intently at the low crucifix, the tub and the black stones beside it.

“They tie her naked upon it,” growled the elder, more to himself than to the youth, “and then cut her into pieces. The first three cuts are called the strokes of mercy, and are no doubt dedi-

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cated to the many-handed goddess. The first stroke the executioner draws his knife across the brow and a fold of skin drops over the eyes, which is merciful, for it shuts out the sneering faces around her."

The elder, looking up, saw that the Eye of God no longer shone in the heavens. Above and around them fell unfathomable darkness.

"Then the ears are cut off, which is also merciful, for jeers are no longer heard."

A wolfish giggle came from the abyss about them; a drop of rain fell and their wet garments flapped heavily.

"Her tongue is cut out next," continued the growl in the darkness, "and this is the crowning stroke of mercy, for it stops her piteous cries."

Again came an interrupting roar, low and sullen. The typhoon was near at hand but the older man raised his voice above the distant roar.

"Then they cut off her breast, where——"

Gnashing, grinding, the iron-toothed wind fell again upon the hapless suburbs, revolving in the opposite direction. It is what sailors call the return storm, when its cyclonic revolutions are reversed and the typhoon returns to complete its devastation. Going, the typhoon is a monster; returning, it is in addition, a maniac. What it has failed to destroy, it returns to mangle. The terrible winds now came from the northwest through

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the open side of the court, and the two men were no longer protected. The shed that had sheltered them was shattered by the first returning blast. Helpless and bleeding they were hurled together with the headless corpses into a corner of the court, making altogether a hideous pile but wherein the cadavers protected them from the debris that was hurled into the corner. It often happens that in these storms the dead succour the living.

The typhoon continued to shriek and to laugh triumphantly in the black and fiery abyss overhead. It was as if hell had been turned upside down and out of its vast chasm its green fires were being poured and all those bruised noises that are said to resound there.

The typhoon was making its departure, which is not less terrible than its coming. Screaming, hovering and hastening it makes its retreat; mangling what it has heretofore destroyed. In time it weakens and begins to linger, then exhausted it hesitates, stops, and whispers. Frenzied, it again wanders uncontrollably about; revolving always in the same circle and moving whimsically hither and thither until its strength is gradually expended. Quivering, shuddering, whimpering, it at last disappears again into the mother sea—a prodigal returned.

BOOK I. A WOMAN



CHAPTER ONE

IN THE VALLEY OF THE FOUNTAIN

JUST south of where the Yangtse River empties into the ocean lies the Province of the Winding Stream—venerable and beautiful, with a history written back almost to that long hour when the world was yet supposed to be unmade by the hand of God—a nebulous vapour adrift in the night.

This province is one vast park of alternating hills and valleys, where peaks, cascades, and woodlands intervene in a fascinating confusion; where walled cities and temples rise majestically on all sides; where canals and watercourses, alive with boats, form a silvery network among fragrant hills and tree-hid hamlets, making it altogether just such a land as the imagination conceives belonging alone to the sunlit East.

This province is like an endless garden; wherever the eye reaches is seen not only a luxuriant vegetation but one that has been tended and reared by man for his uses. Patches of pink orchard blossoms alternate with grey thickets of mulberry; clumps of feathery bamboo flutter as plumes by the edges of rice fields; plane trees with their

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snowy blossoms alternate with orchards of pumelo, while along the lower hills, forming wide and densely shaded tracts, spread groves of silvery olive and lichee with delicate pink leaves and strawberry-like fruit.

Throughout all of these hills and orchards wind rivers, brooks, and canals, overspanned at short intervals by high curved bridges of stone. Under their arches innumerable boats glide from dawn until night. In some places the country is covered with tea plantations, and from each willow-whipped cottage rises the fragrant breath of burning tea. Here and there on hills thick with cypress and pine are seen the carved gleaming roofs of temples, while on the paths leading to them every crag and turn has its miniature pagodas and grottoes. Again, the hills in many places are covered with groves of oil-bearing camelias, whose graceful shape and dark green foliage add an indescribable charm to the landscape.

But Che Kiang is not more famous for the charm of its countryside than it is for the beauty of the women, who dwell among its hills and valleys, working in the midst of their tea shrubs, rearing cocoons, spinning silk; and are no more thought of than the azaleas that brighten the hillsides or the purple lanwhui that scatters its perfume on the bosom of the careless passing winds. In the Tien Mu Mountains, toward the southwestern

IN THE VALLEY OF THE FOUNTAIN

part of the province, these women have a peculiar hauteur and independence of their own, a vivacity and laughter, which is found nowhere else in China.

It was among these mountains and forests of the Tien Mu Shan that that tireless spider, Fate, set to weaving one of its innumerable webs of invisible strands: a net fragile yet terrible. Unseen or half seen, a spirit-glint in the azure heavens, it is a barrier through which and from which the little man-fly never breaks.

So the spider webbed in the Valley of the Fountain, and before this net is finally torn and shattered by the bluster of Time there shall be found in it those that did not know of its weaving.

One spring morning, probably about the same hour when a melancholy Breton and an unknown priest were setting out from the Mission of Ying-ching upon their errands of mercy, a mandarin's retinue moved slowly along the Tien Mu Mountains and before the night mists had entirely cleared away the path brought them to the upper heights of a small glade, known as the Valley of the Fountain. Around this vale the rugged, broken mountains were clothed in trees of various sorts. The bright golden leaves of the camphor and amber mingled with the purple foliage of the tallow, while over these rose the deep soft green of pine and arbor vitae.

As the sun rose and sent its broadening beams

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down into the purple Valley of the Fountain the lower mountain sides became a gorgeous mass of red and yellow azaleas; on every hillbank wherever the eye could reach spread a flower mantle of dazzling brightness. From the valley came the fragrance of tea; from the ravines, the breath of lilies and lanwhui.

As the retinue moved slowly down the tortuous path there rose from a thicket of tea shrubs on a round slope to the right an outburst of song not unlike that of the mocking bird in its sweet intensity and freedom but vibrant with the melody of human passion. And, as this wild song rose with supreme impulse and passion above the tea thicket, the mandarin's retinue stopped.

Never was an auditorium more suitable to song than this amphitheatre of flower-packed hills that surrounded the Valley of the Fountain. The sun's rays were just stealing through a purple haze and turning the dew, which lay heavy upon the flowers into myriads of opals; the murmur of ravine-hidden cascades, the chorus of bird-song in the still-aired morning, all seemed but part of the song that rose from the tea thicket. This tempestuous outburst made the hills ring with its echoes, calling, scorning, pleading, threatening; now bubbling like the wood-warbler with cadences of silvery notes; now rising, exultant as the nightlark, to the ear of heaven; triumphant, declamatory, beseeching, full

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of defiance, of mockery and laughter until at last it ceased, dying away among the neighbouring gorges, as soft as a kiss.

"What was that?" demanded the mandarin excitedly, putting his head out of the sedan.

"That is Ma Shue's daughter," said several voices at once, "the girl with a tongue of a hundred spirits."

"On with you and stop your chattering," cried the mandarin.

Ma Shue, the old farmer of the Valley, stood watching from the door of his rice-thatched cottage the procession winding down the mountain path.

"Where is she?" demanded the mandarin, stepping hastily from his chair.

"How greatly honoured is my poor and miserable abode," murmured the old farmer, bowing repeatedly.

"Where is she?" demanded the mandarin again, as he peeped about the corners of the cottage and through the open door.

"I am ashamed to set before your honourable self the wretched food we live upon," apologised the old man as he followed at the heels of the mandarin.

"Go get her," commanded the mandarin impatiently as he peered into the cottage.

"Yes, yes," murmured the farmer hastily, "but

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for the poor our food is not sufficient; how can it be tasted by——”

“What are you talking about, old coxcomb? Have you not a daughter?”

“Alas, Great Sir, it is true, I have been unfortunate——”

“Go get her at once, at once,” interrupted the mandarin excitedly.

“How can I, how can I?” asked the old man, bowing with trepidation.

“How can you?” mocked the mandarin scornfully. “How can you? Because I ordered it. I, Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank.” And Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank, scowling with dignity, stepped back and folded his hands majestically on his stomach.

When the farmer returned he bowed mutely before the mandarin.

“Well?” he demanded.

“I told her; yes, yes,” cried Ma Shue, “she is coming.”

“When?”

“She said,” and the old farmer looked uneasily at the feet of the mandarin, “she said——”

“Well?”

“When she got ready——”

It was a long time before a soft patter was heard in an adjoining room whence came low, amused laughter; then a light flutter of garments,

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and the tea-farmer's daughter entered. Casting a hasty glance at the mandarin she turned her back on him with a haughty but almost imperceptible toss of her head.

For some moments the mandarin looked at her in astonishment, yet with intense satisfaction.

"Maid."

"Man."

The mandarin started, his eyes opened to the utmost of their narrow width and he glared at the old man shivering in his chair.

"Did I not hear you singing this morning?" he demanded severely.

"Your knowledge should be greater than mine," she replied coldly.

"Were you singing?"

"I am always singing."

"Were you not in a tea-thicket?"

"I should be at my work now."

"Then it is settled. I heard you singing. You see I am quick in my judgment as well as sagacious. Will you sing for me?"

"Sing for you?" she repeated in soft, amazed tones. "Sing for you? Why?"

"I am Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank——"

"I never sing for mandarins," she interrupted decisively.

"What?"

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"My song," she replied in cold, careless tones, "is for the birds and tea-pickers of the Valley, but not for wolves or tigers of the Yamen."

The mandarin became rigid; the old father's pipe fell from his hand and the daughter, casting a fleeting glance at him continued, her voice becoming suddenly gentle and humble:

"But your coming down into our valley is as the turning of raindrops into pearls."

The mandarin's countenance beamed with pleasure.

"By my Fifth Button," he exclaimed, "I believe you could be taught something."

"I am afraid it is impossible," she murmured contritely.

"Never! You allow these rustics——" and Ho Ling glared his challenge around the room.

"Yes," she continued meditatively as she turned her head slightly toward him, "a shrub may appear lofty in the desert and a tea-plant among the tea-plants is not small but," she looked at him out of the corner of her eye, "I am only a fragile weed in the shadow of the luxuriant pine."

"Yes, it is true," he replied, settling back in his chair with supreme satisfaction. "It is true. I am Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank."

The farmer's daughter with unconscious coquettishness turned her head slightly toward him so

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the rose brown of her cheek and her full lustrous eye were visible.

Suddenly, in the midst of the mandarin's self-contemplation, a chime of laughter pealed through the room. Tossing her head, the child of the Tien Mu Mountains glanced roguishly at the astounded mandarin and darted laughing through the doorway. Again and again came the birdlike notes, until in the distance they ceased in a silvery echo.

"Call her!" shouted the mandarin, rushing to the door.

The old man bowed excitedly.

"Call her! Get her!" cried the mandarin, turning fiercely on the old farmer.

"What can I do?" he mumbled pathetically. "She is gone. You do not understand, she moves as the kin deer, she is as wild as the pheasant."

The mandarin returned to the doorway and remained for a long time in moody silence. Presently he turned to the farmer.

"Let it be known that Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank, will depart."

And the old man skipped gleefully from the room.

CHAPTER TWO

THE VICEROY

HANGCHAU, the capital of Che Kiang, rests haughtily upon its hills in full view of the ocean. Its granite walls, more than thirty miles in circumference, higher than a four-storied building and wide enough on top for four vehicles to drive abreast, extend north from the river Tsien toward a vast plain that stretches out an unending garden threaded with a thousand strands of silvery waterways. South of the city along the blue waters of the bay is another mighty garden spotted with clumps of trees, covered with luxuriant crops and villages nestling in groves of feathery bamboo; westward is the lake of Si Hu, and beyond, a wide amphitheatre of wooded hills and mountains.

Hangchau, like Che Kiang, has an antiquity of its own and though it stands to-day one of the world's great cities, so it has stood for innumerable ages, more or less, in the manner Marco Polo saw it in the thirteenth century, "pre-eminent to all other cities in the world in point of grandeur and beauty as well as from its abundant delights."

In that uncertain antique age when Babylon

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rested securely within its hundred-mile wall pierced by eighty brazen gates; when the massive town of Troy frowned down upon the troubled waters of the Xanthus, and Darius peered anxiously from Persepolis across the plains of Merdueth, even then was Hangchau a city. And now while Babylon is but a mud-mound on the willow-fringed banks of the Euphrates, Troy a myth, and jackals come forth when the moon is high to howl where once kings commanded—yet Hangchau lives, thrives, and is great.

Another wonder of Hangchau other than its antiquity and greatness is the Lake of Si Hu, a lake transparent as a diamond, its brilliant surface gleaming and fluttering amongst dark green hills for many miles in irregular circuit. On the north, west, and southwest rise picturesque mountains whose slopes along the lake's edge are laid out in groves and gardens, beautiful though fantastic; having here and there temples, palaces and pagodas, while numbers of fanciful stone bridges are thrown across the arms that reach out among the hills. About over the waters great numbers of barges gaily decorated, sail to and fro, the passengers dining, smoking and enjoying the breezes which blow down from the higher mountains, as well as the gay scenes, the whimsical gardens, palaces, pagodas, and overhanging groves.

This lake, so like a jewel in its brilliancy, is

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studded with innumerable islands adorned with palaces and temples and on one of the larger islands, near the north shore, is a viceregal palace used as a suburban dwelling by the Viceroy of Chukiang.

One spring afternoon, when the pink petals lay strewn about, the Viceroy sat in the sun on a marble terrace thoughtfully munching his melon seeds, occasionally throwing one to the goldfish and turtles that crowded toward the terrace bank, snuffling, flopping but impatient to be fed. On a high ebony table beside his pipe and tea bowl lay a package of papers and at intervals the Viceroy reperused some part of their contents, then placidly resumed his melon seeds, gazing over the lake to the hills bright in their spring foliage, to the slopes pink with blossoms, to the lake's edge, fringed with the feathery bamboo. The shadow of a wutung tree slowly creeping across the terrace passed over the table and, hiding his bare grey head from the warm rays of the spring sun, aroused him from his meditation; again he looked over the papers then raised his hand.

In a moment Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank, came from an adjoining pavilion and bowed before him.

"I have read these reports," said the Viceroy gruffly, decisively tapping the package of papers. "They are guilty, and to-morrow shall die."

THE VICEROY

The mandarin bowed.

"Justice," continued the Viceroy, "is an excellent thing—when not delayed; to put off the punishment of the guilty is to destroy the dignity of the state—a procrastinating Justice is the buffoon of the populace. Do you understand?" And squinting his eyes, the Viceroy surveyed inquisitively the mandarin, who bowed repeatedly, uneasily.

"You were one day late."

The mandarin continued bowing.

"Well!" demanded the Viceroy, impatiently tapping the papers that were spread upon his knees.

"I stopped——"

"Yes?" interrupted the Viceroy.

"I could not get——"

"Eh?"

The mandarin bowed fervidly.

"Where did you stop?"

"In the Heavenly Mountains," he answered furtively.

"In the mountains?"

The Viceroy uttered these three words weighingly.

"That is—in a little valley—a very little valley."

"Ah," and for a moment the Viceroy looked at him in silence. "What valley?"

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The mandarin became became sallow. "My poor memory——"

"I will call your escort."

"When I think of it," put in the mandarin hastily and with trepidation, "the name comes to me—it is the Valley of a Fountain."

"Why?"

"Great Sir," answered the mandarin with an excited burst of confidence, "I am to marry the daughter of this valley."

"Ah?" A sympathetic inquisitiveness was in the Viceroy's voice. "I suppose you will now want a leave of absence?"

The mandarin's face became suffused with joy. Nothing could have prevented him from bowing repeatedly.

"Well," commanded the Viceroy impatiently, "this only daughter, is she well dowered?"

"Great Sir, I do not know; I do not care!" he cried excitedly.

"What!" demanded the Viceroy, peering at him in amazement.

"O Great Sir, if you could but see her you would understand that she is richer than wealth itself; if you could but hear her you would understand how my desires are as spring freshets surging against Time's wintry constraint——"

"Ah?" The Viceroy uttered this with a great depth of feeling.

THE VICEROY

“Yes, yes,” went on the mandarin hurriedly, never lifting his eyes from the floor, “Fate, the Judge, decreed it, and Fate, the Jailor, pulled me into it. As I was passing along a mountain path, suddenly from out of the tea-shrubs came sweeter music than the song of the phoenix—the Song of Fate. My escort stopped and I was unable to make them amble onward. I can now understand how the flute of Liang Kiang stole away the courage of eight thousand men. My escort stood breathless while in vain I blustered and threatened. I was obliged to send a horseman to find out the source of the song and I found the phoenix-singer to be a girl living in the valley. My escort became mutinous, then like a gleam of sunlight shafted through a black rebellious storm flashed the thought of gain for Your Excellency—a musician rarer than any in the Middle Kingdom—and it determined me to go down in the glade.

“When the girl’s father learned that I was Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank, he told me confidentially—confidentially, that is the way it was—that his daughter lingered in the outer room tearful to see the hem of my robe. So I admitted her thinking that I might be of great service to Your Excellency. When she bowed down before me she trembled with delight——”

“What was her appearance?” demanded the

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Viceroy, interrupting the mandarin's breathless monologue.

"O Great Sir, if I had all the wisdom of nine times the Nine Classics I could not describe her. She is not beautiful in the manner of the women of Hangchau. Her big eyes are round like those of oxen, but charged with most unoxen fires. She does not dainty along with golden liliated feet as the women here, but ankled as the kin deer and winged as the wild pheasant, she derides the very rocks and mountains. Her cheeks of almond flower the jealous sun has lacquered over with ruddy gold and her pouting lips are so pent full of ruby blood that they would turn the honestest man into a thief if he could but perform the subtle theft of gaining them.

"And yet, Great Sir, I do not know whether you would have called her beautiful or not before I conquered her, for she had somewhat of the devil in her."

"You conquered her?" demanded the Viceroy, eying him doubtfully.

"Yes," replied the mandarin, scowling proudly into the tree tops. "I conquered her, but not more by my personality than by stratagem for, as Your Excellency well knows, I am not unskilled in that contentious art."

"So you captured her?" queried the Viceroy again, somewhat sarcastically.

THE VICEROY

“Yes, she came haughtily into my presence——”

“And kissed the hem of your robe?” interrupted the Viceroy.

“Exactly, exactly, a figure of speech; I have renamed her humility—haughtiness. But in continuation, when she beheld me and heard me speak in fluent familiarity the wisdom of the ancients, her rebellious, warring heart sent at once through every dainty vein its bold scouts that for themselves did redly dare the combat. Her eyes became a perfect arsenal and the arched bow of her lips shot from some inexhaustible quiver shafts divinely smeared with a poppy that would lull into dreams the most valorously inclined defence.

“Ah, it would have done Your Excellency a world of good if you could but have seen how her eyes, her lips, and even the shy little dimples, which hid in her cheeks and chin, contended as jealous allies, each first to make a breach in the hitherto impregnable fortress of my heart.

“But like a wise general, I simulated dismay, abandoned my outer works, and retreated to the keep. Straightway the jealous allies scaled the walls. I opened the inner gates and they, surcharged and petulant with fancied victory, rushed in. There was a momentary struggle, then she yielded, and now remains a willing captive in the very donjon of my heart.”

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For some time the Viceroy eyed the mandarin in a manner unappreciative and in no way to his liking.

“ Ho Ling! ”

The mandarin started violently.

“ You are still an ass.”

CHAPTER THREE

THE WIFE

AS Destiny fated it, the Viceroy himself married, that summer, the daughter of the tea-farmer and not Ho Ling, Mandarin of the Fifth Rank.

More than a year had passed since the Viceroy had married this farmer's daughter from the Valley of the Fountain, which extraordinary event had been duly commented upon by the gentry of Hangchau and had been forgotten. But with the Viceroy it was different. Though many months had mysteriously vanished he was still an uneasy bridegroom unable in any degree to resume that tranquil state he had enjoyed years before.

"Tranquillity of the spirits," said a guest one day, "is the culmination of a scholar's life; it is the essence of propriety; the golden mean between the heart and the mind."

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," replied the Viceroy gruffly, "but there is no happiness in it."

So the Viceroy, while by no means tranquil, was happy. And though a year had rushed hastily away, he still paced restlessly back and forth be-

THE VERMILION PENCIL

fore a richly carved screen; waiting, frowning, biting his under lip.

Suddenly stopping in his impatient pacing, he clapped his hands and an old woman timidly entered.

“Is she coming?” he demanded in a voice of mingled anxiety and doubt.

“Great Sir, she will be here in just——”

“Get out! I will not tolerate this any longer; not another——”

A soft, tinkling laugh from behind the screen caused him to turn, startled, uneasy; a gentle rustle and the tea-farmer's daughter entered.

The deer-like freedom of her home was altered; she came slowly into the room with graceful but restrained hauteur. Her rich, brown skin was now white as an almond petal; in her cheeks wavered a transparent pink but her lips were as red as ever and her eyes shone with the same liquid brightness.

Bowing, she said mockingly, “Most impatient and ungentle Great Sir, you are angry at my delay?”

“No, no, just bothersome dispatches——”

“Indeed! then I shall leave you to consider them in peace.” Tossing her head she turned to leave the room.

“Just a moment! Just a moment!” cried the

THE WIFE

Viceroy hastily. She stopped with her back to him.

“I have a necklace of pearls.”

“Yes?” she inquired carelessly.

“You wish it?”

She could hear the pearls trickling through his fingers.

“Ah, do you not admire it?”

“I have not seen it,” she answered curtly.

“I am seated on the divan here.”

“I am standing by the door.”

“Are you not going to take these pearls?”

“Are you not going to bring them to me?”

The Viceroy got up, hesitated, then came and stood beside her. She held out her hand and he wrapped the necklace around her palm and wrist, while a childish happiness dimpled her cheeks as she admired and fondled the gold-strung baubles from the sea.

“They would be most beautiful,” she said, looking up at him with a smile that brought a flush to his face, “did not the jewelled kindness that suggested them dim their brilliancy.”

“Eh? Yes, yes,” his Excellency bowed. “Pearls are a very worthy jewel—unfortunate——women have not their attributes——”

“What are they?” she demanded, throwing back her head.

“Why, why, Time’s incrustations——”

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“Yes?” she inquired, with such a mocking chill in her voice that it caused him to lower his eyes. “Yes,” she repeated, walking over to a table where an inkstone lay, “it is quite true that what Time adds yearly to the pearl, it steals from a woman’s cheek but,” she put the pearls in the wet ink and with the tip of her tiny forefinger rubbed them around and around until they were but a blackened mass, “you see,” she continued naïvely, “that they are alike in a way.”

“Isn’t it strange?” she murmured, still rubbing her little finger tip among the blackened jewels. “Isn’t it strange?”

The Viceroy stood immovable, while a network of purple veins began to spread across his face.

The wife’s hands rested for a moment on his shoulders, then seizing his ears, pulled him down into a chair.

“You are not angry?” she said consolingly.

The Viceroy looked up at her reproachfully.

“I know it was very wrong,” she said with contrition.

He eyed her questioningly.

“Do you think,” she frowned and her tones became threatening, “that my father did not teach me gratitude?”

“Yes, yes,” answered the Viceroy hastily. “Yes; economy is a woman’s highest virtue——”

THE WIFE

“Economy in what?” she demanded, straightening up and looking down at him coldly.

He moved restlessly and tried to say something.

“Money!” she repeated with scorn. “I knew you would say that! Money! Oyah! A pool of filth where men are defiled and drowned—bah!” She stamped her little foot fretfully, and threw the pearls on the floor.

“Would you let wealth all run away?” he asked pathetically.

“Does not a running stream irrigate more fields than a pond? Is there not more purity in a brook than in a stagnant pool?”

His Excellency sighed deeply.

“Why don’t you learn other economy?” She leaned over him, pouting her red lips like a teasing child. “Why don’t you be economical of punishments, wasteful of mercy, and treat greed as a rogue? Because, my husband,” and taking hold of his ears, she tilted his head back, “I think whoever is a miser in punishments and a spendthrift of compassion, not only hoards up inestimable treasure, but practises the economy of heaven.”

“That is true,” mumbled the Viceroy, thickly, “very——”

“It is not!” she interrupted, letting go his ears and stamping her foot.

“Not true?”

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"It never happens."

"That is so," replied the Viceroy in a relieved tone.

"It is not!"

"What——"

"Because you could make it so if you wished." Speaking these words in half whispering tender tones, she again took hold of his ears and looked down into his eyes, serious, begging.

"Will you promise me not to have any more prisoners beheaded this week?"

"Again!"

"Will you promise?" she pulled harder on his ears.

"But—but——"

"Promise!"

"Yes."

"And you will send away that thin, wicked lictor?"

"Eh? Yes, yes; he is a rogue."

"And you will rebuild the hospital at Ho Yong?"

"No, no; a waste of money."

"You won't?" she pulled his ears again. "Not even for me?" Her red lips parted and her breath blew warm upon his cheek.

The viceroy moved restlessly, hopelessly.

Her lips, just touching his ear, whispered, "Only that one little promise, my husband."

THE WIFE

A tremor passed through the Viceroy's great frame.

"Yes," he muttered in a thick voice, lifting his hands to clasp her to him but in that instant she stood beyond his reach, her face flushed and dimpled with smiles.

Distant she stood, looking at him, smiling, blushing, mocking; then taking his fat face between her little hands she tilted it back, laughing softly a laugh like the low notes of a woodwarbler.

He raised his hands.

She frowned.

His hands fell and her smiles came again.

BOOK II—TWO UNKNOWNNS



CHAPTER ONE

THE YOUNGER

IT is necessary to go back some years prior to the time of the typhoon through whose swirl of devastation two priests from the French Mission of Yingching had struggled and survived, in order that by some knowledge of their past, though it is extremely meagre, a better understanding may be had of the events concerning which this book is written.

Whether the brilliant crepuscular rays from the western sky, the darkness with its labyrinthian uncertainty, the mangling crunch of the wind, the conflagration of the heavens, the crucifix, chaos, then the calm sun of noonday are only symbolic of these priests' lives, or has in it a more material prognostication of their future, cannot be judged until the last words have been written.

Concerning the early life of these two priests nothing is known of the old man and but little of the youth prior to the time with which this book deals, although it is said that the younger priest came from Bretagne, first from an old ruin called the Château Carhaix-sur-Mer, then from a monastery at St. Pol de Leon, which knowledge

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is important in explaining his melancholy seclusiveness, his endless meditation: for this melancholy silence of the Bretons comes with their land, a gift of the Sorrow of God.

The Château Carhaix-sur-Mer in which this Breton priest spent his childhood stands on the edge of a ravine that runs through a moorland lying between a stretch of woods and the cliffs. The town of Lanilis is south of it; Plouzevede and Lesneven are to the eastward, while Plouneur-Trez is north.

The sea along this coast is safest when it frowns and most dangerous when it smiles.

It has been likened to a woman.

From the Château he was taken to a Jesuit monastery and college in St. Pol de Leon, a town of monasteries and nunneries and churches, which, like itself, are the patchwork of different ages. From almost its very beginning until now the cobbled streets of this old town have been filled with monks and priests, while be vies of white-hooded nuns have flitted silently through its shadows as pigeons on the roof-tops and in their comings and goings have left no trace of their passage. Thus this grey old town, with its slumbers, its periodical bustle at Pardons and its endless decay, exists as those who dwell in it—but to mourn and to pray.

In the moss-cowled monastery, where only the chanting of monks was heard or other sounds

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equally solemn, the sombreness of the Breton was changed to a gentler melancholy and the Spirit of Christ is said to have so deeply affected him that when he departed from the monastery for the Mission in China, an old monk, kneeling in the shadows of the gateway asked his blessing, saying:

“ I discern a martyr.”

The Mission of Yingching is not without its history and its antiquity. China has always been a tempting field for missionary effort and from the time the spirit of proselyting first took hold of men there has been no nation that has not at some time or other sent into this old land their priests and missionaries, their apostles and martyrs.

Christianity is not very old in any part of the world, as far as the age of the world goes, but it is far older in China than most people believe; older there, in fact, than in any other part of the world outside the cradle of its infancy.

During those years so momentous to the Roman Church, when her monks, penetrating through the gloomy forests of Europe, sought the conversion of the Goths and the Vandals, the old Bavarians and Alemanni, there were at that time in China more Christians than in all these sombre woods. And while the monks with those devout females, Bertha of Kent, and Clotilda, Queen of the Franks, were bringing over by intrigue their recalcitrant lords to a quasi-Christianity, the Nestorian Fath-

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ers in Asia were gaining through education their tens of thousands of adherents. When Columban, the Irish monk of Banchor, with Boniface, the English monk from Devon, were labouring among the Saxons and Goths, cutting down their sacred oaks, overturning their altars and at last securing the crown of martyrdom at the hands of our exasperated forefathers, the Nestorians were building schools and founding colleges, so that toward the end of the eighth century there were in China more Christians than to-day dwell in the whole of Asia.

But when ambition and lust of power crept into the aims of the Nestorians their influence began to decline; when they made education secondary and intrigue the first element in conversion faith in them was destroyed; their power crumbled; their beliefs vanished and now all that is left of their multitudinous congregations is, in the ancient city of Singanfu, a pillar of stone.

Though the Mission of Yingching was founded more than three hundred years ago the present site or compound dates back only to the middle of the nineteenth century when, after the city ex-muros had been destroyed by the bombardment of French gunboats, the Catholic Church took possession of a large tract of land in the western suburbs, which was afterwards divided into two portions; an enclosed tract in which is the Mission,

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containing nearly eleven acres and an open space some six hundred feet in width between the southern wall of the compound and the river. This vacant tract had been part of the land seized by the Church after the bombardment, but owing to the strenuous and persistent opposition of the Chinese provincial authorities as well as the inhabitants of the city to the Church acquiring such a large piece of land in the populous western suburbs, a compromise was finally agreed upon whereby the Church was confirmed in its title to eleven acres, while the Chinese were to retain ownership to the tract between the Mission and the river but were not to erect buildings upon it or to prevent in any way the Mission from enjoying the cool winds of the river or having free access to their boats. So this tract of land remained an open field in the midst of a crowded population.

The Mission is surrounded by a wall some fifteen feet in height, having two gates. The main entrance placed on the north while from the south wall a gate opens into the field, through which entered those coming from the river. Buildings accommodating several hundred native communicants, schools, quarters, and other establishments necessary to a Mission are arranged in quadrangles, these quadrangles in turn forming a large semi-quadrangle paralleling the enclosing walls other than on the north side, which gave the quad-

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rangles as a whole the form of the letter E, the bishop's residence forming the centre stroke while between it and the north gate stands a chapel, solitary and massive.

The quadrangles are one-storied, constructed of blue pressed brick, covered by dark tiles. Around the sides and between each run pillared cloisters. The intervening courts and spaces are planted with shrubs and flowers, while vines and ivy cling to the pillars of the cloisters sometimes covering the wide-spreading eaves.

The chapel that stands just within the north gate is built entirely of dark granite in the early Visigothic manner of architecture, when that type had not yet freed itself from Roman construction. It is a parallelogram with perfectly plain exterior. The only windows are along the sides, narrow and high, with a bar of iron running lengthwise through the centre. Looking at this chapel from the side it resembles a prison, while the front, with low vaulted doors is as cold and forbidding as a tomb. It in no way has the appearance of a Catholic church; neither plain nor flying buttresses, neither pinnacles nor porches, nor niches. It is without ornamentation; about it is not a line but what is sombre and desolate. Within, the chapel is not less gloomy than it is without. The central nave, tunnel-vaulted, is always dim with shadows, while the two side aisles, separated from the central nave

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by a row of dark lacquered pillars, are low, tombly. In the semicircular apse, groined and dim, is an altar of blackwood, its front ornamented with two dragons coiled in contention and having over their open mouths a cross with golden rays—symbolic of the Mission itself and its aspiration.

To this Mission, some ten years before the Breton priest had left the Monastery of St. Pol de Leon, a stranger came, dropping down like a wild bird in its flight. No one knew from what place he had come, hence they spoke of him always as the Unknown. The bishop treated him with deference.

This stranger lived alone in the southwest quadrangle next to the outer wall, dwelling there for two years in complete seclusion. After that he went out labouring as a priest among the people. But it was said that while he was scrupulous in the performance of his religious duties yet he was never known to make a convert. When any of his fellow-priests attempted to ask him a question he raised his eyebrows and they became hushed. No one was ever known to ask him twice. He seldom spoke and when he did, he growled or commanded; when he acted, his actions were final. He wandered everywhere, driven hither and thither by an unrest of his own. He knew the city intimately and the labyrinths of its suburbs; the fields adjoining and the villages beyond the fields. He

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would be gone a fortnight, return to the Mission for a day or two and then go away for a month. Where he had been no one dared to inquire and only on one occasion were his acts known.

The village of Sam Ma is distant from Ying-ching about thirty-five miles by boat and almost twenty by paths across the rice-fields and hills. During one fifth moon cholera broke out in this village, and in the midst of the epidemic the Unknown appeared. He assumed command over the village; segregated, doctored, punished, rewarded, beat, buried. In the beginning the villagers obeyed because they feared him; in the end, they were obedient because they worshipped him. But when the epidemic was over and the elders went to his house to express their gratitude, they found it empty.

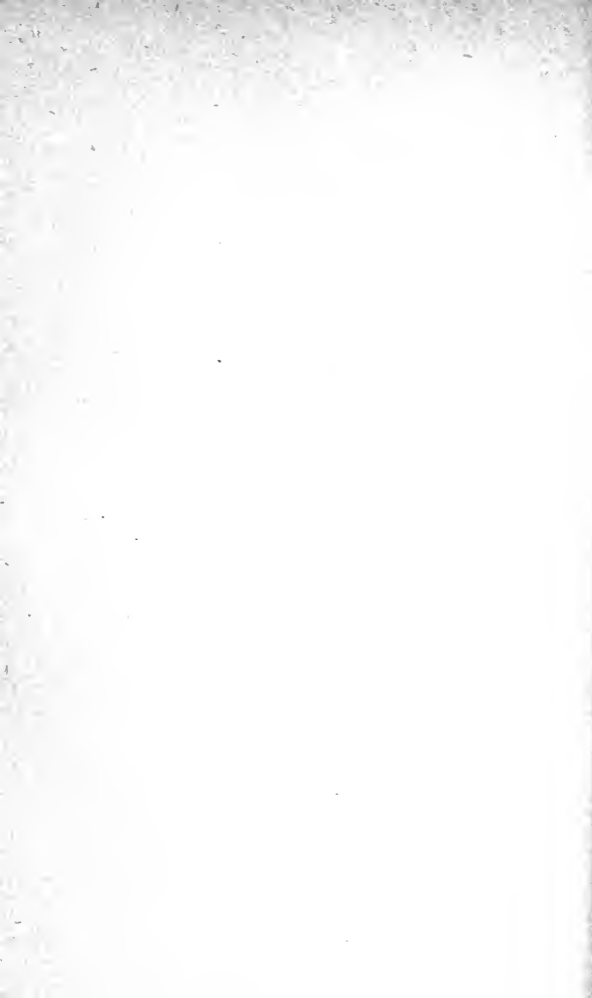
Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Sam Ma still perpetuate the memory of this Unknown man in their customary manner. And if any traveller, reading these lines, should go to their village, which is situated on the river of the Falling Brook he will find on a wooded knoll just without the walls, a shrine standing next to the Temple of the Goddess of Mercy. Within this shrine on an ebony altar covered with a gold-embroidered mantle is a tablet before which burns a taper by day and night. This tablet bears a name and beside it these words:

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“He looked upon the people as he would on a man that is wounded; he looked for the path of righteousness as if he could not see it.”

Such is all that has been discovered concerning this mysterious man and it was into this environment that the Breton priest came from the Monastery of St. Pol de Leon. It is said that at once this gloomy man and the youth found out each other in a way, not unlike that reciprocal attraction wherein the tempest finds on the sea's calm bosom rest and lightning finds fire in the hearts of rocks.

Henceforth, the older man ceased to disappear or even leave the Mission unless accompanied by the Breton. They studied together, travelled together, enduring hardships and dangers. It was noted that while one loved and growled, the other loved and was silent; for whole days they uttered not a word and it was this mutual taciturnity, which is the surest sign of love between men, that made an unbreakable strand in the net that Fate was in due time to cast and to draw in.



BOOK III. THE BEGINNING



CHAPTER ONE

PRO DEO ET ECCLESIA

IT is not a matter to wonder at that the Mission of Yingching was founded during the latter part of the sixteenth century,—an age known elsewhere for its deception and cajolery,—but it is remarkable that M. Ricci should remain the greatest of its bishops though more than three centuries have gone by.

From the beginning of that eventful day when the Viceroy granted him permission to build a little house where he might forget his hours in prayer and study, until he had laid secure the foundations of this Mission, which even Time and innumerable vicissitudes have not destroyed, the life of Ricci was passed more brilliantly than any of his successors. While most of them have faithfully continued his policy, they have done so only with that crudity that is to be expected from the efforts of mediocre men when they seek to emulate the schemes of master minds.

The successes of the bishop had been many; the fruition of his schemes was continuous and like the orange tree there mingled promiscuously to-

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gether the sprouting bud, the bloom, and the golden fruit. Yet numerous as had been his victories they were all overshadowed by one failure—the securing of a foothold within the walls of Yingching. Many had been the schemes carefully planned toward this end, only, through some fatality, to fail. But the bishop smiled and was hopeful, for no one knew better than he that in the march of ill-fortune there are to be found points of attack called opportunities, which assailed at the right moment end in victory; one must watch and wait; when there is seen a gap or point of weakness, fall upon it—perhaps to be repulsed, perhaps to succeed. So the bishop waited and watched as ill-fortune in a lazy, long column filed by. Often he had made the attack and failed but he was not disheartened nor did his failures ever alter the serenity that men noted on his brow, a serenity that was conspicuous.

One day—which might be called the beginning day of this history—the bishop was seated in his study with a peasant woman kneeling before him, and on his lips played or twitched that peculiar, unfathomable smile which someone once said was the shadowy echo of a scheme's contented laughter.

“Yes,” the bishop repeated musingly, “you will secrete yourself, listening to all that is said, seeing all that is done, and report to me each day. You must undertake to gain her confidence as much as

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possible and do nothing that may cause her displeasure."

The bishop, tapping the tips of his fingers together, settled back in his chair and smiled, one might almost say, rapturously.

"Since this matter is arranged, you may go," he said, leaning forward and looking down at the woman that knelt at his feet. "But remember," he continued with gentle firmness, firmness that left no doubt, "that you are first the servant of God and afterwards the maid of Tai Lin's wife. Never, as you value your soul, neglect to report to me all that is said and done each day between the priest and this wife. Go and obey!"

A hesitant knock aroused the bishop from his musings. The Breton priest, entering softly, knelt down and received his blessing then rising, stood dreamily waiting.

For some time the bishop sat rubbing with both forefingers his high, narrow nose. And as he contemplated the handsome, sad Breton a satisfied smile passed across his covered lips.

"I have new duties for you," he said presently in soft, thoughtful tones. "Tai Lin, the former Viceroy of Chekiang, has asked for a tutor to instruct his young wife, and I have selected you."

The Breton made no sign that he heard.

"Do you understand what that means?" demanded the bishop with purring severity as he

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leaned forward, pressing his bony knuckles against the sides of his knees. "God has intrusted you with its accomplishment, and there must be no failure in tasks imposed by Him.

"Tai Lin is one of the richest men in this province," he continued meditatively, as he leaned back in his chair and struck stiffly together the tips of his bloodless fingers. "Some say his wealth is limitless; this to a degree is true, for I know that he alone owns the great Erh-tung mines of white copper in Yunnan; the camphor groves of Si Kiang belong to him; the jade mines of Yu-Shan, and those boundless forests of teak that lie between the Me Kong and Song Ho rivers; besides—there is his great park in the heart of Ying-ching."

For some moments the bishop sat silent, his eyes half closed, his fingers motionless.

"Yes, that magnificent park, that wonderful park—— But this young wife, have you heard of her?" he demanded, suddenly sitting up.

Again the Breton looked at him questioningly.

"She was a tea-farmer's daughter, beautiful, it is said, as a wild animal, and though permitted to run wild among the hills and woodlands she acquired some learning the reputation of which, no doubt, spread among the neighbouring villages and finally reached the ears of Tai Lin, then Vice-roy of Chekiang. The beauty of this woman must

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be of some subtle, tireless kind if we are to believe in rumour and the influence she has over Tai Lin seems to prove it. He is less than a child in her hands. He does not seem to have any desire that is not hers nor any pleasure or thought in life that does not, in some manner, revolve about her.

“Strange, strange, that a woman with no other power than fleeting beauty or the skim of learning should rule so absolutely a man accustomed to be despot over tens of millions. It is said that within a month after she entered the palace at Hangchau her influence was felt in all directions. Tai Ling was a Confucian when he married this tea-farmer’s daughter, a ridiculer of all religions, yet she caused him to rebuild the Buddhist Temples of Yoh Miao and Ting Tzy; found hospitals and schools; send caravans loaded with food to the starving in Kwangsi and Shensi. She does whatever she pleases with him. This man to whom the Emperor has given the title of Great, is a nonentity; he amounts to nothing; the wife is everything. What could be more fortunate?”

Again the bishop relapsed into silence, while the eyes of the Breton looked meditatively along the book shelves behind him.

“Such are the ways of God, and nothing is more beautiful than His compassion in so deeply instilling in the heart of woman—even against her own acts—religion’s spirit, causing her to yield to the

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agency of His ministers and become an instrument in their hands for the salvation of mankind! Thus this very creature that caused man's fall and the desolation of God's garden, becomes an aid in his redemption. That villainous curiosity that caused her to spy around among the leaves of the Forbidden Tree still forces her into the thick foliage of her husband's thoughts; while that insatiable appetite that made her devour the apple that led to earth, still insatiable, causes her to hunger for that fruit that shall again unlock the Gates of Heaven. And just as she tempted man forth from Paradise by the deliciousness of desire, so shall she lead him back.

“If she alone can persuade him to build temples, found hospitals and give aid to the starving, how beneficent will prove her labours under proper tutelage! If she can cause Buddhist monasteries to be built she can erect Roman cathedrals; if she can scatter money broadcast among these hungry heathen, she can fill the coffers of our Mission. But beyond all of this there is something else.”

The bishop suddenly ceased speaking and his black, cavitous eyes closed as he tilted back his head.

“You know,” he resumed thoughtfully, “how our predecessors have laboured without success to gain a foothold within the walls of the city and

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how we have followed in their footsteps. Now, at last, the Eye of God looks down upon us: this opportunity allowed by Him must not be neglected. You must spare no effort nor fail to use any means to save her soul; to accomplish this end whatever means are employed, God will sanction. *Exaltibimus te, Domine.*"

For a long time the bishop gazed steadily at the Breton, and the deep silence was only broken by the cracking of his knuckles as he pulled one finger after another.

Presently he lay back in his high ebony chair, and a dim ray of light shafted in from the high-barred casement rested upon his pallid face: his thin, tight lips parted in a smile, while his hands, whitish and long, clasped to his breast an ivory cross imaged with the Christ.

The Breton waited, with eyes lowered dreamily before him.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SCHOLAR

A FEW days after the Breton had received his instructions from the bishop he was summoned to the palace of Tai Lin, thence peremptorily to an apartment belonging to his Excellency's wife, the tea-farmer's daughter. This room, with its alternate slabs of rose and white marble, its walls hung with curtains of crimson silk embroidered down the centre in characters of gold; its beams and pillars lacquered a dark red and overcast by a tracery of golden filigree, was filled with an amber light that a sun ray shooting through a shell-latticed window diffused among its shadows.

The Breton had stood for some time beside one of the pillars, waiting without restlessness or impatience the coming of his scholar, when unconsciously he raised his head and looked expectantly toward the carved screen-work—a mass of gold and sang-de-bœuf lacquer—that reached to both sides of the room and from the ceiling to the marble floor.

Suddenly a chime of music, which was laughter, filled the room, bringing a flush to his face. The

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first chime no sooner died away than came another and another; never in his life before had there fallen about him such sounds—like music laughing, or laughter from a bird's throat. Had that been heard in his native land, it would have been honoured with a shrine. The melancholy peasants rising from their knees before its sanctuary would have said, "Is it not true that Bretagne is under the Eye of God? Over yonder the Devil is buried beneath Mont St. Michel and now the Virgin is heard to laugh."

So the eyes of the Breton, propped open wide with wonder, stared at the screen. But not another sound was heard until the wife said softly:

"Priest, come—sit here."

For an instant he hesitated, then went over to the screen and sat down in a chair of teak and mother-of-pearl, which had been placed beside it. He heard a trembling silken rustle, then the room was again filled with the music of the wife's laughter.

"Why, priest," she exclaimed in the midst of her merriment, "your eyes are really blue! Who would ever have thought such a thing! Blue! Isn't that strange!" she added wonderingly.

The Breton bowed his head, but made no answer.

"Look up!" she commanded.

He raised his eyes to the crevices near his head.

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“ Priest,” said the wife presently, her voice still gentle with wonder, “ if your eyes were not so soft, I would say they were sapphires; were they not so strangely bright, I would say they were as the sky when the moon loiters behind the mountains. So these are the eyes of devils——”

The Breton took no notice of her comments.

“ And you are the priest,” she drawled presently.

“ Yes,” he answered softly, “ a priest of God.”

“ And what have you come to teach me, priest?” she inquired, mockery and laughter trembling in her demure tones.

“ As the bishop has ordered.”

“ Indeed!” she commented disdainfully. “ And what did he order?”

“ To save your soul,” replied the Breton reverently, “ for the glory——”

The laughter of the wife interrupted him.

“ And he sent you to do it?”

“ Yes,” he apologised, “ the bishop has sent me.”

“ How thoughtful of him! No doubt you will succeed!”

“ Yes, God will be here,” he answered simply.

“ Why did not the bishop send someone else?”

“ I do not know.”

“ You did not ask to come?”

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“No.”

“Indeed! If he asked you to go elsewhere tomorrow, would you go?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, very well. I may not want you any more. I am not at all firm in my desire, and you are so young. My last teacher, who had had the learning of seventy winters, said the ignorance of youth was really pitiable, especially in men. No; I don't think you will do,” she commented with candour, “not at all.”

The Breton gazed dreamily through the half-opened shell-latticed window, and only the restless hopping and chirp of the thrushes in the golden bamboo cages broke the silence, or sometimes a dulled sound, which was the noise of the surrounding city in its labour.

“Priest,” her voice came from just above him, and as he turned his head, a ring set with a large pear-shaped pearl dropped from the crevices into his lap. He looked up and tried to speak. His lips moved, but that was all, for just overhead a little pink finger tip clung to the edge of the crevices.

“Oh, you need not thank me,” she exclaimed coldly, “that ring is not for you. It is for your bishop, who wishes to save my soul.”

“Yes, he wishes it,” the Breton answered thoughtfully, as he fingered the ring in his lap.

“And you?”

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"I shall pray for you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I will teach you," he added gently, oblivious of her mockery.

"What?"

"To love God and——"

"How monotonous you are, priest," she interrupted impatiently.

"No," he answered, looking gravely up to the crevices, "to love God is not monotonous; to pray to Him is happiness."

"I suppose you pray all the time?" she asked with mock compassion.

"Yes; ad Jesum crucifixion."

"I never heard of Him," she commented lightly.

"Our Lord, who was crucified."

"Indeed! And what had He been doing?"

"He died to save men."

"How useless!" she sighed.

"From the crucifix came the cross; from torture, salvation."

"Dreadful! And you pray to Him?"

"Yes; to Jesus crucified," he answered softly.

"Let me hear you," she commanded unconcernedly as though thinking of other things.

The Breton, bowing his head, began in a low monotonous tone. "Eu, amantissime Jesu, qui sponsae sanguinum mihi esse voluisti ad pedes tuos

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prosternor, ut meum in te amorem debitamque gratitudinem contester. Sed quid rependam tibi mi Jesu——”

After the first few words of the Breton's prayer the wife began to laugh, at first softly to herself, but as the Breton continued, her merriment increased until the music peals of her laughter stopped him completely.

“What a noise you are making!” she exclaimed. “I never heard such sounds!” And she fell again to laughing. “You must not mind my laughter,” she said, breathless, “I cannot help it. You never laugh?” she inquired when her merriment had subsided.

“No.”

“I did not think so. I laugh all the time. But then you are a priest,” she added consolingly. “Are you going to finish your prayer?”

The Breton looked hesitantly at the screen, then resumed his prayer. “Mi Jesu, qui usque in finem dilexisti me? Manibus ac pedibus imo et cordi tuo inscripsisti me, magno sane et conspicuo character. Quis mihi hoc tribuat ut sicut tu me, ita et ego te cordi meo inscriptum circumferam. O Jesu——”

“No,” interrupted the wife meditatively, “I would not say that your hands were disagreeable to look at. My honourable husband told me that the hands of foreigners were speckled and covered

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with red hairs like the wood spider—just think of it! But I should say that your hands are—you can put on that ring, if you wish.”

The Breton did not touch the pearl in his lap.

“I said you could put on that ring,” she enjoined imperiously. “No, on the other hand; yes—— Now, go on with your prayer.”

And once more the Breton began his prayer to the crucified Christ.

“O Jesus quam profuso mi charitatis effectu complexus es qui non tantum manus et pedes, verum et opulentissimum pectus mihi operiri voluisti, ut inexhausto bonorum coelestium affluentia desiderium meum expleas——”

“And priest,” his Excellency’s wife again interrupted with the same meditative interest, “I would not say that it is annoying, either, to look at your face. Do you know,” she added naïvely, “that I was almost afraid to see you? I did not know what you would look like. My honourable husband has been telling me of the English, who have a wad of red hair on each cheek; isn’t that frightful?” And she laughed softly to herself, merrily as a child.

“You never even smile, do you?”

He made no answer.

“I do not think so; your face is too sad. And I suppose,” she sighed deprecatingly, “that it comes from all this dull praying.”

The Breton was looking sorrowfully across the

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room to the sunlit shells, opalescent in the latticed windows.

“Are you going to finish your prayer?” she asked with mock wonder.

He turned his head and looked steadily up to the crevices.

“You do not wish it,” he said sadly.

“I do!” she exclaimed, petulantly slapping the screen.

“Salve, O benedictum vulnus lateris tui mi Jesu! Salve, O fons amoris, O thesaure inaestimabilis, O requies animae meae ausimne benignissime Jesu.”

As the Breton uttered these lines, he turned his eyes once more toward the crevices whence she spoke.

“Ad sacram hanc aram ad hoc sanctum sanctorum, accidere ardens que amore cor turum.”

“Do you know,” she interrupted, a subdued tremor in her voice, “I don’t believe that devils have such eyes. They are like the ocean. I was on the sea once when I came here from Hangchau and I watched the waters. I noticed the sea, though always blue, the blue changed. Sometimes shadows swift or faltering crept into it, and oh, how sad it was! Suddenly these dark waters would become light. I never saw such brightness. The sea smiled and—don’t, please don’t look at me.”

CHAPTER THREE

HOMO! MUTATO!

WHILE the weeks and then months that followed the Breton's advent into the palace of Tai Lin were as widely different to the past years of his life as is sunlight to sorrow, yet in themselves these weeks varied but little.

Unseen and impregnable behind her great screen the tea-farmer's daughter usurped all the liberties of her childhood. She mocked his learning, derided his God, then whispered—which was another way of caressing; and when the Breton looked up, injured yet forgiving, to the crevices above his head, she filled the room with the music peals of her laughter, sometimes coldly derisive, again like a rapturous song dropped from a heaven un conjectured by the Breton priest.

In the beginning only two men in the Mission noticed that a lingering uncertainty had come into his actions; a greater dreaminess into his preoccupation and a brightness into his melancholy eyes. As weeks went on he became more hurried and restless, so that even a vagueness came at times into his prayers. This was apparent to many, but

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they attributed it to Breton eccentricity, and they would have been confirmed in this belief had they watched him leave the Mission in haste, then after passing through the Great Southern Gate, go forward reluctantly. When he reached the park entrance he often passed it, wandered about, or sought refuge in the Tower of the Water Clock, where dripped, dripped, dripped those relentless drops meditatively from their ageworn jars of granite.

In the late afternoons when the lessons were over and the wife had dismissed him in silence, or scornfully or with laughter, he left the park only to move unconcernedly through the streets, apparently seeing nothing; not even hearing the multitudinous cries and noises that resounded about him. He was drifted along like flotsam in their currents and carried around through their endless windings until, as flotsam, he was tossed up on the threshold of the Mission gates.

At first these street currents brought him back to the Mission more or less quickly. But as time hastened on they began to take him further and wider in their drift or leave him stranded momentarily or longer in some temple grounds, or on the river's bank, until at last sundown did not find him at the Mission and after a while dusk crept in before him.

One night he sat on the edge of the cloister out-

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side of his door. His eyes were half closed, a faint upward curl fluttered in the corners of his mouth, a fulness pouted his lower lip. He had been sitting thus for a long time when the Unknown priest came and stood looking down at him steadfastly, weighted with intuition—a gaze to be avoided.

Presently he began to talk aloud to himself.

“It has come.”

“Spontaneous?”

“Yes.”

“Fungoid?”

“No; it takes a night to produce a mushroom and only a minute to shrivel it. An instant produces this or a mountain. Ages can not alter it. I know of no name unless it be called volcanic; an upheaval, a something from the depths; made up of scoria that destroys but is itself indestructible.”

“What are you doing?” he growled.

The Breton looked up.

“Are you asleep?”

“No.”

“Are you praying?”

“No.”

“What are you doing?”

“Thinking,” the Breton answered softly.

“A bad trick,” he grumbled as he went on, leaving the Breton alone in the night.

It was in this manner that these two priests, who had for so long a time been inseparable, drew un-

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consciously away from each other. One dreamed and the other remembered: two extremes, which look alike and which effectually hid from the other priests the parting of their ways. For instead of a single silence—which had been mutual—came one both double and divergent. Two such silences cannot drift together. Nothing is more selfish than self communion.

But as the Breton drew off more and more to himself he did so so unconsciously that his affection for the Unknown was in no way diminished but was simply put away in one of those inner chambers of the heart until—as was destined—it was brought forth again unaltered or changed.

The Unknown priest now went on his journeys alone, and soon drifted back to that solitary, stern seclusiveness in which he had lived before the Breton came. Again he left the Mission for weeks at a time, and the Breton no more noticed his comings and goings than did the others that dwelt in the Mission. Both priests were busy; one dreamed; the other succoured; two things hard to wear out or become threadbare.

The lessons of the wife began about an hour after midday and continued until she left the Breton alone, waiting by the screen. This she did peremptorily, moodily, in laughter, in silence, in mockery. She cajoled him when it was her humour, reprimanded and laughed at him. She questioned,

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then derided his answers. She wondered and scorned—like a child pouting with hauteur. Yet in the midst of all this the Breton could not or did not care to distinguish one mood from another, for as music is music, regardless of what it expresses, so were the mood tones that came from behind the screen, and in time no amount of scorn or laughter or derision could alter this music.

“What a people you are, priest,” she chided, “to practise benevolence for Heaven’s payment! Don’t you know that men are fools that try to make themselves the creditors of Heaven?”

She lowered her voice to a pleading whisper: “How can you do such a thing?”

The Breton looked up; contrition flashed across his face and instantly the rooms were filled with triumphant laughter.

But while her mockery, her commands, and derision affected him in no way, there were words, however, which were spoken in such inexplicable, whispering tones that they remained with him always. And after he came to enter the park before the hour of midday the memory of these words were so vividly recurrent in the song and solitude of the park that every sunbeam sent them scintillating through his revery. The memory of one word—and he was hid in the cloud of its thought.

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As when a rapid rushes down over a cliff and a white cloud rises from the gorge without any will or substance of its own, so did the sudden tumbled memory of her half-whispered words cause to rise and permeate his whole consciousness, a mist-cloud through which passed an iridescence more beautiful, more brilliant than the rainbow in the gorge.

And when the pehling rose from the meadow—a song shot toward heaven—the Breton stopped, held his breath, so near was its song like her laughter or her chiding. Thus each day he drifted rather than wandered about the park as he waited for that hour when once more he should be seated beside the screen. This sombre Breton, moving half-restlessly, half-contentedly among the groves of flowery tamarix and wu-tung, among orchards of bloomed almonds and lichee; along hillsides terraced in orange and pomegranate; beside iris-circled ponds and down outstretching streams, moved in a sort of a radiance, not incomparable to a bubble adrift. For as a bubble reflects whatever surrounds it, whether upon the banks, upon the stream, or clouds immeasurable overhead, illuminating with inward mysterious brightness their lights, shades, colours, and perspectives, so his nature as of other men took on the forms and colouring of his surroundings and like a bubble

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tinctured them with a radiance that came from within himself.

Heretofore the Breton's impressionable, melancholy nature had, as a bubble in the gloom of a cañon, whirled round and round in sombre eddies. There had been no sunlight since the dim glimmer of his childhood—and all that had been reflected in him whirling along through the cloistered dusk had been a shadow—devoid of change as well as of brightness. But now, as a bubble in the sunlight iridescent with a myriad hues, he drifted along, his happiness modified and yet illumined by the melancholy of a race that has known so little of sunshine and so much of Breton gloom. In this park there was not a flower but whose brightness was reflected within him; every nodding blade of grass, the water-fowls' gay plumage, the heavens, the mist clouds adrift like himself in the tranquil air; the double brightness of sun in sky and stream. And from within himself, from the very depths of his sombrous nature, shone forth that something, which man has yet to name, and subtly tinted each image with rainbow tints.

In this manner—not uncommon in life—had the Breton been precipitated from the cloisters; not into the world's wild meadow, but into Tai Lin's park. This had all happened so suddenly, so completely, that it was as impossible for him to remember the time when this sunlight had

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not surrounded him as it was to conjecture that inevitable hour when setting, he would again be in darkness; not the shadow of the past, but the darkness of one that had known the sun.

The languorous flash of the Breton's eye spoke frankly, even insistently of this change—for the tongue cannot wag one's thoughts more carelessly than are the eyes loquacious of the heart's secrets—and one day the Unknown, as if exasperated by his indifference, took roughly hold of his shoulder and demanded:

“What is the matter with you?”

The Breton looked at him wonderingly.

“Do you know that for two months you have not said a word? I doubt if you have prayed. You no longer go with me. What are you dreaming about?”

“I do not know,” answered the Breton absently.

As weeks vanished, or rather seemingly blended into an hour, which had just past, the wife of Tai Lin laughed somewhat less at him, an hesitancy sometimes came into her mockery; impatience fluttered at times in her manner, and silences began to creep in more frequently. In these moments of stillness, when only the sensuous crinkle of silk was heard, the caressing tremor of the fan or the soft pulse tap, tap, of her foot, the Breton leaned forward on the table.

CHAPTER FOUR

A DRAGON AND THE GROTTO

ALONG the waterfront of the southern suburbs, which were penned in between the walls of the city and the river, ran a wide wooden bund that extended for some distance over the water.

The street of the Sombre Heavens leaving the city through the Great Southern Gate debouches almost into the middle of it, at which place it has the appearance of a narrow field, so wide is it, and so dense and multitudinous are the suburbs that crouch beneath the old south walls of Yingching, with its towers and frown of a thousand years.

Just across the river, with its myriads of quarrelling boats, is the Monastery of Wa-lam-tze, where five hundred monks with their fowls doze and blink in alcoved groves or in halls that are of marble. Opposite the western end whirls the black pool of Pakngotam, fathomless at this place, but connected subterraneously with distant points. A pig thrown into it will be found at Ko-Chao, two hundred and fifty miles away, where it boils up in the hollow of three hills. It is also connected with Chukow, two hundred and eighty miles dis-

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tant, and comes up for the last time at Shukwan among the marshes on the borders of the southern sea. Beyond Pakngotam is the monastery Tai Tung, where the earth holds a mysterious abyss that is a source of terror and confidence, for the noxious fumes and vapours that rise out of it—as from the cleft in the Temple of Phytia—presage tempests on land and sea. When a storm approaches, even at a great distance, a thick lurid mist rolls out of this Dragon's mouth and covers the groves of the Monastery. It is believed that these vapours are forced out by the violent beatings of the earth's pulse, that are no other than the subterranean streams of Pakngotam. These pulsations are caused in distant places by the storms' weight forcing the vapours through the veins of the earth to the Dragon's mouth, where they are spit forth as warning of the tempest's approach. Thus this gigantic barometer portrays not only the commiseration and sublimity of the gods, but their watchfulness over the old city of Yingching.

During low water the bund at the foot of the Street of the Sombre Heavens is used for the execution of criminals, although there is a Court of Execution not far from the southeast corner of the city walls. But this portion of the bund, so wide and prominent, is almost always used, especially when it is desired to make a greater display

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of official grandeur and the Law's vermilion majesty.

The Breton in leaving the park of Tai Lin usually passed out of the city by the Great Southern Gate, and following the Street of the Sombre Heavens came nearly every evening to this part of the bund, where he loitered instead of continuing on his way to the Mission. Eventually the bund loafers became accustomed to his tall form standing at evening motionless on the bund's very edge, his garments blown by the river's wind, and his eyes dreamily lowered on the floods rolling at his feet.

Men passing him commented:

"Scholar."

"He is wasting his time."

"He thinks," said one.

"A fool," replied another.

"He is a wise man," growled a misanthrope.

"Why?"

"He is thinking of jumping into bed."

"He dreams," said a boat-woman.

"About what?" demanded a slipper boat-girl with bated breath.

"Who knows, Alinn, when the dreamer does not!"

One late afternoon as the sun hung red in the purple mist, which rises from the rice fields beyond Honam, the Breton was dreaming as usual on the

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bund's edge when a sampan gondoliered by a boat-girl glided to a landing stair not far from him. Under the bamboo awning sat a foreigner talking eagerly to her as she moved easily and gracefully her ponderous oar. The boat passed under the bund. Presently the foreigner mounted the landing stage, but at the top of the stairs stopped perplexed and uncertain, then pattered hastily over to the edge.

"Hi! Cumsha! Hi!" he cried, frantically shaking his umbrella at the slipper boat as it started on its way across the river.

The boat trembled momentarily in the dark mighty currents, then turned slowly around and approached that part of the bund where the stranger stood beside the Breton.

"I know you," he commented, as he glanced quickly up at the Breton, "but look at that," and he pointed to the girl as she moved with so much grace her slender craft. "A water nymph, sir, in blue pantlets! I am the Reverend Tobias Hook, and I tell you, my young friend, there is not another like her from Wampoia to Wu-Chau; she is a vision of triple dimples, and when you see them you will ooze with envy. What an ideal for a convert! How admirable she will be around the house! I have cumsha for you, my little lost lamb," he chirped as the girl steadied her boat in the currents below them.

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“Throw it down,” she answered in a matter-of-fact way.

“My poor lamb, will you not answer?”

“What?”

“What I spiritually beseeched of you in the boat.”

“I forget.”

“Will you not receive what I offered?”

“I am afraid.”

“Think of what you will have.”

“I would rather have that cumsha.”

“Think! think what you will have,” he repeated ecstatically.

“This is my sampan; I live on the river because I was born here and will die here.”

“Come with me,” he held out his hands.

“Throw that cumsha or I will go.”

As she started to swing her great oar the stranger threw a few coppers into the boat and, leaning on his umbrella, watched her cross the river, his eyes dancing as they followed her lithe body swaying in rhythmic motion to the movement of the great oar. Finally, when she was lost to sight among the other craft, he turned to the Breton, shaking his head solemnly.

“Ah me,” he sighed. “I was just in time; another day—who knows—it might have been too late. . . . It is going to be contentious. I see it, I hear it, I know it; but let it come, I will

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out-Solomon Solomon with the keen edge of my diplomacy, and mark you, the infant of my desire will not be severed."

For some moments the Reverend Tobias Hook balanced himself, now on his heels, now on his toes.

"My young friend," he resumed with impressive solemnity, "reverence diplomacy primarily and late, for it is the right healing hand of our Maker. It alone diagnoses the depths and shallows of diseased contentions. With subtle pills it ruddies up a pale hope, or judiciously phialing out popped words it bats the eye of envy. And when the distemper of ambition rolls up the pulse of those around you lay on the gentle fingers of diplomacy, pucker up the wise silent lips, and blinking, fashion out a cure. If, in due time, you should fall, as men have fallen from Adam down, into the fever and ague of marriage, you will need for your own health's sake this physician's calming dosage.

"Marriage, marriage," he soliloquised bitterly, jamming the point of his umbrella viciously into the planks, "that, my young friend, is the act that strips us and leaves us naked of hope. Why did I marry? A question. Was I lonely? No. I was wallowing in youth. Was it greed? No, for it has further impoverished my poverty. Was it ambition? No, I tempt not what caused the fall of angels. Was it love? There is no need to ask that

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question. Nor is there any use to take the whole inventory of my mind. I did it—that is all.

“This thing and theory of the one woman, my young friend, is like a nettle found in the White Cloud Hills; it tickles sensationally at first, then leaves a rash burning the rest of life. In this nettle simile lies the substance of my whole contention. At the moment of discovery our vision is distorted so that we discern in this very nettle a rose, a lily, or what not so that it is pleasing to our fancy. We pluck, we pop the other eye, and before we know we begin to scratch.

“Moreover, in this rose and lily metaphor lies argument for another drift to the point we are getting at. We grant the one woman to be the perfect rose or lily; man ambling through the garden of womankind spies this choicest flower and plucks it—which is marriage—then for his temerity wanders the rest of life through this endless blooming garden with an herb whose hues are soon no hues, whose perfume has become an odour, and its sweets so galled that the very bees forsake it and hornets extract substance from it for their stings. Furthermore, my young friend, in your feeble youth, unstrengthened by the vicissitudes of matrimony, nor toiled, nor calloused by it, I warn you that the sweetness of one rose is soon blown. No cook can concoct a meal out of one dish, nor prayers nor Aladdins make one meal fill out the

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course of life. It is variety and abundance that peppers and adorns the monotony of this rutted earth. Ah, if our discretion would only come in youth and our follies in old age! What happiness! We would die from a surfeit of it."

The Reverend Hook stepped closer to the Breton and laid his hand consolingly on his shoulder.

"My young friend, I have watched you for many weeks standing at dusk on this bund and holding dialogue with empty space, and I conceived the thoughts I have given birth to—that there is a woman in it, for nothing but female imaginings can make a man a companion to shadows and vapours, squeezing music out of noise and plastering the air thick with visions.

"Now mark me, I do not complain of lathering in this fragrant soap that so cleanses our minds of sorrow, but let lather be lather; temporarily it laves us in joy but in the One love—no! no! with it comes only moody agitations of the heart. You try to crib on nature and deceive yourself into believing that the lily cannot lose its whiteness, nor the rose its perfume. Ah, my young dreamer, if you had Mrs. Hook for one week—that is all!

"But let us be cheerful, retrospect your thoughts back to that little dimpled darling in blue pantlets! Could anything be finer? She is curried to

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my taste, sir, and when chutneyed with a little strife—what a morsel! What a dish! . . . If I can clasp her once, just once, mark you, she will wail for the love of me.”

The Reverend Tobias Hook became meditative at this pleasing thought. He folded his hands on the head of his umbrella and gazed abstractedly down into the sombre flowing waters that the Chinese call the Pearl River; not, however, because pearls are found in its silty bed, but pearls are euphemistic of tears. This is the River of Tears, dark in sunlight, melancholy and sullen at dusk, and at midnight a dark flood that mourns. There is an immense terribleness about it and its sorrow; robbing, feeding, contemplating, nursing, and in due time devouring the innumerable millions it has reared. The giving of man to this River of his tears and his dead has been without end, as long as they have dwelt on its banks it has been so, yet they conceal this fact from themselves by calling its dark flood the River of Pearls, by giving gods to its depths; to its banks, temples and pagodas.

Suddenly the Reverend Tobias Hook was aroused from his sweet musings by the falling of dusk.

“I must hasten!” he exclaimed abruptly; “tomorrow I will come back. I want to talk to you about the Treasure hidden in the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon, and that, sir, is worth dream-

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ing about. But I cannot stay." He shook his head dolefully and looked furtively over his shoulder.

"Mrs. Hook is at the Willow Gate this very moment watching for me, and when she sees my rolling, sensuous gait, my pouted under lip and high-distempered cheek she will cluck, sir, she will cluck with rage."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MONSOON

DO you know what is the matter with you?" demanded the Unknown gruffly as he stopped the Breton hastening out of the Mission Gate.

The priest looked up.

"You are happy," the Unknown grumbled.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

"What do you think?"

"I think it is from God."

While the Breton did not perceive it, the wife had in a way become less wilful, though her moods were yet as the river's wind; her words as changeful as the mocking-bird's song; her impetuosity as uncertain as those strange storms that come down through the gorges of Kai Fong. One moment sweetly naïve as a child, the next abrupt and full of cold scorn; she still chided, still coaxed and scolded, though sometimes her words caressed. She questioned and derided as in the past, and still brought doubt into his sensitive eyes only to laugh it away.

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The fact is, however, that in the rapid rush of time, the wife laughed less, and in no such manner as she did during the first weeks of his tutorship; then it was part of her always, and he heard it even in her most impatient moments. She welcomed him with it; mocked and scorned with its music, and when he departed its petulant echoes ceased at no time in his heart.

So as months passed and the eyes of the Breton lost their melancholy shadows, there crept imperceptibly into the wife's laughter a softened, doubtful tingle. It was as though the sadness, which went out from his eyes, was finding its way into her laugh.

"Will you never finish that book?" she complained.

"You do not like it?" He looked up hastily, a shadow in his eyes.

"No!" she answered sharply.

"I have two other books," he suggested, not turning his eyes away from the crevices.

"No!" she cried impatiently, "not another book!"

"What shall I teach you?" he asked softly.

"I do not know," she mused vaguely; "but it's something! something!"

"And you do not know?" His eyes became suddenly bright.

"No."

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"Then it is from God."

"Please don't pray," she pleaded.

"You do not——"

"I know—but it is so tiresome," she interrupted plaintively. "Priest," she whispered.

He looked up.

"I know, I know," her whisper was constrained. "Do you?"

He shook his head.

"Do you wish to?"

He could scarcely hear and did not at all understand, so he made no answer and the questioning in his eyes did not change.

"Rest your ear here," she whispered, putting her little finger through the crevice.

He hesitated for a moment, then in the manner of a boy pressed his ear tightly to the crevice. For a moment there was perfect stillness, then a hurried, alarmed fluttering of silk.

Presently far from the screen he heard the wife strike her hands softly, nervously together.

"You must go," she cried, her voice trembling. "Please don't stand there."

But before the Breton left that afternoon the dusk of a monsoon storm had darkened the rooms and as he passed through the park masses of clouds as black as the night-sea rushed along across the sky like enormous billows frothed with a grey foam. The narrow streets were filled with hurry-

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ing men; shopkeepers were putting up shutters, and barring doors; hucksters ceased their cries; itinerent barbers, money-changers, and fortune-tellers were hastily, silently departing. Sentries left their posts; mothers screamed after wayward brats; beggars sought the shelter of temples, and the chant of the blind was still.

The Breton, instead of returning to the Mission, went as swiftly as possible through the tortuous streets to the East Gate, thence made his way toward their outer edge, where a small Catholic community lived, almost buried under the tumbled side of this vast, old brick-heap—a plastered chip from the Rock of St. Peter.

The streets were now deserted. Here and there people stood in their doorways and watched him pass. Fowls hovered by threshold and children, still devilish, scurried hither and thither—storm-tempters and scorners.

When the Breton reached the edge of the suburbs he turned southward and hastened along the embankment of an old canal; to the right was the city; on his left the fields, and beyond darkness.

There came the rumble-boom of distant thunder.
It was twilight.

No one could be seen; no sounds were heard. Upon the earth rested that vasty stillness which belongs to dusk when dusk is the forepart of a

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storm. Night birds, day beasts, men, insects, all were sheltered. It was night.

The Breton hastened on.

As he drew near to the Catholic community, a flame of lightning burst out of the blackness; a terrific thunder-crash followed; then again impenetrable gloom was around him. But that flash, as though it were the torch of God thrust out of heaven, illumed for one brief second a dismal scene.

Before him on the bank of the old canal stood a man with head bowed upon his bosom, his hands hanging loosely to his side while the wild night-wind whipped thin garments about his body. At the man's feet cowered a woman holding a baby to her breast, and, crouching over it, sought to ward off the storm. Two small children clung to his legs. This group did not speak, nor move, nor sob.

The Breton approached them.

"Why are you out in this storm?" he asked gently.

"It welcomes us," the man growled carelessly.

"Where is your house?"

"It is here."

"Your beds?"

"We do not sleep."

"Your food?"

"We do not eat."

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“ Who sent you here? ”

“ Fate.”

“ It cannot protect you.”

“ Who can protect whom Fate deserts? ”

“ But the storm——”

“ Bah! the storm will come and go with its good and ruin. Fate remains unaltered.”

“ Let me shelter you.”

“ Where? ”

“ I am a Christian and near are my friends.”

“ You are my enemy,” the man replied with the same nonchalance.

“ Your enemy? ”

“ Leave us.”

“ I cannot.”

“ You wish the eyes of my children? ”

“ I wish to help you.”

“ You do? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Kill us.”

“ Will you not go? ”

“ Owls consort with owls; finches with finches.”

“ My wish is to help you.”

“ To-day you took away my house and gave it to Chun Ping, who is a Christian, a river-pirate, a buyer and seller of stolen goods. You know this, the mandarins know this, but you work together, you do these villainies together—weak governments and powerful gods sleep in the same bed.

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“How many years have I sweated that I might have that little house? What man can say I am not honest? That I did not give alms to the blind and cash to the gods in the Temple? Did I not intend to save money that my sons could study and take the Examinations? Now—it is all gone.

“Chun Ping wanted my house; he went with your priests and said it was his. The priests said it was his house. I went to the Yamen and showed them my red deed and white deed. They said, ‘It is your house; give us money and we will protect you.’ I gave them all my money. They gave my house to Chun Ping. They said, ‘We dare not offend these Christians; they have gunboats in the river. Go away.’ To-night your priests came and put me out.”

The Breton made no answer.

When the lightning flashed again it showed two men standing silently over the woman and children.

The black breakers of the storm-sea overhead began to fall amid the crash and boom of thunder.

The children were terror-stricken; the mother sobbed and cooed. The priest stared out into the night toward the Catholic community.

The storm grew worse and the still group bowed under it. The teeth of the little children chattered, but they did not cry nor speak. The

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mother had ceased her sobs and no longer cooed to her baby.

“We must go!” said the Breton, and he took up one of the children; the man picked up the other and a cage in which fluttered a bedraggled bird. They started off and the mother with her baby hugged tightly to her breast, followed.

The Breton, leading the way, went up to the door of a house and knocked.

No answer.

He went to another.

“Who knocks?” demanded a man from within.

“We are caught in the storm.”

“Who are you?”

The priest turned to the man behind him.

“Tsang.”

“It is the family of Tsang.”

There came no response. He knocked on the door again, but it was useless. So they went on, in the reek of rain and wind-blasts, from house to house.

Suddenly the man Tsang stopped. He beat violently on a door.

“What do you want?” growled a rough voice from within.

“My house!”

“Who are you?”

“I am Tsang.”

“You are a rat.”

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"I am an honest man. Give me my house."

"Give me your wife. I am cold."

"Christian!"

"The eyes of your brats are worth two taels. Their spleen is useless."

"I will raise a mob and destroy you."

"The Christian gunboats in the river will tear you into rags."

"You have destroyed your ancestral tablets."

"I cooked to-night's rice with yours."

"You may deceive men, but you cannot close the eye of Fate. You will yet be cut into a thousand pieces."

"Bah! The Law is a rusty knife, my Church is a new cannon. They dare not question me."

"By the Temple of the One God, you have a shop to receive stolen goods."

"I am a Christian."

"You stole the jade-tablets from the Ancestral Hall of Ho."

"I am a Christian."

"You were aboard the pirate junk that killed thirty people near the Lob pagoda on the fifth day of the last moon."

"I am a Christian."

"You stole the daughter of the Widow Chin and sold her to a whoremonger."

"You had none old enough."

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“You cannot escape. Fate will overtake you though the Yamen runners fail.”

The priest took the man's arm and dragged him away.

They trudged on, whither? This thought did not occur to any of them. They now forgot the wind and the waters that flowed underfoot. To the man Tsang this raging of the elements seemed a natural portion of his ruin. He became part of this environment of wrath and was contented in it. The storm was companionable. This tempest and the man held converse, which was friendly.

The Breton led the way while the mother trudged on behind. This woman hardly knew that she was turned out of doors and was wandering about in the night through a wreck of waters. What did she care for these rending winds; this night vomit of heaven; these red forks of fire or blare of thunder?

Her babe suckled.

So they went on in single file until suddenly the little boy on the Breton's shoulder began to cry, which was next best to the stopping of the storm.

The Breton turned to the man.

“Where can we find shelter for your wife and babies?”

“In to-morrow.”

“But to-night?”

“Let us go to the river.”

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“Why?”

“We can drown.”

“When men fear death less than poverty, should they not be held in contempt?”

“It is true.”

“We must find protection.”

“Let us go to your Mission.”

“You hate Christians.”

“I despise them!”

“We cannot.”

“Then let us go to the Temple of the Five Gods. It stands to reason that five gods have more compassion than one.”

The man now led the way. The woman still followed, falling behind like a tired dog, and like a dog she made no complaint. Often they stopped and, halting, waited for her; when she caught up, this mother would give a long whistling sigh and sink down in the mud.

“Come,” said the man, “we must hasten or the Temple will be overcrowded.”

“With whom?” asked the Breton.

“With rags and lice.”

“What?”

“Yes, the temples in the Middle Kingdom are now only the refuge of beggars—as in your country they are filled with plotters.”

“Are there no robbers?” asked the mother feebly.

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“No,” he replied consolingly. “Fate is impartial—our temples have only vermin; the beasts were reserved for this priest’s Church.”

Presently they reached the outer gates of the Temple of the Five Gods; it was ajar. They crossed the court, where the water reached high above their ankles, and ascending the granite steps hesitated on the threshold. They lingered, uncertain before the huge doorway, which looked like the entrance to some abyss, then the Breton stepped in, closely followed by the man and the woman.

The lightning’s glare lit up dimly, momentarily, the temple’s vast hall, where dark heaps of shadowy forms were huddled along the sides. At times these heaps shuddered, and from out of the depths of them came groans.

At the farther end of the temple’s hall, on a huge ebon altar, were the images of the Five Gods. And when the red flare of lightning inflamed their terrible eyes, these gods looked down upon the sprawling wreck of man and grinned.

Toward these monsters the Breton made his way, followed by the man Tsang and the mother. Close by the altar they found a vacant spot where they crouched, while the wind that came through the great entrance blew full upon them. The child in the Breton’s arms shook with cold, and

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taking off his robe, he wrapped it about the little thing.

The mother cooed and talked to her baby.

Presently they all nodded and slept—except the Breton and the Five Gods above him. The child's chubby face rested softly, securely against his neck, and that indefinable murmur of its sleep gave him a strange thrill of comfort. In the slumber breathing of a child, as in the breath of solitudes, are awakened memories and thoughts, which altogether might be called the symphony of revery. And the Breton heard in the child's sleeping sighs a voice, which vanquished the blackness of the night.

Without this refuge of the forsaken pounded the deafening churn of wind and rain and thunder. But the priest, crouching in front of the altar, listening to the echo of another voice, heard nothing. The gods looked down upon him and—smiled.

CHAPTER SIX

A GIFT

THE monsoon, with its wrack and pain, passed away much in the manner as the man Tsang said it would; for the monsoon repletes more than it destroys, and the prayer that goes up for it is a great prayer.

“I was alone to suffer,” commented the outcast complacently, “but in the vomit of the monsoon Fate relented and the priest came.”

Just outside of the Bamboo Gate in the easterly part of the southern suburbs, close to where the alley of the Old Dog opens kennel-like into the Street of Ivoryworkers, the Breton provided a home for Tsang's family, and thither the street currents drifted him more often than he knew. The little Tsangs toddled out to meet him, climbed upon him, smeared his robe with rice and kale, kissed him, prodded his blue eyes, and cried when he went away. The man Tsang revered him and cautioned his neighbours that Fate had peculiarly redeemed this one priest out of the whole utterly damned tribe of them all.

“Why is it?” demanded one of his neighbours.

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“How do I know!” answered Tsang indignantly. “Such things belong to Fate, and, neighbours, don’t woman Fate, don’t spy, don’t peep!”

While the Breton went every few days to Tsang’s hole in the Kennel of the Old Dog, yet he came always by evening to the bund where a certain murmur rising from the river softened the grind and crunch of the city’s toil. Some days, as on this day, which was the fourth of the fifth moon—other noises in addition to its murmurs came from it and the rasped, bruised milling of man was completely drowned in them. On this day the river revelled in the gaiety of those whom it fed, and all the careless joy, the wine, the froth, and ribbons of Yingching laughed there. Wherever the eye could reach were seen the tatters and tinsels of ten myriads silks swishing and fluttering in the river wind. The buildings along the bund pulled over their time-pocked and shrivelled forms robes of satin. Sea-going junks hovered above the river like gigantic butterflies, their great ribbed sails turned into gorgeous, trembling wings of silk. The flower-boats along the southern bank were voluptuous in silken wraps; their eaves earringed with lanterns, while on their flower-clustered balconies crowded dainty pouting creatures, their music and laughter mingling with the joy of the day. Among these winged junks and flower-boats darted slender slipper craft like gay-breasted

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swallows, twittering, perking, and quivering in mid-currents.

Nothing can exceed the gaiety of this sombre river during the Festival of the Dragon boats; and when the Breton came to the bund on this day—which in Western chronology comes in June—he found it in a gay swelter of excitement. On this day were the races of the Dragon boats; and the cleared course, which extended from the west side of Pakngotam's black pool to the Island of the Sea-Pearl, was lined with boat-loads of gesticulating spectators, howling and chattering as the Dragon craft rushed up and down stream, propelled by naked, sweating demons and urged on with cries, gongs, and flags.

But these unaccustomed pleasure sounds, emanating from a river that of itself mourned and was sombre, were lost upon the Breton as he stood over the bund's edge dreaming, listening alone to the murmur underfoot. The rattle of hucksters, the scoldings and screechings of old boat-women, the men's voices nonchalantly cursing or chanting in falsetto tones the theatricals of the river, the splash of oars, burst of crackers, cries of children in their sports, the shrill songs of slipper boat-girls, the howl and clangour of the Dragon boats and the dull pandemonium that rose from the goals did not cause him to raise his head nor turn away from the yellow waters. It mattered

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in no way to him that the loom of life, always dully clangorous about this bund, wove upon this day a few bright strands through its warp of gloom. He did not look up nor make note of it, for he was no longer of its woof nor its warp nor the ravelled ends that fell by the loom.

Within the quiet places of the Breton's love the world nor its noises could not penetrate. Only gentle thoughts made their way thither, invoking feelings deeper than themselves; thoughts veiled from the world and such that even he must fall into deep communing to lift apart their shadowy screen. He revelled in that fair region where there are no paths nor guideposts—the wilderness of meditation. With unuplifted eyes he paced on through groves where none had gone before him nor shall follow. Love danced ahead of him, thought ambled after. Now he stopped to listen to music; now to laughter that was more than music, now to chidings that were a little of both. Sometimes he lingered over a slumbering, sensuous rustle that drew down from heaven the inspiration of a dream.

So the Breton cared in no manner what the world might do around him, whether it toiled along—as it did ordinarily—on all fours, or rushed wildly exuberant into the morrow. Whatever it might be he had a region separate from it—a region where the running brooks of thought had no end of bab-

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bling, where the wind scattered its stars without number, and in its horizonless heaven the fairy tumbled clouds were imaged and tintured with the iridescence of meditative love.

Thus the Breton lingered on the bund until dusk passed into night to scatter the noises around; then he came forth from the region of his dreams with the slight semblance of a smile on his lips and hastened to the Mission.

Often, however, he was awakened from midst of these dreams and ruthlessly snatched out of his heaven by no less a personage than his new acquaintance the Reverend Tobias Hook. Fortunately or otherwise, as it may prove to be—the Reverend Hook came often to the bund when the Breton was there. It was too evident that he did not come solely for recreation, or to breathe in that open spot the river's wind, since he spent his time, either in extolling the charms of some new nymph he had discovered in the river or in the wilderness of Yingching and whose conversion he was about to undertake in spite of Mrs. Hook; or he expatiated without end concerning the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon, where Yu Ngao, the last of the Ming Emperors, sought refuge with his retinue and imperial treasure—to be seen not again by mankind.

At first the Reverend Hook was chilled by the dreamy indifference of the Breton, and it was only

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after he had found that silence was a part of the priest's nature that he unloosed his endless chain of information and argument concerning these caverns from whose mysterious depths no man has even been known to return. The gaining of this knowledge had been one of his chief pursuits, a task he had found delightful with expectation, and he believed in due time would not be without its rewards.

From every source, from legends and histories, he had collected information concerning these caves, all of which he unfolded as he coaxed and argued, tilting himself on his heels and toes in his pleadings with the Breton to go with him to these Grottoes, where the Great Earth Dragon guards so zealously the melancholy secret of the Emperor.

The Breton listened but did not go, nor did he even make reply.

"And why not, sir, why not?" the Reverend Tobias Hook would demand shrilly, cocking himself on his toes.

The Breton did not answer.

Fate was yet to drive him thither.

This day the Reverend Hook came later than usual, and had not talked with the Breton long before he pulled a roll of papers from his coat pocket and began on his favourite subject—the treasure in the Dragon's Grotto.

"Young sir," he continued reprovngly, "you

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must undress your mind of any thought that I burrow for personal gain. Disillusionate yourself! I scorn, sir, that puffed Huckster, that old dealer, who bundles up men's honour and upon the open market of the world traffics in their virtue. I am an antiquarian, sir, a subterreaneous hunter.

“Of course,” he added in a modified tone, “it would be but right for me to adorn my sideboard with a few platters and pitchers of gold, a few jade vases and urns for my parlour; a reserve of pearls and emeralds to cool the hot distemper of my wife,—which, my young friend, cannot be too few,—for she falls into the most parboiled ecstasies not less than once a day. Sometimes in the very middle of the night a sudden thought pierces her in a tender spot and out she bounces; before I can disengage my eyelids from heavy sleep she has me stalled on the floor, rides me with her knees, and plays horse with my beard.

“Now, sir, you see the nakedness of my plans; if I can get hold of the jewels of Yu Ngao, I will be able to ransom myself from these frolics. Ah! if I can but coax her into skirts again I will flounce them with emeralds, and every time she weeps I will match each dewy tear with ten big pearls.

“No, no, my young friend, do not berate wealth, for though in youth it is a mill that grinds out follies, when youth is done it mills the rarest comforts.

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“These papers,” and the Reverend Hook unrolled the papers he had been holding, “are maps and other information concerning the Grottos. This is the triple labour of years. I have screwed it out of legends and pulled it out of the deepest records.

“This map,” and he handed one of the sheets to the Breton, “is the route to the Grottos from Yingching. A scrutiny of this one, on the other hand, shows it to be a map of the path leading from the river to the true cavern under the falls. These other manuscripts are historical proofs; they defy refutation, and no man’s eyes but yours have or ever will discover them.

“I tell you, sir, the treasure of the whole Ming dynasty is there, hoarded in the earth’s dark cellars and misered there these hundreds of years by unchristian superstitions. Do you know that if all the Chinese in this country were hunting you in maddest frenzy you would be safe from them in the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon? They won’t go near it. But we, unburdened by such superstitions, can filch these jewels from the Old Dragon with impunity, with gaiety.

“Ah! what a treasure! Cry havoc, my young friend, to reservation, and let your mind’s eye romp through these dim-eyed caverns, where in great heaps lie the garniture of Empires. Plates of gold enough to feed two thousand three

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hundred and eight of royal blood, cups and bowls to match; pitchers and little saucers as numerous as the golden plaques that lay on the sky at night. Shields, swords, cuirasses studded with jewels. Priceless urns of jade, slop over, sir, with brimming measures of pearls; there are rubies that by comparison would jaundice the reddest blood, while emeralds are so thickly strewn about that they lay in wrinkled folds like moss-green carpets.

“Disport yourself among these hillocks of wealth that would make Croesus’ spirit mundane with envy. Dine from golden platters, splash in basins of silver, play hockey with emeralds, shower the gloom with handfuls of pearls, and with the big round rubies shoot a game of marbles——”

The Reverend Tobias Hook stopped suddenly and peered through the gloom, now ebbing imperceptibly into the quietude of night. The Dragon boats no longer scurried over the water, and the dwellers on the river had ceased their clamour. The yellow flood was becoming darkly sullen, impatient for that hour when man’s noisy hum would be silent.

For some time the Reverend Tobias Hook contemplated seriously the darkening of these waters, then with sudden resolution shoved the papers containing the maps and secrets of the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon into the hands of the Breton, who took them unconcernedly, not even

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raising his eyes from the waters—now an abyss that muttered.

Soon afterwards the Reverend Hook went softly away, and in uncertain mind disappeared up the Street of the Sombre Heavens.

The Breton continued gazing down into the depths that whispered until night had settled about him, then he put into his bosom the little man's terrible gift.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DAWN

THE laugh of the wife, like her song, had departed. No longer it pealed through the rooms—nor its echo. Her laugh was gone; slowly, imperceptibly had it vanished as music stolen away and smothered by the wind. But neither she nor the Breton knew that it was no more.

The wife of Tai Lin had become silent, musing, seclusive. She no longer contradicted her husband, nor laughed at him, nor mocked nor caressed him.

“She is outgrowing her childhood,” sighed Tai Lin to himself.

This wife of his, instead of sitting on a stool at his feet as she used to do, would remain for hours by the screen when she thought that none were about her but the thrushes in their bamboo cages overhead. By noon or by night, moved by sudden impulse, she would creep through the screen's wicket into the outer apartment and, nestling in the chair that stood beside it, bury her face in her arms and cry softly to herself with that grief that is very old.

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But she was not alone with her tears, nor with the thrushes complaining overhead—she was never alone. At all hours a maidservant hovered about her, and only when the Breton came did this servant retire behind an oval doorway that led from her mistress' room to an open court. There she concealed herself and listened to the words between them; to their silences; to the going away of the wife's laughter and the coming of her tears. After a time she began to shake her head, perplexedly, fatefully.

One day, as the wife sat in the outer apartment sobbing to herself, this maidservant stole up to her, and kneeling down by the table, asked gently:

“Why are you crying?”

The wife sobbed but made no reply.

“Why are you crying?” asked the maid again.

“Go away, Kim! Go away!” she cried brokenly. “You cannot understand—I do not know! Go away—please go away!”

The servant left her. But that night when she came to the bishop's door she hesitated, picked the hem of her garment; turned away; came back, then knocked ruefully on the portal.

When the Breton came to the wife's apartments he no longer stood on the threshold waiting for her salutation or expectant of her laughter. Crossing the room, naïvely eager, he sat down in his

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chair and, looking up to certain crevices in the screen, remained silent with a smile in his eyes.

Day by day these silences grew longer. Without laughter, without converse, almost without movement, each sat close to the screen—so close that her red pouting finger tips were hardly over his head, and sometimes through the crevices just above them flashed a light, dark and lustrous.

In this manner it came about that Silence held them more and more beneath its velvet hand, although this stillness of theirs was not mute nor somnolent. At intervals it was broken by a question, a reprimand, a whisper; a word that caressed or a burst of scorn; only laughter came not again. Their conversations were no more than flashes; an ignition, an illumination.

Sometimes the Breton would look up as if about to say something and the wife, breathless, would demand:

“What?”

He never spoke. Yet one day in the midst of their silence he lifted his eyes to the crevice, his lips moved, but only his eyes uttered.

Hastily the wife withdrew her fingers; there was a flutter of silk; constrained stillness.

“Oh, well,” she commented, turning back to the screen, “it doesn’t matter; if a man can’t get ivory from a rat’s mouth, how can a woman expect truth from a man’s?”

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He turned away toward the windows.

In a few moments her fingers were again thrust redly through the crevices.

“Are you?” she whispered.

The Breton looked up.

Again there was silence.

“Do you know what it is?” she still whispered.

Once more he raised his eyes to the crevices above the finger-tips.

“It is a rain-drop, priest, iridescent—but trembling on the eaves’ edge.”

While these silences grew longer, they at the same time were drawing to an end. No stillness can last for long in this world so full of noises, and in time a second but greater restlessness lay hold of the wife. No longer petulant, she became irritable, and often impatiently moving her chair aside, she wandered about the room. And as time passed, this unrest of the wife increased until it came about that she could not sit for long beside the screen without getting up and moving uneasily, even wearily, about the room; now by a table, then back to the screen; her hands at one moment plucking flowers from their vases, in the next tossing the folds of the silken tapestries.

One day she suddenly drew her fingers from the crevices, started to cross the room, came back, and peremptorily ordered the Breton to go away and stay away.

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“Go!” she commanded, stamping her foot.

The Breton looked up wonderingly and his eyes smiled.

Presently he heard her open the shell-latticed window, then all was still. The larks and thrushes from their swaying bamboo cages fluttered and chirped questioningly. For there are silences that make birds as well as women inquisitive. They cocked their heads, chirped, and looked down unapprovingly upon the priest.

“What! I thought you had gone!”

The Breton turned his eyes expectantly to the crevices just above his head.

“Are you not going?” she demanded coldly.

The Breton rose from his chair, uncertain, but the light in his eyes untroubled.

“Sit down!”

The stillness that followed was not broken until after the feathery shadows of the bamboo had crept across the translucent shells of the latticed windows. Then the wife, very close to him, whispered:

“Priest.”

The Breton did not move.

“Is not this screen a nuisance!” she cried irritably, and her voice would have been savage had it not been for the music of its tones.

The Breton neither answered nor turned his eyes away.

“Priest, shall I come out?”

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He still looked up into the crevices.

“ Shall I ? ”

A questioning light came into his eyes.

“ Would it make you happy ? ” she whispered.

The light deepened.

“ Well, I don't ! ” she exclaimed scornfully.

“ At its best it is nothing ; in its truth it is false. Such hopes men lay to gold and rubies in their mountain caskets : to the cloudy pearl in the jade depths of the sea. Sought ; found ; lost ; forgotten ; its gold, cloud—gold and its pearl moon-mist ! How ridiculous ! ”

“ Would you truly be happy ? ” Again her voice was without its impatience ; again it trembled with tenderness.

A light in the eyes of the Breton answered.

The birds fluttered and beat their wings against the bars of their cages.

Evening was approaching. The cawing of the white-headed crows could now be heard contending for their roosts in the banians.

The light in the room mellowed, became a rose-saffron, while the wind of sundown blew in through an open window.

Suddenly the wicket in the screen was opened and the wife, leaning against the lintel, looked down at him.

With difficulty the Breton priest rose from his chair. A flush swept across his face, then pallor.

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He lifted his hand to the neck of his robe; a film came over his eyes.

For a moment the wife fluttered on the screen's threshold, then came down and sat on a stool close by but with her back to him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DELUGE FAMILY

IN the phenomena of national life there are certain conditions that force men into such a labyrinthine existence that they resemble, in their bore and burrow, the teredo. These terebrants—human and otherwise—exist to destroy; hence their dignity. Sometimes, like the hymenoptera, they destroy to soar.

The Terebration of mankind—always more or less terrible—has left its wrecks sticking desolately above the floods of Time in all parts of the world, and shall through all ages leave its wreckage. These human teredines, which have existed to a greater or less degree among all nations during every period of their duration, are known by many names. In the Latin countries they are called the Carbonari; in Russia, the Nihilists; Germany, the Socialists—a teredo degenerated into a tapeworm; Ireland, the Clan-na-gael; Greece, the Haeteria. In France there has always been a mess of wrigglers, known and unnamed; in the Balkans is another spew, which are allied to the necrophan, and China, the old and huge nation, has its swarm

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of teredo in labyrinths also old and huge like itself, and filled with unknown terror.

The Tien Tu Hin, unlike the teredines of Europe, is not nihilistic, anarchistic, or a tapeworm; but is regarded by some as next to the end of the world; by others as the millennium; yet, in truth, what will come out of its two hundred and forty years of boring is not known. Such things are not even conjectured in the depths of its endless labyrinths.

During all ages secret political organisations have had prolific progeny in China, and when a dynasty becomes rotten they attack it like an old pile in the sea. They gnaw into it; devour; eat upward or downward according to the tide. The result is a cyst full of worms. When a storm rises it vanishes or protrudes a stump at low tide.

Secret political societies in China like religions in the Occident, have their immaculate conceptions, stars, signs and noises; the product of which is a founder having the divinity of a god and the respect; who ascends high places to preach; who governs and plays at dumb-bells with the moon. An instance of this was Chang Kioh, immaculated some years subsequent to Christ and a disciple of Lao-Tze, who, also, was not only immaculately engendered, but was eighty years in gestation, born with a white beard, and during his senile infancy

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wrote in five thousand characters the religion of Taoism. This disciple formed the Yellow Turban Rebels and with them destroyed the Great Han dynasties.

Matrêya, the Buddhist Messiah, has been immaculately foaled, rebelled, and beheaded a good many times in this old land, while the Taiping Rebellion, which started an half century ago and destroyed more than twenty millions, all came about because Hung Hsiu Chüan was the younger brother of Jesus and received visitations from God.

But stranger things than teredines swarming out of divinity have destroyed dynasties in China. That of the Mongols, founded by Genghis Khan, was annihilated by a ditty of the children of Honan and Hupeh, who sang in childish treble:

“Down will Mongol kings be thrown,
When moves the One-eyed Man of Stone” .

During the year 1344, the One-Eyed Man of Stone was found at a place called Huanglingkuang by some labourers, who were repairing the banks of the Yellow River. The rebellions resulting ended in the expulsion of the Mongols and the establishment of the Ming dynasty by the Buddhist acolyte, Chu Yuan Chang.

Thus through all the ages of China—and they have been many—this terebration of man has

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ceased at no time. Yet the Tien Tu Hin, with more than a ten million swarm of human teredo, with more than all the wreckers that have gone before, is still silent. What will come out of it man not only does not know, but its immensity forbids conjecture. Among members it is called the Hung Kia, the Deluge Family; a family so vast and wide that it is beyond our comprehension; it exceeds anything ever conceived by man, and its labyrinths extend from Siberia to Siam—half of Europe could be lost in them. They crawl under oceans to the Straits Settlements; throughout the Malay Archipelago; the Philippines, India, Burma, Australia, the Pacific Islands, North, Central, and South America. This brotherhood of the Deluge Family, bound by the same oaths, actuated by the same principles and obedient to the same commands, has in its hidden recesses untold millions. While there have been directed against it the most terrible penal laws, they avail not nor reach down into the depths where it lives, travels, thrives, and year after year, in its endless labyrinths, becomes more dreaded, its murmur more terrible.

The terror about this society is its serenity and long quietude. Up to the present time it has hardly more than growled, but silently these two hundred and forty years it has been burrowing, burrowing.

A statesman in the reign of Kiuking said:

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“The Empire rests on something like a volcano.”

Occasionally there have been sporadic outbreaks, and while some of them have been extensive enough to annihilate many European kingdoms, they are only thought of in the light of incidents, a source for anecdotes.

The hour of the Rebellion is not yet; but will come with a manifestation from Heaven. This may be a red star in the East, or when the Five Flags rise of their own accord from the earth, but more probably when the phœnix sing from the wutung, for at that hour the Man has been born, and on that day from all the fields of the Empire shall rise up those sown of the dragon's teeth: then will the silence of Ages be broken, labyrinths uncoil, and a murmur come from depths so deep and unknown that even the world itself shall shrink with dread.

The Tien Tu Hin was founded about 1674, in the Province of Fokien, in the Putien District of the Fuchin Prefecture. Here, among the Chui Lien Hills, in a vale charming on account of its solitude, was situated the Buddhist monastery of Shao-lintze, built by the priest Tahtsunye during the Tang dynasty of the seventh century. But a thousand years later the monks—whether forgetful or in accordance with the wishes of the Immortal Tah—spent their time in the study of the arts of

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war, eventually becoming so famous for their knowledge and ability that men came from all parts of the Empire to receive instruction.

In the reign of Kanghi, the tributary state of Silu threw off its allegiance and sent an army into China, defeating successively all Imperial forces brought against it. Edicts were posted throughout the Empire calling upon someone to free the country from the enemy. Chu Kiuntah, a student at the monastery, took the edict and hastened to the Vale of Shaolintze. After consultation the one hundred and twenty-eight monks offered their services.

The Emperor raised them all to the rank of general, conferred plenary powers upon them, and gave into their keeping a triangular iron seal engraved with four characters.

In three months the Prince of Silu sued for peace, and the monks returned to the capital in the midst of the triumphant songs of the populace, while the grateful monarch offered them any offices they might choose. They asked nothing other than permission to live in peaceful seclusion amongst their hills of Chui Lien.

Years passed, and there rose high in court—as in the courts of other nations—two ministers, Chenwangyao and Changchensui, who plotted for the seizure of the Empire, believing that it was well

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within their grasp if they could get rid of the monks of Shaolintze.

Accordingly they memorialised the Emperor, accusing the monks of treason; showing that since they destroyed the victorious army of Silu with ease, it would not be difficult for them to conquer China. They thus persuaded the Emperor that his domains might at any time be taken from him and begged to be allowed to destroy them secretly.

Receiving the Emperor's sanction, the two ministers placed themselves at the head of the Imperial Guards and set out for Fokien. But after arriving in the Prefecture of Fuchui, they were unable to find the monastery hidden away among the Chui Lien Hills, and were about to turn back when they came upon the monk, Ma Eifuh.

Ma Eifuh ranked seventh in military skill among the monks, but to all accounts first in lechery, and owing to his hot passion for the wife and the daughter of Chu Kuintah, had been bamboosed and expelled from the monastery. It was while wandering about, raging under this punishment and disgrace, that he came upon the Imperial Guards.

That night he led them to the monastery in the Vale of Shaolintze. Gunpowder was placed about its walls and exploded. One hundred and nine of the monks were instantly killed, but the surviving eighteen, still retaining possession of

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the triangular seal, escaped into a court and then crawling through a dog hole got clear of the burning buildings. Aided by a thick fog, which came suddenly down into the Vale, they passed the Guards and proceeded to the village of Huangchuen, where thirteen died. Hence comes one of the terrible sayings of the Deluge Family:

"On Huangchuen road they died,
And through a myriad years we abide,
They shall be avenged."

The five survivors, Tsai Tehchung, Tang Tahrung, Ma Chaohing, Hu Tehti, and Li Shepkai, are now known as the Five Patriarchs. These five monks, having burned the bodies of their brothers, were proceeding to Chung Shawanken, in the Prefecture of Huenchuenfu, when suddenly—as the Jews in their flight from the army of Egypt—they found water in front of them and the Imperial Guards in their rear.

The immortal founder of the monastery, Tah-tsuntze, seeing their danger, sent down two clouds, which changed into planks of copper and iron, forming a bridge over which the monks passed and safely reached the Temple of Kaochi.

After several days they continued on their way eastward, but before long learned that soldiers were again in pursuit, and thereupon they crossed over into Hukwang where they stayed for

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two weeks. Again narrowly escaping the Guards, the monks fled to the monastery of Pao Chu, where they remained a number of days overwhelmed with distress and despair.

But it was here that they met Chen Chinan, destined, as it seemed, by Heaven to become the founder of the Tien Tu Hin.

Chen Chinan, a member of the Hanlin Academy, had been President of the Board of Censors at the time when Chenwangyao and Changchensui memorialised the throne to destroy the monks, and had vigorously remonstrated with the Emperor. This remonstrance brought upon him the hatred of the two ministers that accused him as being a supporter of the monks. He was thereupon deprived of his office and expelled from court.

Having returned to his home in Hukwang, he was devoting himself to study when he met the monks as they were fleeing from the monastery of Pao Chu. Filled with compassion, he led them to his home, called the Grotto of the White Stork.

So now, when one member meets another and asks him whence he comes, the answer is: "From the White-Stork Grotto."

After taking care of the monks in his home for several weeks, Chen Chinan took them to an extensive establishment called the Hunghauting,—the Red Flower Pavilion,—where they dwelt until

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one day, as they were sauntering along the banks of the beautiful Kungwei River, they spied a strange object floating in its current; this object brought about their departure.

Bringing the flotsam ashore, the monks found it to be a large stone tripod having two ears, such as are used in burning incense. On the bottom were engraved four large characters: Fan Tsing, Fuh Ming, Destroy Tsing, Restore Ming. Around these was a circle of smaller characters denoting its weight to be fifty-two catties and thirteen taels.

The monks carried this granite vessel to the top of a neighbouring hill, where they erected an altar of stones. They used guava twigs for candles and grass for incense, water instead of wine. As they prayed to Heaven that a Ming Emperor would avenge the crime of Shaolintze, the twigs and grass burst into flame. Seeing this the monks returned in great haste to the Red Flower Pavilion and told Chen Chinan what had happened.

For a long time this man, destined to some yet unknown end, remained in deep meditation.

“It is the will of Heaven,” he said presently, “that the dynasty of Tsing shall be destroyed.”

When the time came for the five monks to depart, Chen Chinan stood before them, and lifting his hands, spoke:

“Go forth, ye Five Patriarchs, to all quarters

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of the earth; over mountains and moorlands, across the great lakes and five seas. Transmit from man to man our secret words and signs. Be patient, and Heaven shall in its wisdom manifest the time for the assembling of the Deluge Family.”

Chen Chinan then returned to his Grotto of the White Stork, while the Five Patriarchs went their separate ways to organise the Deluge in Five Grand Sections, and to prepare for their assembly.

More than two hundred and forty years have passed, yet their successors cease in no way this preparation.

The Deluge Family founded, this dreaded assembly of men above whose labyrinths a third of mankind waits to be redeemed by it or be drowned in it—a Deluge of blood: to hurl the world into war and bring out of it Universal Peace.

The Deluge Family—like other families—has acquired in the course of time peculiarities besides that of vastness.

In writing the members use superfluous or half characters in such a manner as to make what is written unreadable to the uninitiated. In speaking they have a vocabulary of their own.

In the language of the Hung Kia, fowls are known by numbers; a goose is six, a duck eight. Beef is called great vegetables, and a fish a tail-shaker or wave-borer. A dog is a mosquito and

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that insect a needle, while a mosquito curtain is a lantern. Wine is known as red or green water; oil as family harmony and water as three rivers. To ask a person to smoke tobacco is to request him to bite ginger. To smoke opium is biting clouds and the name of opium is clouds travelling. To ask persons to dine is inviting them to farm sand and waves. A teacup is called a lotus bud; a wine cup a lotus seed, and a plate, a lotus leaf. Chop-sticks are golden selectors and roast pork becomes golden brindle. In speaking of the Deluge Family, a Lodge is called the Red Flower Pavilion or the Pine and Cedar Grove. To join the Society is to enter the Circle or be Born. To hold a meeting is known as letting loose the horses. A member is called heung—fragrance or a hero. A non-member is a partridge or wind of a leper. A road is a thread, and to travel is walking the thread. Sometimes the meaning of their vocabulary is unaccountable. An Ancestral Hall is called a privy and a market Universal Peace. In this strange language a bed is a drying stage and to sleep is to dry. A sword is called silken crepe, and a dagger young lion. A cannon is a black dog, its report a dog's bark, its powder a dog's dung. An handkerchief is a white cloud, a fan the crescent moon. The ears are known as fair wind, and to cut them off is to lower the fair wind. Cutting off the head is called washing the face. The sea

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is the great sky, and to murder by drowning is to bathē; while to be drowned in the sea is to be lowered into the great sky.

The members have numerous ways of testing one another by arranging and handing teacups, tobacco pipes, and other articles.

One member may ask another why his nose bleeds, and he answers: "It is the Waters of the Deluge flowing out of their channels." This terrible enigma is derived from a saying by Mencius, "And a Deluge shall overflow the country."

A member may ask: "Why is your face yellow?" and is answered: "It is troubled for my country." Or, "Why is your face red?" and answered: "I have been drinking wine in the Temple of War."

"What do you hope for?"

"The Market of Universal Peace."

The entire ritual is carried on in verse—a rhythm of terrors—while conversation between members is in poetic form. If a member is asked to rescue a brother it is done by placing a pot of tea with a single cup before him. Should he be unable to do anything with the commands he throws the tea away, but if able, he drinks, saying:

"A horseman comes with might and speed
To save his prince, alone, in need,
And with him comes the Age's horde
To give the throne to our Ming Lord."

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If a pot of tea and three cups are put before a member he is being asked to take part in a fight. If he consents he drinks the middle cup, repeating:

“Lu, Kwang, and Chang in the garden swore,
To heed Duke Tsai's commands no more,
And through all Ages let their fame,
Be upheld in Virtue's name.”

There are thirty-six arrangements of tea-cups, each signifying something different and each answerable with a verse. In the like manner the presence of an unknown brother is made manifest first by some secret sign, which he should answer, then by the repetition of a verse. Should a junk be attacked by pirates and the crew as well as pirates be members of the Deluge Family, the crew repeats:

“Our mast is eyed with Deluge light,
And softly shines by day or night;
Men rob not one another
When in the Circle born a brother.”

Members sometimes teach their wives verses for emergencies, as in rebellions, and should an attempt be made to ravish her, she repeats:

“The sun shines redly in the East,
I wilt, a flower with fragrance ceased,
Fresher flowers beyond are found,
My husband to the Flood is bound.”

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Whenever a member needs assistance in a fight, he holds up the right hand with thumb, first, and second fingers expanded an equal distance apart; while the third and fourth fingers are closed; at the same time, the thumb and the first two fingers of the left hand are placed open on the right elbow. To call to battle is to hold the right hand over the head with the thumb pointing upwards. We know of nothing more terrifying than this pointing up of thumbs to Heaven.

When a fight is about to take place, the queue is looped over the right shoulder after having been brought around the neck and fastened in what is called the sign of Shou. A cry rises from those that have laid upon themselves this sign. It is not thunder, not a moan. It is the growl of Eternity, "Hung Shun Tien"—The Deluge obeys Heaven.

This vast Brotherhood is subject to twenty-one rules: Ten Prohibitions; Ten Punishable Offences. In addition there are thirty-six oaths bequeathed by the Five Patriarchs. Death is the inevitable punishment for those that break them.

Oath Seven reads: "If any brother is unable to escape you swear to assist him, no matter what are the consequences. If there are any that do not adhere to these feelings of kinship, let thunder annihilate them."

Number Twenty reads: "If officials arrest a brother, his escape is most important. You swear

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to see to this. Those that refuse to give such aid shall die beneath ten thousand knives."

The last of the Great Oaths is the Apocalypse of this Empire in its gloom. "All ye that enter the Deluge Family, scholars, husbandmen, merchants, industrious labourers, mechanics, Confucianists, Buddhists, Taoists, physicians, astrologers, geomancers, lictors, thieves, pirates, officials, executioners, and all others, swear loyalty above all things. Ye are the hands and feet of one body, obedient to the Head. Ye must bow down to the Five Seal-bearers and obey them. If any show duplicity or fail to exert themselves, let them die beneath ten thousand knives."

Such is the Tien Tu Hin, the Association of Heaven and Earth: enormous, unseen; filled with terror and serenity; vast, invisible; its labyrinths endless as are the veins of the earth, and like the earth's depths, asurge with molten lava; calm, portentous, peaceful, terrible; born to avenge a crime; fostered to destroy a dynasty; matured to establish Universal Peace.

By the hand of thoughtful Fate the Breton was led into its labyrinths and became part of it and of its terror.

CHAPTER NINE

THE DERELICT

THE Brotherhood of Tien Tu Hin, swallowing in its deluge all degrees of mankind, likewise swallows now and then one of those nameless Europeans whom Fate has utterly cast adrift in those mysterious currents of the Orient Seas.

While not generally understood, yet it is true that most Occidentals, who by choice have drifted heretofore on Orient streams, have almost always been derelicts of some kind. Thither noble scions, criminals, priests, soldiers of fortune have drifted. Some have prospered and some in the wild surge of these seas have been wrecked and sunk.

The flotsam of humanity, like the drift of rivers, like the derelicts of the sea, is but wreckage of some sort hurried along in those irresistible currents that we call Fate. Each village has its little eddy where, round and round in quiet whirl, the neighbouring drift collects. Each country has its maelstrom, a black whirlpool where is collected the debris of human kind. This debris, starting at the top in wide circles, whirls round; swirling deeper

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and deeper until it disappears through that narrow abysmal funnel. These terrible vortices are never still and never without their debris. London is such a maelstrom, so is Paris, so is New York.

The world also has its colossal eddy, but they that drift upon the world's currents are derelicts, not debris; it is true both are wreckage, but there is a wide difference between them. Debris is scum; derelicts are wrecks. Scum from scum arises; derelicts may be the wrecks of greatness. Debris is unnamed; the House of Orleans is a derelict, and its princes have died by the wash of the China Sea.

The seas are awash with derelicts of different kinds. Some, in due time, like the hulks of the old East Indiamen, become thrifty, incrustating themselves with spray gusts of silver, and furring themselves with the fur of their drift; a wealth clings to them and they become stranded by riches. They are found imbedded in all Oriental ports, and while they have formed a new environment, they still remain conspicuous.

Again these seas are adrift with derelicts that would succour; as when men float on the sea in an open boat suddenly behold with immeasurable joy a speck in the distance. It approaches, they board it, but only too often to find it hollow.

Derelicts most known are those that destroy. Deserted, forsaken, alone in this coaxing wilder-

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ness of waves, they drink deeply of their unrestraint and become master-derelicts of death; hurling themselves, areek with froth, on vessels they sink and on rocks which destroy.

In a fisherman's hut near by the Bay of Tai Wan, a hovel mud-walled, windowless, rice-thatched, cluttered with poverty, dark and dismal, there lay dying a derelict of this latter kind.

The only brightness within the hut was a floating taper burning before the Ancestral Tablets and sending through the gloom its trembling, hesitant rays. This glimmering light that fell a gleam on the tablets lit the faces and forms of three persons, two peasants and a foreigner. The stranger lay upon the only bed in the hut, and the peasants squatted beside him. A clot of blood was upon his bosom, and a red froth oozed from between his teeth, which the woman was wiping away with a wet cloth, while her husband kept his eyes fixed and reverent upon a Great Medallion suspended from the neck of the dying man, and glittering beside the wound in his breast.

This Symbol or Seal consisted of two parts: the outer being about four inches square, but quinquangular in shape and made from a rare green stone found only in the jungled mountains of Yunnan, resembling the green of a tiger's eye; gleaming, glittering in the dusk. On each of the five corners was a raised gold character, and a golden

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rim ran around the edge. The second part consisted of a mottled bloodstone placed on the centre of the other, octagonal in shape, about an inch in diameter, and having on its high, rounded apex a gold trigram, the meaning of which is not less terrible than it is unknown. This blood-green stone with its glint of gold glittered with a light peculiarly significant, and the peasant's eyes grew round as he watched it shudder on the breast of the dying man.

He whispered to his wife: "It is the Great Symbol."

She drew back with an expression of terror.

"If they find him here, we will be beheaded!"

"Yes."

"What shall we do?"

"Nurse him."

The woman wiped the red froth from the man's lips and the red clot from his bosom.

"If he dies?" the peasant woman whispered.

"We will bury him."

"And that?" she pointed to the Great Symbol.

The man on the bed moved uneasily; his eyes opened, but he saw nothing.

"He is going to talk again in his own speech," said the woman, moving cautiously away. "Find someone to understand," she pleaded. "Who knows what he may say?—and perhaps he will tell what to do with that Eye."

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"I heard to-day that a foreigner was in the village."

"One of these?"

"No; a priest from Yingching."

The peasant buried his face in his arms, and for some time crouched on his heels. Afterward he went quietly out.

The woman fetched some clean water, and continued to bathe the man's bosom and lips. She crooned to herself.

"I do not see why men do these things. If they would only plant their own rice this would not happen. I do not understand what crop they expect to get. When the rice-fields are burned how can there be any rice? When the mulberry bushes are cut down how can there be any worms? When the worms are dead who shall spin silk? They kill, kill, kill, and their killings they cannot eat. They bring home neither pigs nor fowl. Once I said to one of them, 'Why do you kill?' And he answered, 'We are soldiers.' Now I do not understand that.

"Poor man, and what will your wife say? To come across the Five Seas just to get stuck full of holes. Now who will carry back your bones? I do not know why you foreigners are such devils to fight and to pray. My husband belongs to the Deluge Family, but I will not let—— No, no, you must not get up. Poor man, poor man, I don't

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suppose you will ever fight any more. If you had only spoken to your wife she could have told you that this would happen. When men don't speak to their wives they get into trouble. I wish you did not have that Eye upon your breast. How terrible it is to be a great man; how sorry I am for their—— No, no, do not talk, you are getting blood all over my bed.”

The man, endeavouring to speak, had turned upon his side, and a quantity of blood spurted from his mouth. After that he rested easier, and the red froth ceased to ooze from between his teeth, though it still came from the wound in his side. This the woman continued to wipe away.

Suddenly he snapped his fingers imperiously.

“Cha——”

The woman hastily brought a bowl of tea and held it to his lips, but he could not drink.

Thus as she tended him the hours of night passed. She became restless, and sometimes left his side to peer into the darkness, where was heard only the swish of wing and splash of wild fowl.

There came a mumbling from the bed, then coughing, and another spurting of blood. As the woman washed his face he opened his eyes, bright with the delirium of death, and resting his hand upon her head he began to speak in gentle, piteous tones.

The woman, turning away, saw through the

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open door the approach of a bobbing lantern. She returned to the bed and threw a rough cloth over the wounded man, put a jar in front of the taper, and seating herself by the door waited.

The Breton priest entered, followed by the woman's husband and several others. Without hesitation he crossed the room and sat down by the bed. The woman took the jar from in front of the taper, and as the priest drew the rough coverlet from the dying man the light fell upon the Great Symbol. The men that came with him gazed at it for a moment then bowed their heads thrice to the floor.

As the priest took hold of the man's hand he opened his eyes to look at him and smiled. Then in a low, uncertain voice began a quatrain of college revelry. His eyes closed; he mumbled.

Suddenly he began to speak again. He pleaded and a woman's name trembled on his lips.

The Breton turned away.

The derelict choked, spat blood upon the Breton, then lay still. Tears rolled down his cheeks, sometimes mingling with his blood to scintillate for an instant like rubies on the coarse cloth. This grief of his was more than bitter—it was the grief of the strong dying, a packing of pain into Eternity. He moaned and brought a pallor to the cheeks of the priest. He sighed and the pain of it was indescribable.

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Presently he began to breathe hoarsely, then mumbling, speaking—the speech of his wild life. One moment in combat with Malay praus; hurtling through the water; repelling boarders; cursing, exultant, frenzied and the swish of the kris was in the air. Then followed commands, as when the typhoon is on sea, and in his quivering tones was the echo of the wind's scream. Fights in the jungle—soft, creeping, peering, throttling. Then in the open, commands, curses, silence.

Suddenly, as he muttered the ritual of the Deluge Family—sombre and unrelenting, he rose up in bed with his hand over the dripping wound. As he fell the priest turned him gently upon his side, and taking the bowl of fresh water the woman brought him, bathed his face.

The dying man opened his eyes.

“Where am I?”

“In a hut near the village of Tai Po.” \

“Who are you?”

“A priest.”

“A rogue like myself.”

“You are wounded.”

“I am dying.”

The derelict raised his head and looked sternly at the men in the room, who seeing him look at them, fell upon their knees, striking their heads thrice upon the floor.

“It is well.”

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He studied the sad profile above him.

"Priest," his voice was without its wildness, "priest, I am dying. It is what I have been trying to do for many years—by land and by sea——"

The pain of speaking became too great.

He fumbled with the chain around his neck, consisting of gold links each about an inch and a half in length, and made up of two dragons contending for a pearl.

The priest removed it, and the derelict, taking it in his hands, whispered:

"Closer!"

The Breton bent near to him, and the chain with the Great Seal of the Tien Tu Hin was hung around his neck.

"Never take it off," the dying man whispered hoarsely. "I—I—command." His eyes closed and the pallor of death came upon him.

The priest leaned close; all listened, for the speech of the derelict was precious.

His lips moved, and the Breton bending closer heard:

"Alice——"

And so he died.

The priest on his knees held his crucifix over the body of the derelict.

Hours passed, and still the Breton did not move. The stillness in the room was unbroken, and the men crouching upon the floor hardly breathed.

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The only sounds were the weird flight of wild fowl as they winged their way through the night.

A cock crowed.

Night was ending, and the priest, rising, stood before the men with the Great Symbol glittering on his breast. Thrice again the men struck their foreheads upon the earthen floor.

“At the break of day we will bury him.”

The men wrapped the body in a shroud of rough cloth, and when darkness began to give away to that cold grey dusk that, without being night nor day, is yet the sick pallor of Time, they went forth and followed along the embankment of the paddy-fields until they came to a low hillside close to the sea.

It was natural that this casket of the derelict should mould near the ocean's wash, for on its turbulent stream he had been blown hither and thither, unknown, unseen, a wreck in its wayward currents. There had he drifted and fought and mourned—a sad and perhaps terrible soul. Well might the sea dirge to his spirit its eonic plaint—that melancholy chant of Eternity. And well was it that they should remain forever together, the living sorrow and the dead.

Low down on the hillside they dug his grave.

A rift of light, almost lurid, glowed just above the rim of swaying waters.

They put the derelict in his grave, and the priest,

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holding his crucifix above him, stood over the open tomb. Upon his upturned face shone the red light of morning, while a vaporous mist like streams of incense rose from the grave and broken earth around him. As the priest prayed the Great Symbol rose and fell upon his bosom with the rhythm of his silent prayer, quivering and afire in the red glare of heaven.

The men, seeing the Great Eye flashing redly, knelt down before the Breton and rested their foreheads upon the earth.

The prayer ended; then the priest sounded, terrifying in its majestic intonations, the awful Taps of the God of Wrath.

“*Dies Irae, dies illa
Solvat saeculum in favillâ
Teste David cum Sybilla.*”

“*Lacrymosa dies illa
Dua refurget ex favillâ
Judicandus homo reus
Huic ergo parce Deus.*”

CHAPTER TEN

TWILIGHT

THE Bay of Tai Wan, where the Breton had been for more than a month and upon whose shore he had buried the derelict, is a long distance down the coast southeast of Yingching, and is famous on account of the evil spoken of it. This bay and country has a bad name, which is due to God as well as to those that dwell on its wild wash.

The waters of the bay are not blue, but a reddish-brown, and are serrated with the fins of the spotted shark, which lurk in its depths; for the feed in this bay is sometimes abundant, not only when the gale is upon the sea, but more often when men come together. The mountains that surround the bay on the south, west, and north are not high, but they are sinister; their south slopes desolate; those on the north gloomy with thickets. The narrow valleys extending back from the bay are diked, terraced, and made into paddy-fields, or are walled and made into towns, armed, forbidding. The lowlands below them are also dammed from the sea tides, and in those places not suitable

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for rice are salt pans, where the sea is evaporated for its salt.

The men that live on the Bay of Tai Wan have no settled occupation. They are farmers when the time comes to sow rice and to harvest it; they are fishermen, who know the bed of the sea; smugglers in their peaceful moods, but pirates always, and months are few when their mountains do not resound with the noise of combat; when the brown surge of the bay is without loitering spars, or dead or wreckage.

The secrets of this turbulent place, the fights fought there; the deeds of valour; the hopes and the end of hopes—gone down in its depths are without number. To look upon its waters is to shudder; to live there is to fear neither God nor His judgment; to go there requires the courage of a child, so the bishop had sent the Breton.

The priest, leaving Yingching at daybreak, sent no word to the wife, but went away happy in that nameless credulity, which belongs ordinarily to neither man nor woman, but only to children or such as he. And yet the Breton was not to blame, for happiness was the cause of it. Many weeks had already passed since the wife had opened the wicket and had come down to sit beside him—weeks that had vanished with the brevity of a dream.

Each day she fluttered for a moment on the

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threshold, then came down and seated herself near him; but it always remained as the first day, a vision, a tremor, a silence. The wife sat with her back to him, and not often did the Breton dare to raise his eyes nor even glance furtively at the beautiful contour of her neck and shoulders, nor at the delicate bloom that crept back from her cheek. But sometimes there was a quick turning of her head, a flash of light—then he trembled.

The happiness of all this nearness, stillness, and flashes brought about no change in the outward demeanour of the Breton. There is but little difference in appearance of a torrent at half flood and nearly at full flood. Only the beginnings and what ensues from it are noticed. The flood was still rising, and when the Breton was sent by the bishop to the wild Bay of Tai Wan, he left as he had remained during the past weeks, dreaming, without smiles, joyous, silent.

The priest's journey was distant, and his stay among these turbulent sea-dwellers had been long; but he had much to do to keep him busy; much to remember and dream about, which kept him happy.

The people had received him with scowls, suspicion, and threats. In the market place of Hsia Wan a rock thrown at him struck a boy hooting by his side. He dressed the wound. Crossing a narrow islet to the village of Yat Ho, his boat was purposely overturned; without a word of

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remonstrance or show of concern, he paid the boatman and went on his way. At midnight he passed through the tiger-infested woods of Foshui and Sanshu from Tai Po to the hut of the fisher. In this way it was not long before his dreaminess was construed into fearlessness and admired by those amphibious bandits of the bay. And whomever a Chinese pirate admires men should stand in awe of or look upon him as a child.

The Breton went about his duties without cessation except at dusk, and then, when those about him had ceased their labours, he would seek the solitude of the sea-bank as he had that of the river. It is doubtful if he perceived that instead of the great city with its lessening but varied noises there were behind him mountains down whose desolate sides came gloom instead of twilight, while the only sounds that rose from them were the bark of jackal and scream of night-bird. Not after the hour of sundown were to be heard at all the hard noises of labour, nor the wild mutter of these sea-dwellers in their daily life. When the evening guns had boomed from the walls of their villages and from their low long boats at anchorage had come the last roll of kettle-drum, the clash of cymbals, and burst of crackers, a deep silence brooded over all except cries from the mountains and the sea's muffled splash.

As dusk deepens this Bay of Tai Wan takes on

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a terror of its own. By day its waters are a reddish-brown, and its wave-crests look like yellow floss; by night it is black, and its wave-crests flashes of fire. This strange phenomenon is due to the fact that the sea along this coast teems with phosphorescent protozoa, making it a red-brown by day, and when night falls there is seen in every movement of the waters a glint of green fire. Wave-crests moving shoreward are as an endless flight of monstrous fire-flies. Where the sea breaks on the wash and rocks the spray becomes a shower of green sparks, so that the shore-line burns with a cold, livid fire. Among the flame-crests are seen zig-zag lines—the fiery trace of shark fins. Sometimes a green coal glows in the blackness, a tortoise floating in the break of the sea; sometimes a swarm of flying fishes rise from the waves, their scales and membranous wings adrift with a green fire, and for a moment their flight is ghastly. Looking down the edge of a cliff the shallow sea is filled with monsters aflame. Man never witnessed a more horrible sight than the sea at Tai Wan by night. Nothing that moves escapes the clinging protozoa: fish darting through the blackness have every scale, spine, maw, and tooth covered with this ghastly glow; the hairy legs and bodies of sea-spiders, their protruding eyes and fangs glitter in frightful luminosity; gleaming snakes glance through the depths. Squids some-

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times hide their fire-covered bodies in a black vomit, but crustacea, sea-toads, and larvæ all burning in this livid fire wriggle about under the black waters.

It was over this sea that the Breton dreamed and was joyous; it was by this sea that he buried the derelict whose chain and Seal he wore under his robe—a promise to the dead, but in due time to be more precious to him than all the jewels that have bedecked men, and more powerful than Empires.

The Breton once more stood before the screen, eager, hesitant; straining his ears for the music of a silken rustle; his eyes for one pink finger-tip. He waited a long time, but heard nothing, nor saw even one little finger resting shyly in a crevice.

“What, you here?”

He raised his eyes joyously.

“Well?”

“I have come back,” his words were almost inaudible.

“Indeed!”

He looked down happily.

“How did you happen to return? Did I send for you?” The voice of the wife was cold, vibrant.

The Breton's eyes wandered contentedly from crevice to crevice.

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“Sit down!” she petulantly commanded.

There was silence.

“Where have you been?”

“To the Bay of Tai Wan.”

“Why did you go?”

The Breton, discovering in the crevice a little finger, did not answer.

“Oh, very well! I suppose you were glad. It must have been a great relief. I was getting tired.”

Heedlessly the Breton heard the stamp of her foot and contentedly waited, though no sound was heard but its restless, impatient tapping.

“Why did you go away?”

“I buried a man——”

“Did that take you all these weeks?”

“No—but——”

“Priest!” she interrupted impatiently, “don’t give me excuses! Those veiling rags under which men hide their scared swarm of sins! Bah!”

He looked happily expectant at the crevices just over his head.

“Oh, well, it is immaterial,” she continued coldly, carelessly; “you are only my instructor. Come and go when you please. I have sought your learning, not you.” Her foot tapped measuredly. “Learning satisfies every craving of the heart, man—nothing. Learning is steadfast; a friend, who coaxes away the weariness of hours, hueing

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dull days with treasures from forgotten time, a wealth from the ends of the earth. It has a hundred attributes; man—not one. It is a cloak for chilled age, a balm for pain, an ointment for misfortune, and man—Oyah!

The Breton thumbed contentedly the leaves of his book.

Presently the tapping of her foot ceased. He heard the soft, sensual rustle of her garments, then the wicket opened.

The pink had gone out of the wife's cheeks; her face was pallid and her long lustrous eyes looked larger yet from the darkness that was under them.

The Breton glanced furtively at her as she came down and sat with her back to him.

"I am——" he ventured, uncertain.

"Yes?" she drawled, turning her head slightly toward him.

"I have thought about it."

"Indeed!"

"Have I——"

"Oh, yes," she interrupted coldly, "your teaching has been quite delightful; so learned."

"I was away a long time."

"Yes?"

"I hastened back."

"On account of my studies, I suppose?"

"Yes," he apologised.

"How thoughtful of you!"

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“ I could not——”

“ Oh—it did not matter. No doubt if it had not been for the lessons you would not have come.”

Something in her tone made him look furtively at the pale altered contour of her cheek.

“ Of course not!” she exclaimed vexedly. “ How could I ask such a thing! It would be very annoying were it not for the instruction!”

“ I enjoy——”

“ Oh, you do! Don't you suppose I know that? Instruct! Instruct! Instruct! I am tired of it!”

“ You——”

“ No, I don't!” she interrupted savagely. “ What is the good of all this learning, all these black books? Who loves me any more for it? Does it add a dearer pink to my cheek?” She turned her face partly toward him and in her voice was a wave of pain. “ Do you think it gives lustre to my eye or music to my words?” Her tones became mocking. “ Do you really think it will puff away wrinkles? A cosmetic, a tire-woman, a——” She stamped her foot peevishly. “ I tell you, priest, I will have no more of it, never!”

“ Learning enlightens,” said the Breton aimlessly, “ as a mirror——”

“ Oyah! A mirror! So is a tub of water holding the image of the sun, but what warmth comes from that reflection? I would like you to tell me, priest, with all your learning, what there is sub-

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stantial in a reflected image? What if learning were the painting of the world's ocean acts, could fish dwell in its mock waters? And I would like to know if there is the fragrance of one rose in ten myriad miles of embroidered flowers?"

He did not reply, and again came the half-kindly truce of silence, but only half, for there was still the tapping of her foot. And how varied is that speech! What a world of meaning is in the tapping of a woman's foot! So the Breton listened, wonderingly to the thoughts that came from the tap, tap, tap on the marble floor.

"Did you study?" he ventured hesitatingly.

"Oh, yes," she responded with mock carelessness, "and I learned many things."

"Yes," she added bitterly, "many things; and in the first place, I learned that learning is like dragging the sea for the jewels of night. I also learned that a brilliant cloud is easily scattered and that the fairest sunrise fades the soonest. Moreover," she continued with increasing bitterness, "I have learned that trees blown away by passing winds have more branches than——" She stopped. A tremor in her voice was mastering her. Again came the tapping of her foot: petulant, impatient, then slower, softer and more uncertain.

"But why should I grieve?" she communed to herself, her voice full of weariness, filled with the quiver of hopeless pain. "No one cares for me, no

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one ever thinks of me caged here forever in this cold, gilded chamber, while they move far and wide, gay travellers on the many rivers of life. Now and then one stops and with a small laugh drops a crumb between my bars and passes on. They loiter through the world's flower-gardens, and I—sometimes there comes swiftly past a whiff of perfume. They drain deep the different wines of pleasure, while into my tiny cup, bar-fastened, is poured a few drops of water. They move abroad under the broad sunlight, and I—moveless in this wee shadow. They hear ever that great symphony, the world's laugh, and I—no one ever laughs alone. Their cheeks are stained by the dews of an hundred skies, mine—by tears. They sleep that they might hasten the morrow, and I—to forget to-day. They weave and I untangle. Their threads are of a hundred hues, mine—one sad colour. Untangling! Untangling! And when will it all end? To-day is yesterday; yesterday as days gone; to-morrow—oh, if I only did not know! If I only——”

She burst into tears.

The Breton's lips parted, his eyes grew round. Presently he began to realise that she was sobbing almost at his feet. His hands tightened their clasp on the arms of the chair and a pallor came into his face. It was difficult for him to recognise this bitter, passionate outburst in the very joy of his

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return. He never before had seen a woman sob, and during all of the months they had been together he had only known her in careless, exuberant happiness, a joyousness almost divine. Now crying so heart-brokenly before him, she appeared as someone else. Grief in her was more than paradoxical—it was laughter weeping, it was the sobbing of song.

The tears of the wife did not ebb as tears often do but each sob seemed to gain greater force from the one gone before. Her face was half hid in her little hands, her wide sleeves had fallen away and her tears trickling down her bare arms fell two jewelled streams into her lap.

The Breton sat rigid in his chair watching her slight form shake with each convulsive sob but he said nothing, did nothing; not even his eyes moved.

At times her crying ceased; there was a moment of questioned silence, then her tears fell faster and despair crept into her sobs.

It was during one of these choked, silent hesitations that the priest mumbled:

“Your husband loves you——”

She straightened up. Her hands still over her eyes and a sob trembling on her lips.

“Your husband loves you,” repeated the Breton monotonously. “Your husband——”

She stamped her foot and fell again to weeping.

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The Breton moved uneasily. A tenseness came into the lines about his mouth.

“Your husband——”

“What do you know about love?” she demanded in the midst of her sobs.

And presently the priest said: “It is something from God.”

“Yes!” she drawled with mocking, scornful bitterness. “Indeed! Why, I thought it was just a violet thrown in a rocky waste; a sunbeam cast upon the cold sea; dew dropped into the desert; a bundle of burnt prayers tossed upon the wind; a—a——” She choked, turned her face away and again tears gathered on her lashes.

Presently she began to sob softly, full of pain.

“Don’t,” he whispered.

Her tears flowed faster.

“Don’t,” he begged again.

“You—don’t—care!” she sobbed.

The Breton did not reply.

“I—know—you don’t.”

The Breton’s lips moved, but he said nothing.

“You—you——”

“Don’t.”

“I wish—I were dead——”

“No!”

“And why shouldn’t I?” she demanded fiercely. “One is better dead than one’s heart strangled by this silken scarf. Why must one live forever on

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this desert, scanning each day the sky-line for what cannot come?"

She picked restlessly the folds of her robe, her tears falling upon her unrestful hands.

"You would not care," she continued hopelessly. "You never even asked if I had been sick, and yet I come before you all white with troubled palor——"

"You——"

"Oh, no!" she interrupted, scornfully, turning her head and glancing coldly at him. "I have been more than well and happy. Why—I have laughed and sung each hour of the day away; no bird in all the park has been gayer than I, and my cheeks? Oh, I whitened them; they became so ruddy. Oh, yes, how happy, how happy——"

She was looking at the Breton, pleading, tearful.

"Don't you know," she begged, "don't you know that I have not laughed nor sung all these weeks? No caged bird ever——ever—I think you would have cared if you could have seen me cowering now in one corner, now in another; counting the moments for the coming of day, then longing for night. And oh, how ill I have been; now burning with fever, then cold, chilling. I did not know what had happened: one little thought parching my lips, making my heart shrink and draw high into my throat. A noise like a foot-fall would make it beat so painfully I could not breathe, and

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when I heard someone coming, I trembled all over. I grew feverish, then cold, a dimness would come over my eyes. All day and night I cried for tardy sleep—and when one begs for sleep is it not a wish for death? Oh, if you only knew,” she cried, striking the palms of her little hands passionately together. “If you only knew!” She rose from her stool and stood looking at him.

The Breton stood up, as she came close to him, her hands clasped on her breast, her eyes questioning, beseeching. He looked down at her for a moment, then raising his head, closed his eyes.

She stepped nearer, quivering, hesitant.

“Tell me you will not go away again.”

The Breton did not answer.

“Tell me,” she whispered, moving closer so that their robes touched and she felt him tremble.

Through the open windows came the grumble of the surrounding city. All else was still; the birds in the cages above them and the birds in the park without. Man was yet in the midst of his toil and Nature still somnolent in the afternoon heat.

“Promise me?” She lifted her clasped hands and rested them lightly on his bosom.

The thrushes in the bamboo cages above them began to flutter, and in the park the calling of pheasants was heard. With the breath of evening larks, pehlings, birds of a hundred spirits came

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forth from their hidings. The hum of the city grew less and less.

Neither had moved.

The shadow of the feathery bamboo that grew by the fish-pond without came softly in through the open shell-latticed window; furtively it crept across the floor, slowly it ascended the lacquered wall and—vanished.

After a while the sun's rays were gone and a yellow light diffused through the room, burnished anew its golden fretwork. An orange-saffron glimmer lingered for a few moments, then came the fleeting rose blush of twilight, caressingly tinging the paled faces of the Breton and the wife standing so still and so silent in its parting light.

Gently as silken floss is wafted upward by a breath so the little hands of the wife stole from the Breton's bosom to his shoulders.

And when the songs of the birds in the park had ceased; when only the quarrelling of the white-headed crows was heard; when the hum from the city had died away; when silence with dusk had closed around them the hands of the wife crept lightly around the Breton's neck. Her lips parted, her eyes, tearful, yet happy, looked up into his face.

Dusk deepened.

Heavily the Breton lifted his hands, resting them gently but firmly upon her arms,

TWILIGHT

A joyous flush spread over her face and neck; her lips quivered as if to smile or burst into joyful tears; she laid her cheek lightly on his bosom. The Breton's fingers closed around her wrists; trembling, with difficulty he took them from his shoulders.

Gently he put her away from him and as he crossed the room he heard a little moan, also the crinkling fall of silk.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NIGHT

THE Breton went calmly out of the Hall of Guests and came unconcernedly down the Lion Steps into the Park as though without thought or in profound meditation. His head was thrown slightly back and his hands hung loosely by his side. Softly he went into the dusk as though watching the crows and herons still unsettled in the darkened domes of the great trees.

Dusk was deepening into night as he passed out the gateway and the streets were filled with their night streams of hurrying men. The stores had closed, street stalls were leaving. The seal cutter that sat near the gate and always welcomed him, had departed, as had his neighbour, the money-changer, who had gone before dusk with his strings of cash. A short way up the street a fussing cook stopped his grumbling to offer him a cake; a fortune teller peered momentarily into his face, then jumped dramatically to one side. Itinerant barbers, apothecaries, shoemakers, dentists, story-tellers, geomancers, astrologers and book-sellers

NIGHT

joked and reviled as he passed them in their packing-up and counting of the profits of the day. Beggars innumerable and hucksters with trays slung over their shoulders, with rattles and wailing whistles, jostled against him. Unresistingly, unconscious of these men and their noises, he was carried along in this dusk-stream through the tortuous channels of Yingching.

Sometimes with jest they brushed roughly against him, peered up into his face, only to draw hastily away with a look of silent fear. Sometimes a swiftly borne mandarin's chair came by him and the attendants would thrust him brutally against the walls or into a corner. A line of singing bonzes, modulating their tones by the sound of wooden cymbals and mingling their melancholy chant with the evening noises carried him along with them.

In and through the twisting streets the monks took him until they vanished, and another crowd shoved him along through the night. Only here and there were lights in front of tea-houses, from which came jests and songs and the laughter tinkling of wine cups. In front of one of these several sedans had stopped and blocked the way. The crowd growled and cursed and surging forward, was forcing the Breton in front of them, when from one of the chairs a dainty singing-girl stepped out. This dusk crowd, at the sight of her,

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grew licentious in a moment and there rose a tumult of comments. The girl wavered, almost terror-stricken, at this mob of men. She peered around for a place to flee, but they were all around her and the way to the tea-house was closed. The wit of the crowd grew more violent when the girl, looking up, saw the Breton standing silently beside her. For a moment she hesitated, then lifted up her arms to him like a child seeking protection and rested them on his bosom. He looked down at her unconcernedly, while the crowd jeered as only a Chinese crowd can do and poured upon him and the little singing-girl clinging for protection their storm of lascivious wit.

Suddenly those that stood nearest the Breton saw him shudder, then sway, as if to fall. He staggered back among the crowd as one choking for a breath of fresh air; he forced his way through them, then moved listlessly along through the half-vacant street.

Again the dusk crowd caught up with him and hurried him along the Street of the Marble Portal, thence into the broad Avenue of Peace, which leads to the Gate of Eternal Rest, the last of the city gates to be closed. These men, who but a moment before had been aburst with jest, hastened silently on.

Down the street was heard the sound of wedding music—a bride happy and smiling

NIGHT

was being carried with her trosseau to the home of the groom. The crowd was once more full of laughter and jest, for no people so love to mock the misfortunes or cajole the vanity of others as the people of this old land. None are more skilful in its use and abuse. They are at it during all hours and in all places where men or women congregate; in markets, streets, and temples, they hurl it from window to window; and on the boats in the river old women are perched on the high poops with no other purpose than to revile and abuse. Their fund is inexhaustible; they can rail most viciously at one another, foam with vituperations, then part as friendly as they met.

So once more the Breton, in the half stupor of his terrible sorrow, was forced to listen to lascivious and brutal jests hurled so relentlessly upon one perhaps as beautiful and—and——

The crowd forced the Breton against the wall. Flaring torches and swaying lanterns could now be seen winding toward them. The head of the procession came by—an old man bearing a large gold-brocaded umbrella, which he held over the bride as she entered and left the sedan. Behind him came men bearing great lanterns inscribed with propitiatory sentences: “May the phoenix sing harmoniously”—another way of wishing that the bride will give birth to a son. As the crowd deciphered these various illumined wishes, they com-

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mented upon them in sarcasm which cannot be uttered. The musicians who followed did their utmost to drown the abuse heaped upon them, as did the bearers of halberds, dragon heads, titular flags, and honorary tablets, denoting the honours and rank of the bride's father, but there was no compassion in the crowd as they assailed with their vituperation these unfortunate symbols of human vanity.

Parties of young lads, fantastically dressed, tripped gaily by playing on drums and flutes, followed by bearers arrayed in red robes and burdened under many vermilion-lacquered boxes containing the bride's trosseau. The contents of these boxes came in for a new outburst of lecherous jest. Men turned to one another and those nearest the Breton surrounded him and delivered grave conjectures as to what they contained—doubts that were brutal.

The bride approached, securely locked in her red and gold sedan, surrounded by quivering, silken lanterns. The acme of the crowd's pleasure was now reached and their licentiousness ended in a final outburst. They jested upon everything appertaining to a bride or a woman, from the size of her feet to the possibilities of her extravagances. They took a maternal interest in her, and gravely advised her as to what to do upon this night. Nothing had been left unsaid when the wedding

NIGHT

procession vanished in the darkness of the narrow streets.

Silent, even sombre, became the crowd as it hastened with the Breton toward the Gate of Eternal Rest under whose shadowy portals soldiers were drawn up preparatory to closing the gates for the night. The crowd hurried through and, once beyond the walls, vanished, dispersing almost instantly in the black labyrinth of the suburbs.

The Breton went on alone, his manner unchanged by the vanishing of those that had but a moment before elbowed and jostled him along through the streets. In and out, winding, turning, twisting through this black network, he threaded his way. Through narrow passages, up and down hollow worn stairs, under gloom-weighted portals, along the edges of canals and over bridges that spanned them, he went carelessly along, neither faltering nor stumbling.

When he came to the north entrance of the Mission Compound he stopped for the first time. He stood for a moment, unloosened the neck of his robe, then went slowly along the wall until he came to the northwest corner; turning, he followed the western side until he passed out into the open space lying between the Mission and the river. Again he hesitated for a moment, then crossed to the river's overhanging bank where its black waters swirled straight down below his feet.

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All around him brooded silent night. But from the flower-boats down the river came the faint echo of laughter and songs and music. From the sampans and junks anchored across the river came an occasional volley of crackers by which the simple boatman warned the devils of the night that he was still alert. Sometimes was heard from these rocking boats a child's fretful cry. As night wore on the noises of revelry ceased. The boatmen and the night devils slept in peace and the children's cries were hushed.

The world was asleep. No sounds were heard but what came from the river at the Breton's feet, for when the insect hum of man was stilled and a nation of them slept on its banks this river communed aloud and to those that sought it there was peace, even enticement in its coaxing, as well as terror.

The Breton leaned perilously over this compassionate, sweet-voiced river upon which only the day before he had looked impatiently as he waited his cumbersome sea-junk to make headway against its flood. Eagerly had he watched for the first sight of the Sea-Guarding Tower on the north wall, then for the two slender pagodas, which are the city's masts.

And this was the end.

At last he sought this river over whose bosom

NIGHT

he had dreamed so long and so happily. But he had come to it now an outcast; a priest that had repudiated his God and defiled his sacred brotherhood; a man that had sinned—a man—yes—again he hears her fall; again he hears the little moan that broke from her lips; again he sees her lying as dead in the twilight. It is he that did this——

The Breton mechanically took off his rosary and crucifix and dropped them into the waters. He drew himself up, then hesitated. Presently his chin sank to his bosom and he stood motionless on the very brink of this strange River of Pearls, which has never been known to smile since mankind came to dwell on its banks, other than to those that sought it in the night, then a smile came from its murky depths and it was illumined with more delicate traceries than are reflected from the fretwork of heaven.

To those that are happy and look upon it in the sunlight, this melancholy river is forever sombrously brooding; its bosom is an abyss and its voice that of grief. But for those that seek it, repose is found there, and in its dreadful monologue contentedness, a paradox only understood by those whose hearts, as its bosom, are aflow with tears. Those listening forget, and plans are not made with the sound of its voice in the ear. Innumerable have been the weary pilgrims that have questioned

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and have been pleased with its answer; more have sought than have fled from it and its voice has been the rarest of music to them; its bosom the kindest. Holding its arms open to him, entreating, enticing so gently, this dreadful yet kindly river flowed on by the Breton to the sea.

Night was passing. The golden-jetted horologue of Eternity turned slowly. No moon came up, but in endless succession rose the constellations. Majestically these bright markers of unending Time crossed the firmament and with infinite grandeur, ignorant of the riot of man, a pulse beat went through the universe.

Day approached.

A fog came up the river and the stars were seen no more. The Breton still stood erect upon the bank; his eyes peered into the waters below him; his hands still hung listlessly by his side.

Suddenly there rose from the Mission Compound, reverberant in the still air of dawn, those stately cadences, which are the chant of a world's grief.

“*Stabat Mater dolorosa,
Juxta crucem lacrymosa,
Dum pendebat filius,
Contristatam et dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius.*”

The priest tottered.

From across the river sounded the halloo of a

NIGHT

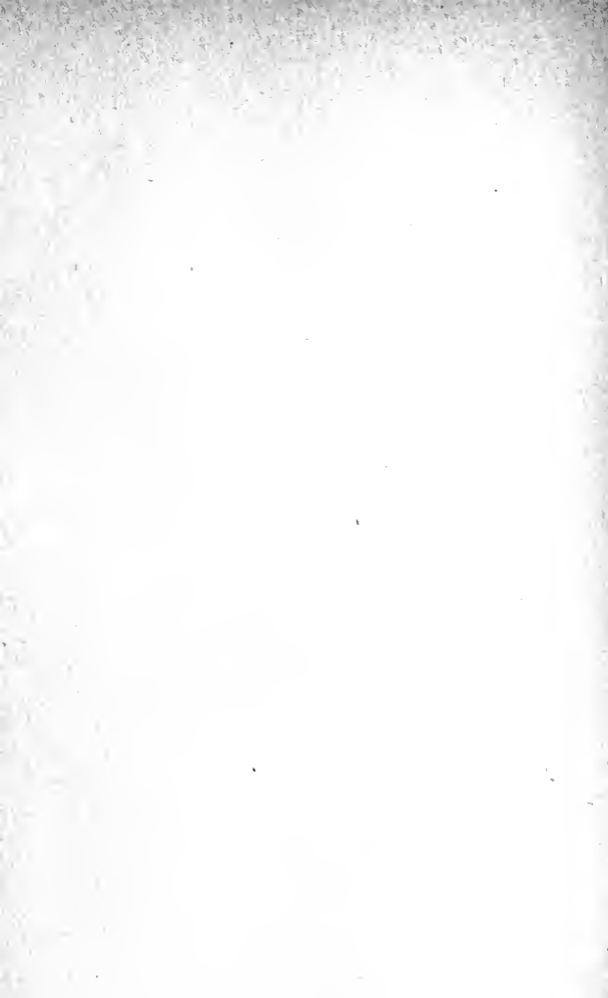
boatman. This was echoed and re-echoed from different parts. The riverside had awakened.

“*Fac me cruce custodiri,
Morte Christi praemunire,
Confoveri gratia,
Quando—*”

The Breton shuddered—he also had awakened.



BOOK IV. THE NEMESIS OF FATE



CHAPTER ONE

THE WANDERER

WITH thoughtful, tireless touch, the Unknown nursed the Breton through the fever that had fastened upon him the night he had cast aside the wife of Tai Lin and had brutally left her lying unconscious on the floor in the dusk of that evening when she had so trustingly laid upon his bosom and had given over to him her love and her life and her honour. Sleepless, the Unknown had nursed him as he struggled to hurl himself into the river that still flowed coaxingly at his feet. Sleepless he had knelt beside him when he lay in a stupor, his face pallid and covered with a cold sweat; sleepless he had listened to him muttering in slow, indistinct utterance, insistent as the dripping of the Water Clock, "I have sinned; I have sinned; I have sinned."

The Unknown had roughly driven the other priests from the Breton's chamber on the day they had brought him from the river's bank, even after he became convalescent and was moved out into the shadowy cloisters, the Unknown still watched sternly and silently over him, so that dur-

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ing those reluctant days of the Breton's recovery, neither the priests nor the communicants, continually coming and going, heard this silence broken nor knew the cause of the Breton's sickness. They glanced compassionately at his fever-worn figure, motionless other than his fingers, which were ever nervously creasing, smoothing, caressing a fold in his robe. They noticed that his eyes looked endlessly somewhere, and that a stony calmness, like a veil, clung to his face. But their glances, as they passed and repassed, were ever as thoughtless as they were momentary. It was not for them to conjecture the struggle waging in the still form before them; that unseen volcanic combat was hidden by illimitable distance.

When the Breton was able to leave the Mission he accompanied the Unknown once more on his visitations through the city. These visits took them to that part of Yingching lying north of the Examination Grounds, and when they returned to the Mission they made a short cut through these ancient tourney grounds where multitudes have, during these thousand years contended and lost and won as Fate has willed. Going out by the South Gate they turn westward into the short Street of the Martial Dragon, at the end of which stands the Tower of the Water Clock, where this time-gnawed clepsydra of Yingching drips, drips, drips, the minutes of unnumbered years.

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How often the Breton had come to this comforting tower to dream in the shadows of its imper- turbable calm, happier than any in the bottomless pool of millions, that swirled around him, the Unknown did not know. But as he passed the winding stairs, the Breton stopped, looked up, and drew his hand across his eyes.

“Come, my son, we must go on,” said the Unknown, gently taking him by the arm.

The Breton looked dully at him for a moment, then seizing his hand pressed it convulsively to his heart.

“No, no, my father,” he cried, bursting into sobs. “I cannot go.”

So it came about in this manner that each day the Unknown left the Breton at the Stairs of the Water Clock and hastened on his way alone to the Great Peace Gate, and it was never until night that the Breton came silently to his chamber.

Once when they came to the Tower of the Water Clock, they stopped as usual but the Unknown stood for a long time gazing intently, questioningly at the Breton, then suddenly he put his arms around him, pressed him fervently to his heart, kissing him repeatedly on both cheeks, while tears streamed down the seams in his face.

“My son,” he cried brokenly, “my son,” and he wept as only an old man can.

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“Yes,” he said finally, his voice again calm, “I leave you, my son, to God.”

He kissed the Breton again and hastened toward the Great Peace Gate.

For some moments the Breton stood by the winding stairs of the Water Tower, then walked hastily south, winding, turning, doubling, twisting through a maze of narrow alleys until he came to the Street of Pearls. Once on this thoroughfare he hastened on until he came near to where the street ended at the granite Gate of Tai Lin's park. Without hesitation he turned into an open guardhouse recessed on the right of the street and leaning against one of the pillars fixed his gaze upon the gateway, as immovable as the pillar itself—which was of stone.

The hour of dusk was falling. Shopkeepers came out of their stores and looked in vain for a customer. Reluctantly they took in their wares and put up their shutters. The itinerant booths were gotten ready and were being taken home on the backs of their owners.

On the side of the street opposite the guardhouse and nearer the Gateway a fortune-teller stopped suddenly in his packing and beckoned mysteriously to his neighbour, a cook.

“Again!” he whispered hoarsely in the cook's ear.

“Again? Again? What again? Rice——”

THE WANDERER

“ Did I not prognosticate ? ”

“ Pork——”

“ Look ! Again he is there ! ” and the fortune-teller whirled the cook around and, half crouching, pointed cautiously to the guardhouse.

“ So he is ! So he is ! ” cried the cook.

“ Did I not foretell it ? Master cook, did I not prognosticate ? ”

“ Yes, that is a fact, ” answered the cook doubtfully.

“ Cook, ” continued the fortune-teller in mystic-triumphant tones, “ I see everything, hear everything, know everything. Now, master cook, let me do you a good turn ; it will only cost——”

“ But, ” suddenly exclaimed the cook, brightening, “ he has been there in that fashion toward night-cooking for nearly two full moons. ”

“ Certainly, certainly, but would he have been there if it had not been for my prognostications ? ”

“ That may be, that may be, ” answered the cook, scratching his head.

“ Master cook, let me prognosticate you. It will only cost——”

“ No, ” interrupted the cook abruptly. “ But, ” he hesitated, “ I don't like that influence every day just at my night-cooking. ”

“ It is very bad, ” interjected the fortune-teller, shaking his head ruefully. “ I would not be you for all the cash of Ho. ”

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“What is it?” demanded the cook hastily.
“Tell me, master, tell me.”

The fortune-teller jumped back dramatically and threw up his hands. “I am overwhelmed,” he cried in lofty injured tones, “dumb, speechless, a dying phœnix.”

The cook scratched his head and looked sheepishly at him.

“Master cook,” the fortune-teller continued in the same severe voice, “you pretend to be a merchant, and yet you are unable to distinguish great profits from a fly’s head. Is it not known among honourable merchants that just scales and full measures injure no man? I am pained! Good-bye, master cook.” The fortune-teller began to wrap up his paraphernalia.

The cook scratched his head.

“Master cook, I leave you with a pitying heart—farewell.”

“What have I done? What have I done?” cried the cook, coming hastily to his side.

“What have you done!” repeated the fortune-teller scornfully. “What have you done but throw out the refuse, the burnt scraps, the very swill of your inquisitiveness to lure from me the peculiar gems of my knowledge—my pearly prognostications!”

“But what have I done?” exclaimed the cook perplexedly.

THE WANDERER

“Can you get rice without planting? Chickens without eggs? Heat without fire? Fire without fuel? Prognostications without incentives?” demanded the fortune-teller haughtily.

“But what threatens me? What threatens me?” cried the cook impatiently.

“Master cook,” said the fortune-teller, solemnly though relentingly, “I should be lenient with you; that you do not understand the incomprehensible is not your fault. You are a cook, I alone am the scholar. Cook, I pity you; to me only is apparent the disaster overpending. I will aid you.”

“Do, master, do.”

“Before prognosticating, cook, I must have four rice-cakes, cooked well in oil, and two pieces of pork——”

“Too much! master fortune-teller, too much!” cried the cook, backing off in amazement.

“Cook, I salute thee! To-night empty your oil into the street; scatter your flour upon the night-winds—you will need them no more. Farewell, there comes a day when every tumour must be punctured. Listen now to my last prognostication: Do not waste your wife’s cash in mock-money. It will not avail you.” The fortune-teller moved slowly away.

“Master fortune-teller! Master fortune-teller!”

“What is it, unfortunate man?”

THE VERMILION PENCIL

“I will give you one rice-cake and one piece of fat pork.”

“Does one grain of planted rice produce as much as four?”

“I am a poor man.”

“Must not the poor avert their fate as well as the rich?”

“I will give you two rice-cakes and one piece of lean pork.”

“You are indeed a poor man,” commented the fortune-teller sadly, “and unfortunate. Yes, my compassion pleads for you. I will prognosticate. Yes, for two cakes, two fat pieces of pork, and a bowl of kale.”

“Too much! Too much!” cried the cook desperately. “I will give you the cakes and the pork, no more! no more!”

For some moments the fortune-teller looked seriously up at the heavens.

“Let it be,” he finally mumbled with compassion, “but mark you, master cook, the depth of my benevolence!”

When the cook had provided him with rice-cakes and two squares of fat pork he squatted down upon his heels and munched contentedly, while the cook crouched by his side and waited. Now and then the fortune-teller would stretch his neck and peer mysteriously through the gathering twilight at the tall figure standing so still beside the stone

THE WANDERER

pillar of the guardhouse, and the cook at the same time stretched his neck and peered fearfully through the shadows.

After the fortune-teller finished his cakes and pork he drew from his paraphernalia a small-bowled pipe. When he had taken a few puffs, he asked in a low voice:

“What do you see, cook?”

“He is still there,” answered the cook in a whisper.

“What else do you see?”

“He stares like a big-eyed owl.”

“What is an owl?”

“A bird of bad omen.”

“What else do you know?”

“That he never turns his round eyes away from the gate of Tai Lin.”

“What is a gateway?”

“It is the coming in and going out.”

“How do you write the characters Yen Wang?”

The cook moved closer to the fortune-teller. “Is it that?” he asked hoarsely.

“Did you not see him when he commenced to come many moons ago?”

“Yes, master, yes.”

“Was he not as stalwart as the young bullock of Heungshan?”

“Yes, master——”

THE VERMILION PENCIL

“And now he is like a spectre, a troubled ghost whose Fêng Shui has been ruined.”

“It is true, master, it is true!”

“Have you not noticed,” continued the fortune-teller in tones that made the cook huddle closer to him, “that since he came you have drowsed and drowsed and been careless of your business?”

“It is true! It is true!”

“Have you not noticed that when his fingers twitch, men shun you?”

“Many men have passed me by, master, many have passed me by!”

“Have you not noticed when his bosom heaves out you have a sadness in your chest?”

“Yes, yes.”

“He has the appearance of a Western-sea man!”

“What!”

“A foreign devil. Have you seen his eyes? They are blue!”

“Blue? master, blue?”

“If he should look into your boiling oil, it would go up in flame; if he should look into your flour, it would frisk with weevils; if he should look into your meat, lo! there would be nothing but maggots, and if he should peer into your heart—I tremble.”

The cook crouched closer to him.

“Cook, how is the Idol of Yang Ssü made?”

THE WANDERER

"By three swings of the axe, master."

"How is the Idol of Yen Wang made?"

"I know not, I know not."

"It is carved by tears, cook, as rocks are cut by mountain's rain. Its visage is of the terriblest sorrow; the height of heaven, the depth of the sea cannot encompass it."

The fortune-teller leaned closer to the cook and whispered hoarsely in his ear: "He has the face of Yen Wang."

"I feel that sadness! I feel that sadness!" cried the cook, pulling open the neck of his blouse.

The fortune-teller looked at him pityingly, then up at the darkening sky and remained contemplative for some time.

"Cook," he said thoughtfully, "there are some things that are known and some things that are not. From the things that are known we learn concerning the things that are not, but this is the task of the wise. Now it is known that heaven is round and the earth square; that the stars are shining characters in the Book of Fate, and eclipses are dragon feasts. Moreover, it is known that when tigers plunge into the sea they become sharks, and sparrows falling into the water are changed into oysters. It is also known to those that are learned that it is the nature of water to run downward; the nature of fire to flame upward; the

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nature of wood to be either crooked or straight; the nature of metals to be pliable and subject to change. In addition to this, cook, it is known to scholars that there are five elements, five planets, five great mountain ranges on the earth, five seas, five senses, five musical tones, five kinds of coffins, five kinds of torture, five ways to die in, and five times in the last five minutes has the spectre in the guardhouse clenched his hands.

“Now, cook, what is known to us, especially wise, is that the clouds are dragons and the winds tigers; mind is the mother, matter the child. If the mother summons the child, will it dare disobey? Those that, like myself, can expel the spirit of death, must summon the spirits of the five elements, and who would conquer death must obtain the influence of the five planets. When this is done, Ying and Yang can be controlled; winds and clouds are gathered into the palm of the hand; mountains and hills torn up by the roots, while seas and rivers can be made to spring out of the ground.

“But, cook, to save you from Yen Wang, whose image now looks down upon you, who has been in your very presence for nearly two rounded moons, exceeds all of these things in wisdom and difficulty. There is only one thing, and it is by no means easy, even for me, to obtain—a golden elixir! Ordinarily the moon and planets and all the powerful

THE WANDERER

lights in heaven must seven times seven repeat their footsteps; and the four seasons nine times complete their circuit. Then must this elixir be chastened in molten silver and burnt red with molten gold. But, cook, one draught will save you; three draughts will give you ten myriad of ages, and eight draughts will waft you beyond the sphere of sublunary things."

"Do it, master," muttered the cook huskily.

"It is well," responded the fortune-teller solemnly. "And I shall see to it that this shall not cost you more than ten taels sycee——"

The cook sprang tragically to his feet, and forgetful of the image of Yen Wang the wrangling of cash began.

The Breton in the guardhouse awoke from his stupor. Reluctantly, silently, he went away and night came down upon the Street of Pearls.

CHAPTER TWO

WORD FROM THE UNKNOWN

WHAT to man is the warring of a whole world of nations when his heart and soul wage their more terrible combat within him? What to him are the destruction of Empires and the annihilation of whole kingdoms of men when his own bosom resounds with mutilated cries? So it is that a monarch in his temporal power is subject more to this internal warring and brawling than to the sufferings of millions, and the spiritual pontiff is likewise forgetful of the penitential throngs and waxes gay or melancholy as this combat ebbs or surges tumultuously within him.

This battling between the heart and soul, flesh and spirit, conscience and desire, or what not, is the primæval combat of man. It is Cosmic. And while blood-letting is purely human, this other struggle has something of God in it—hence its terribleness.

For two months such a combat had been going on in the Breton and the terribleness of it had left its traces upon him. He was but the withered semblance of his former self. Feeble and meagre,

WORD FROM THE UNKNOWN

he appeared to have but little of life left in him. Only when the alluring mind—the heart's fickle ally—would come to his relief with pleasing, enticing thoughts did he betray any energy or affect interest in the affairs about him. Then he hastened to the guardhouse on the Street of Pearls, where he stood motionless until dusk, his hollow eyes staring through the portals into Tai Lin's park. There he waited day after day to see those that lived where she lived, as if they could bring away with them some message from her unknown to themselves, but which he could decipher as soon as they came through the gateway.

Such are the strange conceits of hidden love, and such are the stratagems them employ. A familiar odour, sight, or sound are inexhaustible quarries out of which are hewn and polished with exquisite care blocks that go to build up endless palaces and castles of revery, wherein, in due time, are crowded a thousand airy happenings. There the unsubstantial mind brings to broken hearts echoed laughter, false mirrored scenes, and a myriad of fairy fantasies woven out of the unknown.

Down by his crucifix all night, or on the overhanging bank of the river the Breton fought against his heart and its desires, against the love that had come to him unknown and had taken him suddenly body and soul into its keeping, and which

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even in midst of his appeals to God burned and surged in every vein. So he struggled night after night, little dreaming that the combat was drawing to a close, and was to end—fortunate or otherwise—as each must determine for himself—in a manner that showed him that the hand of God was in it and it was done under His eye.

Dusk had already merged into darkness when the Breton, as usual, entered the cloisters on this night. The faint glimmer of stars that crept through the one high-barred window was lost in the shadows that lay within. He lit a candle, and folding his arms on the table buried his head in them. It was in this manner and at this hour that the dreams of the day began to forsake him. Sometimes his body quivered, and it may have been the trembling of a sob, but it was unuttered. Sometimes he raised his head and with dry, questioning eyes gazed long and intently at the crucifix hanging with its wounded Christ beside his pallet.

Midnight or after a person listening would have heard a smothered moan and might have seen a glimmer of tears in his eyes as they again sought beseechingly the crucifix on the wall. It was then that the day-dreams had utterly vanished, and only the pain of his sin lay hold of him. It was then that he left the table and threw himself down before the Christ in whose compassion sins

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are forgiven and the memory of them washed away.

So, on this night when he raised his eyes to the crucifix he discovered before him two sealed envelopes. On the larger was written, "Do not open for one year." He broke the seal of the other and drew out a letter in the handwriting of the Unknown.

As the Breton read the first few lines a look of startled wonder came into his eyes, then pain mingled with anguish. He stopped reading and for some time sat gazing emptily before him into those dim places where truth is sought.

Presently he resumed reading the Unknown's last words, and varying emotions of amazement and fear shot across his face. He looked wonderingly over to the crucifix as if to ask: "Do you know all this?" But as he continued reading his credulity vanished, and the lines of his lips drew hard and straight. Sometimes his fist involuntarily clenched, a flush burned in his pale, sunken cheeks; sparks of a hidden fire flashed from his blue-black eyes, blazed, died out, then burned with a steadier flame. Sometimes the veins in his forehead and over his temples stood out like whipcords. His breath came in even heavy pulsations.

The letter of the Unknown was drawing to an end. The Breton rose from his chair and bent over against the candle flame, as if with brighter

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light to fathom out the terror and the truth of those unread pages.

The last sheet fluttered from his hand.

Standing by the table his head gradually sank forward; his eyes closed, and into his face came a stony uncertain tension. Presently, like one awakening, he pressed his hand across his eyes, as if to arouse himself more surely to the scene before him. Then mechanically he gathered up the sheets of the Unknown's letter and put them back in the envelope—all but the last sheet, which was afterwards found on the floor under the table, and on which were written these enigmatic words:

“My son, I cannot continue this category of sin. Day now breaks and I must be on my way—a way from which there is no returning at all, forever. You will look into what I have written, then—go away.

“What will come of all this I do not know, but these people will not submit forever. Why they have done so this long I do not understand, nor do I know what is going to happen except that in the chronology of such acts comes inevitably the century end of wrong and that awful number ‘Ninety-three.’ I see already the rim of a reign of terror, I hear noises that are the clamour of vengeance, I discover signs in the heavens and it is the judgment of God.

“To-night is the end! What melancholy fore-

WORD FROM THE UNKNOWN

bodings this may bring to you, my son, will remain forever unknown to me. But I leave you, as is my duty—that you may grapple with this double-headed dragon that now assails you. Alone you must conquer or alone succumb. In the battles of the heart and soul there can be no allies.

“I have left you in the other envelope certain secrets, which you are not to discover until you have left this place, to return no more.”

The Breton continued standing by the table, staring emptily into those shadows out of which so often come forms real and terrible.

The candle burned low and flickered.

Into the dull eyes of the Breton a faint light was creeping, a light that was not a reflection, but itself a fire such as lurks in that inflammable tinder—a man's passions.

The candle, like the Breton's faith, was sputtering, and presently this candle flickered and went out.

Night was ebbing away. Monotonously the watchman passed and repassed, his gong grumbling out the hours of night.

A grey ray stole in from the east; the hum of a new day grew great, and the breaking dawn with its echoes came into the silent room.

The Breton was kneeling before the crucifix that hung near his pallet. Daylight did not arouse him, nor the clamour of day. He was not praying,

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nor moving, nor dreaming. He was waiting, as men before him and since have waited, for the Christ to lift up his bowed head and speak to him from the pain of the crucifix. The Breton waited, and the solemn melody of chanting voices rose and fell, then—silence.

A sunbeam edged shyly through the window, lingered uncertain and—went away. Someone knocked at his door, but he did not turn from the cross, for he heard no sounds nor knew that it was midday.

Daylight grew dim, and the melancholy shadows of twilight hovered a few moments around his window, then it was again dark and the watchman's gong measured out the hours of the night.

Once more dawn crept up from under the skirts of night and ushered in a new and memorable day for the Breton priest. He still knelt before the crucifix, but the deep lines of pain had vanished from his face; a calm, gentle serenity rested there, and when at last the sunbeam edged coyly, doubtfully, across the casement, he opened his eyes and they shone with a new, great joy.

When the sunbeam began to go he rose from the crucifix and put the envelopes into his robe. For some moments they lingered, then went away—this sunbeam and the Breton.

CHAPTER THREE

DAWN AGAIN

WITHOUT hesitation the Breton once again entered the Palace of Tai Lin, and went quickly through its halls and courts until he came to the apartments of his Excellency's wife. For a moment he hesitated at the oval silken-draped doorway, then putting the curtains aside he stepped softly in.

By the screen, as if it had never been moved, stood his chair, beside it the high ebony table with its roseleaf marble top, and in front of it with her face toward the screen sat the wife, as she had sat many months before.

For a moment the Breton pressed back against the curved lintel, then went softly over and stood beside her. She did not move nor give any sign of recognition as the Breton approached, only her little hands folded in her lap pressed together more tightly, until her finger tips became darkly red. It is not known how long this silence lasted, for, though time may never cease, there are moments in the horologue of love, which are not counted.

"I have come back," said the Breton finally in soft monotonous tones.

At the sound of his voice, the wife's hands

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trembled and relaxed; a slight feverish flush diffused her face, but she gave no sign that she heard him.

“I have come back to you,” he repeated.

A tremor shot through her, and a faint flush darkened and spread to brow and to neck.

“I understand it all now,” he continued vaguely. “You remember when your hand touched my robe? At first I thought it was the hand of God, for it seemed as though I were in heaven. Then came another thought and I cast you aside. For this I have suffered. In every soft sound of night have I heard you fall again and again, without a cry, just a silken crash. Even God would not heed my prayers to drown that sound. In the day I beggared time before the Gateway. By night I prayed, did penance, and sleeplessly watched for the reluctant shadows of dawn, a dawn that punished me with a thousand memories; with the larks’ song a-fluttering from their bamboo cages; with flowers whose fragrance choked and whose colours burned my eyes; with laughter and the dreadful crinkling of silk. Again at night it was prayer and penance or pain, for the river murmured with the tones of your voice, and the stars stole their lights from your eyes and looked in reproachful pain down upon me.”

Presently the Breton took from the bosom of his robe the manuscripts left by the Unknown.

DAWN AGAIN

“Three days ago I found these secretly beside my crucifix”; and he looked dumbly at the envelopes he half extended toward her.

“He is gone,” he continued, a resigned softness creeping into the monotony of his voice, “and it was in this letter that he asked me to go away, for it was sin to remain. Of this I took counsel of God, and for two nights I prayed to our Christ on His crucifix, and to-day at dawn, God bade me go.

“Did you know,” he asked with singular simplicity, “that I have come back to you?”

The wife moved slightly, and the light in her great eyes deepened.

“You have no husband, for husbands are searched out by God, as wives are sent by Him from heaven. On the second night before my crucifix all things became clear to me, and doubts were brushed aside. We will go to another country; to America, where all are free; to Australia, where all are forgotten, or to other lands where men are lost. We will be always together; I can look at you and you can put your hand upon my shoulder, and it will be as in heaven. We will live together forever, for whom God marries He never parts. I have planned how we shall leave the city,” he continued, his voice vibrant with eagerness. “You know no one can leave this city by night, but on the eve of the Propitiation of the Gods of the Waters all of the city gates and ward gates will

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be open. You can leave the park by the western postern and I will meet you there the second hour after darkness. We will not go to Hongkong, for they would send ships and bring us back. We cannot remain in Yingching, for they would find us. We cannot go to another town in the Empire, for all of the magistrates in the Middle Kingdom will search for you. I have thought carefully of all this and have planned that when you come to the postern, I will meet you with a sedan; I will take you to the river, where I will have a river boat waiting, then we will go up the river to the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon. Men fear this Cavern of Yu Ngao, but there is no danger. I will go there first with Tsang and prepare it for you, and when you go we will take Tsang's wife. We can stay there until people forget, then we will take a boat and go down the river by night until we come to the sea. At Pak-hoi we will take a sea junk and go to Singapore, for there all the ships of the world meet.

“Will you go?”

The wife did not reply, so they remained motionless in silence, and time passed as it had passed with them before.

The sun slid slowly down the cloudless September heavens; the shadow of the feathery bamboo crept again into the chamber and gently slunk away; but when the rose-saffron of the after-glow

DAWN AGAIN

flushed upward the western sky and diffused its soft light through the court, the wife left her stool and crossed over to the shell-latticed window, and as when the summer storm is past and the burdened lily tilts its gathered diamonds to the sun, so her tears, trembling on her cheeks, sparkled joyously in the amber light.

When the melancholy "coo-ee, coo-ee" of the argus-eyed pheasant sounded softly through the twilight, she came back from the window, her little hands clasped together, her eyes downcast. For several moments she stood shyly beside him, then looking up, said:

"I will go."

For some time the Breton stood as if he had not heard, then kneeling, leaned forward until his head touched her robe. The wife lay her hand lightly upon his head, and for the first time there fell upon him that blessing, which, like mercy, has a double sanctity, and though its voice is unheard among the fretful noises of the world, yet its reverberations passing from a woman's heart go on and on through vast distances and depths until its echoes cease in that uncertain chasm—a man's breast.

"I knew you would come back," she said presently, her voice quivering between laughter and sobs. "When I touched your robes and felt you tremble I knew that you loved me, and when you

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took hold of my wrists you do not know what happiness came over me. I felt as if you were going to pick me up and fly away forever to that heaven you have spoken of so often. Then—then you threw me to the floor.”

She felt the Breton shudder, and she reached down and took hold of his ears and tilted his head back. For a moment she looked into his eyes, then for the first time in many months the room echoed softly with her laughter.

“You must not look that way,” she cried roughly as she twitched his ears. “Don’t you know that that was a most happy parting compared to the first time you went away, when you left me without a word, chained by torturing doubt? But this time you threw me to the floor, and then I knew that you loved me. I have not been unhappy, nor have I been joyful these many weeks, but I have been contented, and in the airy tapestry of my dreams have I embroidered ten thousand times just such a scene as this. Each day at that time, when you were accustomed to come, I sought my stool here beside the screen, waited, and now you have come as I knew you would.”

Impulsively she knelt down beside him and in the gathering dusk soon one figure could not be distinguished from the other.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GROTTO OF THE SLEEPLESS DRAGON

FEW spectacles are ever given for man to witness more melancholy than the dissolution of an ancient dynasty; an end inevitably tragic and often leaving its solemn sign, as did the dissipation of the Mings, forever upon the people.

For two centuries and a half had this family of the acolyte ruled over a wide portion of earth and then did it go out, tragically, but in a manner befitting a dynasty whose past had been so filled with greatness.

When Tongshing—the last of his race to rule from the Dragon Throne—found that the east gate of his capital was invested by besieging armies, he retraced his steps to the Palace and sounded the gong to summon his courtiers. None appeared. Then alone with the eunuch, Wen Chenan, the old monarch sought his favourite spot on Wansui Hill, and there beneath its solitary tree wrote this, his final protest:

“For seventeen years I have reigned from the Dragon Throne and now even rebels come to in-

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sult me in my capital. Evidently this is a punishment sent by Heaven. But I am not alone guilty. My ministers are worse than myself. They have ruined me by concealing the true condition of affairs.

“With what countenance shall I after death be able to appear before my forefathers? You, who have brought me to this unhappy end, take my body and hack it to pieces. I shall not protest. But spare my people and refrain from doing them injury.”

Then this old man, who was a monarch, hung himself on the solitary juniper tree.

After the Emperor's death the Ming officials in the south of China crowned one kinsman after another as his successor, but each, oppressed by the curse of his race, died in a manner not less tragic than the melancholy end of Tongshing. In the course of this Imperial extinction the choice at last fell upon the Prince Yu Ngao, who was proclaimed Emperor in the old city of Yingching.

Shortly after Yu Ngao had been crowned the city was besieged by the Manchus and captured on the 26th of November, 1650, more than one-half million of its inhabitants perishing in the assault. It was supposed that upon this day the young Emperor also died, but such was not the case, for on the night before the final attack, the Emperor and three hundred of his most devoted followers,

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taking with them the Imperial treasure, escaped from the city by means of a water-gate situated between the Gate of Eternal Rest and the southwest corner of the city walls, through which a large canal runs from the river into the city.

It was the intention of the fugitives to make their way into Kwangsi and join the Ming forces in that Province; their flight being up the Chu Kiang to the North River, thence to the Lien Chau River and across the mountains into Kwangsi. But after the capture of the city, their escape being discovered, a large force set out in pursuit, the fugitives having but one day and two nights' start. On arriving at the gorge of the Blind Boy, less than one-third the distance of their journey, they found themselves but a half day's march ahead of their pursuers and feeling that the end had come they selected for their last stand a high shelf of rock in the mouth of the gorge.

From this point, looking up the cañon, there is seen with great distinctness on a perpendicular wall of rock about two hundred feet above the water, the "Blind Boy," which gives the gorge its name. Looking at the image from this angle, the form, features and sad blind expression of the eyes is vividly seen. The Emperor with his little army standing upon this high shelf peering through the purple shadows of this great gorge perceived the image of the Blind Boy and as they looked—it is

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so related—the eyes opened and gazed benignly, Buddha-like, down upon them. Then as the eyes closed slowly and reluctantly a peasant appeared upon the shelf and prostrating himself before the Emperor begged to lead him to a place of safety. Receiving imperial sanction he took the force by a circuitous route above the gorge to a cavern whose secret recesses were apparently alone known to him.

Yu Ngao's small regiment had scarcely arrived in the vicinity of the cavern when their tireless foe appeared. It was with difficulty that part of the men defended the approach until the Emperor and the remainder of his force, carrying the imperial treasure, retired in safety. Again and again the enemy attempted to capture the cavern but owing to the ease of its defence they were repulsed. After a number of months' close watch they attacked again. This time there was no combat and they entered—entered to be seen no more.

Years passed and other forces went into the cavern, to return never. After this, during long intervals of time, adventurous persons have gone in to search for the great treasure, but none of them by man were ever seen again.

Thus the people call this the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon and—avoid it. They have surrounded it with a halo of mysticism and a semi-sacredness clings to it. The country around

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abounds with marvellous tales told of its dragon, which guards, sleepless and relentless, its treasure of gold and jade, of pearls and priceless rubies, until again the Mings shall come to their own.

The word holds no more wonderful scene than when after having ascended a fjord that opens into the North River, and upon whose jade-green waters the sun shines but a moment each day, a turn is made and this marvellous white precipice rises overhead sheer out of the water. Four caves are to be seen half-veiled with vines and from out of a great fissure a third way up the cliff falls a cataract in a broad, heavy sheet of glittering silver. When it strikes against the rocks, it then comes down like snow or is blown upward a veiling mist. These falls are broken four times by projecting shelves, the last drop being the longest. Just below the second shelf to the right of the falls and almost invisible from the stream are stone steps cut diagonally across the face of the cliff, beginning in some shrubs and disappearing under the falling waters, while above them hangs a rusted chain suspended in two long folds. Under this projecting shelf, hid by the veil of waters, entered by these stone steps and rusted chain, is the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon.

The formation of the cliff is a calciferous, conglomerate mass of fantastic beauty. The upper

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right hand side has the appearance of the façade of some vast age-eroded cathedral; serrated pinnacles and slender spires point skyward in irregular rising series. Here complete a flying buttress; there one half hid in ruins. In one place arches, in another cavernous recesses, that might have been windows; pillars, gargoyles and angels are scattered from top to bottom; while around each spire and buttress, arch and pillar, gargoyle and angel, twine crepe myrtle and festoons of vinnig, whose clusters of blossoms sweeten the air of the shadowed cañon.

These vines and cavities have become the homes of innumerable birds: doves, thrushes, cormorants and francolins, mimahs, kingfishers, owls, ospreys and eagles, while at dusk the hundred-footed fox and spirit-cat creep about its broken face, in and out of its columns and creepers.

One day these birds fluttered and screamed, the fox and spirit-cat peeped out of their dens for a boat had crept into their solitude and lingered in the emerald lake.

Presently two men got out of it, followed with difficulty the narrow, vine-covered path, crossed the stones and disappeared under the falling waters. All day the birds watched them go back and forth, bearing their loads into the cavern whence no man ever returns.

So the day passed and along toward the latter

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part of the afternoon one of the men went down to the boat and remained there, smoking peacefully. The other climbed up the face of the cliff until he reached a narrow shelf near the far end of the fissure from which the cataract burst. Bright little birds with blue wings and brown breasts, a-tilting on the vines, francolins perched on the crags or fluttering in circles, looked wonderingly at this man standing silently upon that perilous projection and gazing contentedly over the lower cliffs to the westward.

With the setting of the sun came the gorgeous afterglow of this latitude, burning the cloud banks above the purple-misted mountains with gold, alternating with amethyst and lilac and shafting over this solitude their exquisite hues and lavishing them unseen upon the man pressed against the cliff. At last a purple veil rose from the gorge: eagles and companies of ospreys soaring majestically above and below him now began to wheel, scream, poise, and dart. The spirit-cat and hundred-footed fox came to look at him, meditatively, fearlessly, knowingly, for it was dusk.

When the man clinging to the vines and the crags descended the birds returned to their accustomed roosts and night brooded gently over all.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROPITIATION OF THE GODS OF THE WATERS

AMONG the festivals of Southern China none is more popular than the Propitiation of the Gods of the Waters, which takes place during the spring and autumn in villages and cities bordering on the Chu Kiang estuary and the wild ocean banks of the Southern Sea; for these cities and towns have their boats with fathers, husbands and sons scattered over many waters and depend for their sustenance as well as life upon the mercy of the Gods of the Deep.

Contrary to most festivals, this is a festivity of the night. Besides calls, feasting, and the usual merriment of such occasions, it is marked by the procession of the Dragon and an illumination of lanterns.

The Dragon, which is taken through the streets on this night, symbolises the Monarch of the Deep, and is from fifty to a hundred and fifty feet long. This monster, made of silk and covered with glittering scales of gilt is carried by men concealed within it. During the procession it goes through

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all of the evolutions of its kind; coiling, wriggling, creeping, gliding; every so often darting out its monstrous glaring head after a huge sea-pearl frisked teasingly in front of it. It draws up in rolls, moves in long silken undulations, squirms, twists, lolls, sometimes springing at the spectators. Preceding and following the Dragon are carried enormous models of fish: sharks, perch, whales, pompano, sea-eels, an endless number; gorgeous, gleaming, shaking in the sea of the night their fins and tails of fire.

But what is best in this Feast of the Night are its lanterns; nowhere are people so skilful in making these dainty ornaments of darkness as are the men of this land. Their variety of form, colouring, elegant carving and gilding exceed description; while the strange but delightful taste, the infinite pains and ingenuity that are exercised in their construction are beyond comparison. They are made from paper, silk, horn, glass, cloth, bamboo, and raffia. Their variety of shapes and decorations are without end; round, square, melon-shaped, gourd-shaped, melons squared, gourds squared, pentagoned, hexagoned, octagoned and all the other goneds; birds, beasts, official fans and umbrellas, flowers, fish, miniature pagodas, phoenixes, unicorns, and turtles; all the creatures of heaven and earth, of mythology and man's creation, coloured, blazoned, gilded, tasselled, charac-

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tered, swaying and quivering. Such are the lights that swing in the night winds of the spring and autumn.

Some lanterns are no larger than goose eggs; some are like magnificent chandeliers, twenty feet in diameter, while others, as the Tsao-ma Kong, are even more elaborate.

The ingenuity exercised in the construction of this latter kind is almost incomprehensible. The inanimate lives. Currents of hot air generated by lights set innumerable figures in motion; vessels spread their sails and move slowly or rapidly over undulating seas; fields are ploughed by water-oxen and rice-planted; great concourses of people move by and horses race along with chariots; armies manœuvre and retreat; kings and princes with their retinues come and go; there are dances and theatrical performances, comedies and tragedies, while innumerable other scenes of life pass before the bewildered sight as transient and fleeting as life itself—vanishing when the candle sputters and goes out.

The day of the Propitiation of the Gods of the Waters came at last, though youths, jugglers, thieves, gamins, a priest, a wife, and in fact a whole city had waited impatiently, almost angrily, for its coming. The morning of this autumn day dragged tediously along; noon came and the hours succeeding grew more expectant and breathless.

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Other than the occasional firing of a cracker and the whoop of urchins, the afternoon had remained silent. But as evening progressed merry sounds increased; jugglers, mountebanks and actors amused the crowds in every available space; gongs were beaten, music played and as darkness settled over the city lanterns began to glimmer from every projection, from ridge-poles, balconies and carved fantastic eaves. Windows oval, square, and oblong glowed with brilliancy, while fronts of houses, whimsically carved and emblazoned with signs of lacquer and gold, were ablaze with profusion of lanterns. In the throngs moving hither and thither each possessed some kind of a light; a silken, tasselled, emblazoned lantern, a shimmer of horn or flare of torch.

During the first hours of darkness the uproar of music, gongs, brat-whoops and crackers was incessant, but eventually, as the lanterns began to flicker and go out, the roar grew less and less.

The park of Tai Lin rested in this sea of light and storm-din an island of solitude; dark, peaceful, lit only by the stars and the glimmer of surrounding lights, noised only by the roar without, and by the music of waters gurgling in their pools and rivulets, tumbling over rocks and tiny precipices; murmuring, soothing, slumbering.

Out into this solitude the wife crept during the second hour after darkness. She left the palace

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from a western court, known as the Court of Sunset. Turning to her right she skirted along the west granite terrace that overhung the lotus pond. Along this she hastened until she came to the steps leading down upon the lawn. Then she stopped, turned back and with her little hands clasped upon her bosom, gazed intently at the home she intended leaving forever. Trembling she went down from the terrace and crossed the lawn overspread with great banians and wutung trees. As she moved cautiously, hesitatingly along under their shadows every voice of night conspired to startle her; deer coming from out of their covert, a bird-sigh, the night-wind's swish or a leaf falling at her feet caused her to shrink back or brought a smothered cry from her lips. It was a stealth full of fear to her, but she went bravely on though trembling, shuddering, sometimes ceasing to breathe. She came to the miniature hills on the west and hastened through them, past pagodas scattered on all sides; pagodas that clung to the edge of precipices and overhung her path like impending traps; others loomed up suddenly before her in the darkness of little gorges, while some as gigantic beasts watched her from clumps of trees. When she passed through the bamboo groves beyond the fluttering of startled birds caused her to fly with fear over their gravelled paths. From the bamboo groves she followed a little rivulet

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agurgle under an avenue of swishing willows and whenever a fish splashed in the waters she clung to the willows, trembling and uncertain. At the source of the stream in the miniature mountains of rock she turned to her left across a grassy starlit meadow, where the noise of revelry sounded plainly upon the night air. West of this meadow rose blackly before her the forest hiding the western wall. Peering into the forbidding shadows of its pines she hesitated, looked over the meadow so bright under the starlight and glimmer of surrounding sea of lanterns, then breathless, with an heavy hand upon her shoulder, she entered its gloomy precincts.

The wall surrounding the park on all sides was some twelve feet high, the top strewn with splintered glass imbedded in cement. The bottom being about three feet in thickness, caused the small iron-postern recessed close to the ground to be hardly noticeable even in daytime. So when the wife reached the wall and not coming directly upon the postern she did not know which way to turn. Groping along toward the southern end she went away from it, and when she crept back to where she left the wood, her breath came in little gasps. When she stopped she trembled so that she could scarcely stand.

Suddenly her hand went into a recess—it was the postern—not far from the wall's north end.

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Taking a key from a purse hanging to her girdle she inserted it and then—sank down upon the ground and cried. She sobbed, shuddered and laughed; she smiled and cried at the same time. One listening could not have told whether it was laughter crying, or sobs laughing. There was no bitterness in her tears, no joy in her mirth. If asked, she could not have told whether she were gay or sad; whether she thought of the man waiting, waiting, restlessly just beyond the wall or an old man slumbering happily in the palace behind her. Finally she got up, turned the key, shoved open the postern, then sat down upon the threshold and should have cried again had not the Breton, waiting since the beginning of darkness nearby the gate, came and touched her shyly upon the shoulder. She looked up and in an instant her face was illumined with radiant smiles; the world around her with all of its terrors and dangers was now unseen, unheard. Reaching up her hand she rested it timidly upon his arm; looking up into his face she laughed, gently, doubtfully, yet reassuringly.

A short way down the street a sedan waited, and thither the Breton led her. The bearers, lifting the chair lightly on their shoulders, started off, the Breton on one side, the man Tsang on the other. They moved uncertainly through the narrow tortuous streets, some black and empty and along these

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they hastened. Others ablaze with lights were filled with slow-moving crowds and deafened by all the noises of this night and along these they moved with difficulty. Not far from the Magistracy of Kwanghoi they came to a street half-dim with flickering lanterns and in which were but few pedestrians. Being half-lighted and yet deserted gave the bearers an opportunity to increase their speed to the utmost, and even in passing right-angled streets they did not alter their gait.

Suddenly an official green-sedan followed by a retinue turned the corner. The men that should have preceded and announced its approach had, owing to the density of the crowds in an adjoining street, been forced back to its side. And in the collision, which was unavoidable, owing to the speed of the wife's bearers, the green-sedan was overthrown, the head of its occupant striking the pavement through the side window.

Hardly a moment elapsed before the two sedans, their bearers and retinues were surrounded by a crowd of men and of boys. This crowd, deciphering the official name on the tablets borne by members of his retinue, at once began their abuse.

It was a wild scene. Around the sedan and official, who sat dazed on the pavement—a bundle of red satin and gold—huddled his frightened retinue with torches and trembling lanterns, while about

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them laughed and yelped and glowered this crowd of the night.

“Is it a man or a woman?” chirped an imp.

“It is a general!”

“What! He looks like a midwife.”

Everybody now began, heeding no one, listening to no one, but pouring forth that abuse that is heaped by all people upon masters cowed before the terror of numbers.

A Chinese mob is peculiar, though they are innocent of the fact. Just what it is going to do is uncertain; like sea-waves, it depends upon the way some little gust blows. Truculent, docile, smiling, sombre, gay, and destructive—such are they in almost as many minutes. At once childishly curious, peering, chattering, laughing; then taciturn, gloomy, defiant and over whom broods a scowl that is terrible. They never know just what is coming, whether it will be laughter or annihilation. They delight in this uncertainty and their victims cringe before it.

“I don’t believe it is a he.”

“What! don’t you see the Golden Lion on his breast?”

“Beasts often mount the breasts of women.”

“Do you know,” howled a voice authoritatively, “that more generals are killed by falling from sedans than in battle?”

“They are so fat.”

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“ And so soft.”

“ Whoever noticed what things follow them?”

“ Leeches!”

“ Lice!”

“ Sores!”

“ Vermin!”

“ Toads!”

“ Offal!”

“ Somebody help the woman-general up.”

“ Dust his skirts.”

“ Wipe off the spit.”

The officer rose with difficulty, purple, speechless. His retinue fell back terror-stricken, and the bearers of the wife's sedan skipped nimbly away. His rage, however, only gave new impetus to the crowd's joy. They yelped, groaned, sighed and begged piteously for someone to help the officer get mad.

“ It is a known fact,” rose a howl above the rest, “ that a general can never get in a rage.”

“ Poke him!”

“ Punch him!”

The crowd was getting dangerous. A silence fell upon it.

“ Get the general his fan; he is going now.”

The danger passed and once more the crowd was full of amused wonder as the official glaring around, suddenly pounces upon the wife's sedan. Encouraged and jeered on by the crowd's boister-

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ous hoots, he reached in and grabbed the wife by the arm, but as she rose out of her sedan his hand fell.

The crowd became as still as solitude itself—a silence of swaying lanterns and glare of torch. For a long time in this perfect stillness the mob looked breathlessly upon her, then there went over them a soft whispering sound that might have been a sigh. At this sound the officer, who had fallen back astonished, muttered so that those around him heard:

“Tai Lin’s wife.”

As he spoke she tossed her head disdainfully, reaching out her hand to the Breton, who stood bewildered beside her, taking hold of his arm and with calm, scornful hauteur shining in her eyes, she walked slowly past the officer. The mob fell back as she approached, leaving a lane through their centre; and at the end of this terrible passage of lights and faces Tsang joined them. Seizing the arm of the Breton he whispered:

“Hurry!”

A short distance down the street he led them into a doorway, passed up some steps along a black corridor; down other steps, into a court, across this through another passage, thence out into a street. As they gained this thoroughfare they heard a dull cry:

“A priest has stolen Tai Lin’s wife!”

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“ Kill him ! ”

“ Close the gates ! ”

“ We must run,” cried Tsang.

The Breton looked down at the wife and said, softly:

“ I will carry you.”

Smilingly as a child she lifted her hands to him and he picked her up in his arms.

The two men ran with all their speed along this black alley of a street until Tsang suddenly disappeared through a doorway. The flight now lay through corridors like tunnels and courts like abysses. In the neighbouring streets they could hear dully the wild cries of their pursuers, mingled with crash of gongs, cymbals, blare of music and explosion of crackers. In leaving one labyrinth of corridors, tunnels, stairs, and pits they crossed narrow streets or continued along them for a short distance only again to disappear into depths, which would have been appalling had they not been welcome.

These by-streets that they crossed were mostly dark; even in those where lanterns swayed most of the lights had flickered or gone out. So that their flight was as through some strange and terrible cavern; strange because it consisted of doorways, passages, courts, cellars, stairs, and streets; brick, stone, mud, and sky; terrible because all of this had been dug out and piled up by man, the same

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wild ferocious beast who now hunted and bayed in the distance.

Fortunately the man Tsang had also spent his gamin days in this same monstrous labyrinth and he knew all of its intricacies, its short cuts and secrets, its pits, stinks, and tunnels.

"We may reach the Gate of Virtue before it closes—if Fate wills it," he mumbled nonchalantly. "If not——" He did not finish. As they started to emerge from a doorway he stopped them.

"The Gate is near here. I will see if it is closed."

The Breton did not reply nor move out of the doorway. The wife snuggled happily on his shoulder. Neither seemed to know that they were out in the night, pursued with hardly a chance to escape; to-night darkness and joy; to-morrow light and death.

The wild echoes of the chase drew nearer.

Sometimes the wife lifted her head slightly, only to nestle more tightly upon his shoulder, more closely against his neck. Had someone said, "Where are you?" the Breton could not have answered. And had Tsang not returned they would have remained under the doorway until awakened by the elbowing mobs of day.

"The Gate is closed. Such is Fate," said a voice coming unconcernedly out of the darkness. "They are all closed," the voice continues serenely.

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“Thus Fate lights. Who can escape? Who can escape? In a little while it will all be over. Hiyah!” and Tsang sat down on the threshold.

The smile did not go away from the Breton's lips: the wife did not cease to nestle contentedly upon his shoulder.

Suddenly Tsang sprang to his feet, gave a few dramatic cavorts, and then shaking the Breton vigorously by the arm, cries:

“They will never think of the Water-gate. Such is Fate—come!”

Unhesitatingly the Breton followed, carrying his precious burden. Again their flight skirted a maze of lanterns still glowing in the principal streets, then stumbled along through bewildering labyrinths of blackness; beholding for an instant a starry thread of sky, then plunging underground.

They emerged upon a canal, which at their feet looked like an abyss, while in other parts it reflected charmingly the gay lanterns swaying from slipper boats; swinging, dangling rhythmically to the sinuous movements of the gondoliers.

“Sampan!” called Tsang in a matter-of-fact voice.

“Hi! Hi!” shouted several simultaneously.

“Three people to the Gardens.”

“That is a long way,” they commented.

“I could walk there in twenty minutes if it were land.”

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"But it isn't land," they joyfully responded.

"How much?" he continued unconcernedly.

"I am busy and ought not to stop and waste my time talking," answered one.

"I have an all night engagement," added another.

"I was just going to moor my boat," interjected a third, "but since you are in difficulty, I will stop and give you some advice."

"How much?" repeated Tsang.

"This is our Great Feast night," remarked one.

"That is so," chimed in the other two.

From the distance came the inarticulate baying of men.

"How much?" reiterated Tsang wearily.

"Do you hear him ask how much?" cried one turning surprisedly to the others.

"How strange!" they commented.

"It was eight mace, but having a knowledge of benevolence, we have reduced it to seven mace three candareens," added the first speaker.

"Do you think I am a fool or a hill-man?" demanded Tsang with scorn.

"How will you go to the Gardens?" they chorused derisively.

"We will not go," he answered, moving back from the bank.

"I will be benevolent," cried one, suddenly

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moving his boat past the others, "and take you for six mace, four——"

"Six mace, three candareens."

"Six mace, two——" bellowed the third, trying to get his boat nearer.

Tsang paid no attention to them and the price was howled lower and lower.

"Five mace," yelled the first, and without a word Tsang jumped into his boat. The Breton and the wife sat down in the middle of the sampan and drew over them the curved bamboo roof. As the boat shot out into the canal it was followed by a vituperative volley from the others.

Tsang stood by the boatman urging him on.

"There is a riot," he whispered, "and all the gates have been closed except the Water-gate. But don't think we are going to pay just to go there. Only when we——"

From distant streets came cries:

"Down with the Water-gate! Down with the Water-gate!"

The Breton and the wife sat in the darkness under the bamboo canopy. Neither had spoken nor ceased to smile. Never in their lives had they thought of anything so happy as this night journey.

The Water-gate loomed up before Tsang and the boatman; they could see the lanterns swaying on the eaves of its guardhouse. Plainly now came the cries:

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“Down with the Water-gate!”

The pursuers were gaining.

Strenuously the boatman bent to his long oar; his breath came in hoarse gasps and the perspiration running from his face shone in the lantern's light. The sinews in his arms and bared back swelled, knotted, quivered, strained. Tsang stood by reiterating that if he did not get through the gate he would not get to the Gardens, and how then would it be possible to get the five mace? So the boatman swayed back and forth the great oar with all his strength, and the sampan, trembling, shot sinuously forward.

The baying of men drew nearer, and as they darted under the bridge which spanned the canal in front of the Water-gate, they saw the guards running out of neighbouring towers and mount the ramparts.

The cavernous exit loomed before them. And as the quivering boat darted under the tower, they heard above them commands, cries, and the creaking of chains.

From a boat by night this exit of the Water-gate looks like a monstrous maw, and the portcullis outlined by the lights of the suburbs appear as its jagged, gigantic teeth. And these teeth Tsang and the boatman saw move above them and heard their grind. But under the bamboo canopy there were still smiles, smiles by no means lost in

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the blackness. These two were blissful under the very crunch of Fate's teeth. As the boat glided forward under the impulse of its own momentum they were unconscious of a great splash just behind them and cries that the gate was down.

The boatman, panting, rested momentarily on his oar, then without a word continued along the dark, winding course until the river was reached. Here was a mass of boats, which seemed limitless, an interminable tangle and barrier. But as the sampan approached the gondolier shouted out his strange cries and a narrow lane parted to let his boat creep through, while unconcernedly he accepted the railing and scolding of the old boatwomen.

The sampan pushed out into the current of the great river and the gondolier turned its bow upstream.

"Cross over to the south bank," commanded Tsang.

"The Gardens are on the north bank."

"I have changed my mind. I wish to go to a friend's boat."

So they crossed the river, and the boatman, following Tsang's directions, brought up beside a fair-sized river craft anchored in the outer ring of boats that lined the bank.

No sooner has the Breton and the wife seated themselves under the bamboo in their new boat,

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still smiling and silent, than Tsang raised the mat-sail and under the impetus of the river wind, their vessel moved along the westward against the Chu Kiang's rolling, gloomy flood.

The river upon this night presented an appearance fantastic yet beautiful. Its population seemed greater than that of the city, for its whole surface was covered by a myriad of boats; some built as birds, some as fishes; others as houses richly ornamented and resplendent with carved and gilded work. On all of these strange craft moving restlessly about were hung unnumbered lanterns. As they passed in and out amongst each other these brilliant lights of every colour, fancy and shape, swaying, quivering, dancing, turned night's gloom—which broods so cumbrously upon this river—into a fluttering, iridescent day, while from flower-boats, bazaars, and gondolas came incessant strains of music, the song and laughter of women.

Suddenly over the laughter of this night there fell upon the ears of Tsang, as he sat on the high poop with the tiller in his hand, a dull roar, a baying of multitudes that came from the city.

“Fate alone knows,” he muttered.

A turn southward and the lights vanished: in a short time the sounds of revelry and that growl from the city were heard no more. About, all was darkness other than here and there a light on the

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banks and stars shining kindly overhead. No voice was heard but the monologue of the river and occasionally the nasal song of a river-man whose wild and melancholy tones echoed from bank to bank.

Thus they journeyed on to the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PROPITIATION OF THE GODS OF THE WATERS—CONTINUED

IN the southern suburbs, almost under the shadow of the city walls and midway between the Dragon Gate on the right and the Great Bamboo Gate on the left, once stood a Lodge of the Tien Tu Hin, generally known as the Guild Hall of the Merchants of Kiang, since it is the custom of merchants from the same locality to have their guilds where they meet for business and pleasure. So this custom, beneficial in more ways than one, was made to serve as an excuse—a protection to the children of the Deluge Family.

The buildings of the Lodge—or Guild Hall—were surrounded by an high wall having a granite gateway on the street parallel with the city walls connected the two thoroughfares that extended through the Gates of the Dragon and the Great Bamboo. Between the entrances and the buildings was a wide court paved with granite slabs, while a number of banyan trees half hid in their foliage the many buildings of granite, glazed brick, and curved dragon eaves, separated by a series of courts and connected with corridors. The main en-

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trance opposite the gateway was reached by a broad flight of steps flanked by two bronze lions. In the first buildings of this Guild Hall were reception and smoking rooms, libraries, offices, and other apartments necessary to such an association. But back of these, beyond another court, stood other buildings, windowless and forbidding, where unknown chambers held in their darkened recesses the secrets and terrors of the Tien Tu Hin.

As it happened the night of the Propitiation of the Gods of the Waters fell on the night of initiation in this secret lodge on the street of Changsha. So just about the same hour when the wife was creeping fearfully through the still, dark park, others of mankind were slinking along through the shadows of the city walls and vanishing under the granite gate.

It was a strange gathering that slunk under the portals of that gloomy entrance: men in long silken robes, men in rags; merchants, thieves, sailors, scholars, artisans, soldiers, pirates. Men with soft white hands, pale faces and delicate in their courtesies, mingled brotherly with others almost black from storms and exposure; brawny, brusque, sombre, ferocious.

After the second hour of darkness had passed the outer gates were closed; and when the ponderous doors at the top of the Lion steps had been bolted, a gong sounded hoarsely from some un-

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known depths and before its deep echoes had ended this motley congregation of men standing about talking, smoking, disappeared, utterly vanished, so that there was not to be seen in all the Guild Hall man, rag, nor robe.

Presently the gong mumbled again; slowly, measuredly, five times this gong sounded, and as suddenly as they had vanished there sprang out of recesses, crevices and walls fecundite, a new race of men. When they disappeared they had had queues and shaven heads, now they came forth without them and about their crowns were turbans of red silk. A wild medley of satins and tatters had gone into the hidden places, but there came out an assembly all gorgeous in the antique robes of the Mings, so that it could not now be known who had come in rags, who in silks.

Again cymbals crashed, and the assembly arranged itself by twos other than at the head, and there one man marched alone, preceded by guards carrying upright heavy double-edged swords. This man, who walked alone, was the Great Elder Brother—the Grand Master of the Lodge. Behind him followed the Incense Master and Instructor; then the Third Elder Brother and Champion, after whom came the General of the Van and the Red Club; these were followed by the Five Generals, the Tiger Generals, the Eight Guards, the Iron Soles and members.

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Slowly, solemnly, in time with the dirge-like booming of gongs and crash of cymbals the procession moved out of the first buildings, along the corridors flanking the court and disappeared through an opening beyond. After passing through a number of chambers and corridors they came to an entrance before which stood guards with drawn swords. The Guards preceding the Great Elder Brother stood face to face before them and then silently exchanged swords. They now entered the first anteroom, at the far end of which was another guarded door. Again the same solemn transfer of swords was gone through with, and the procession passed on into the second anteroom where, as before, swords were passed and the Great Elder Brother led the way into the third anteroom, at the far end of which were two iron doors. As the guards pulled these back there opened before them a huge Hall of Shadows.

The appearance of this Hall was such as to inspire terror. Just beyond the doors, extending their whole width, stretched a fiery moat, out of which flames leaped and crackled; in its depths the heat glowed white and green. Across this burning ditch, through the middle of the doorway, was a bridge of two planks, one copper, the other iron—symbolic of the bridge thrown down by the Immortal Tahtsunye and by which the Five Patriarchs escaped from Shaolintze. Over this

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bridge hung an arch of pendent swords glowing and quivering with the heat that rose from the furnace below. The only lights in the Hall—unless the stars are numbered—were the ditch of fire and in the centre two iron racks, where blazed bundles of fagots and which gave an uncertain enormity to the shadows within. On the sides were cavernous openings, in the floor abysses. The ceiling other than over the fiery ditch and fagots, was also full of uncertain shadows. In the far left-hand corner, hardly perceptible in this glaring dust, glowed like a blinking eye a taper on the Shrine of the God of War. Opposite in the darkness of the right-hand corner beamed another eye on the Altar of the Goddess of Mercy. Then there was the taper of the God of Earth and five tapers on the Shrines of the Five Patriarchs.

In the centre of the hall but beyond the braziers of fagots stood the Great Shrine, flanked on the left by a representation of Kaochi Temple—where the Five Patriarchs met the founder of the Deluge Family, Chen Chinan, and on the right by a miniature nine-story pagoda. In front of the Great Shrine was a lesser altar on which were placed the symbols of the Tien Tu Hin: symbols that have been revered by countless millions for nearly two centuries and a half—symbols the world may dread. On the smaller altar lay a stone incense vessel engraved with four large characters, Fuh

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Tsing, Fa Ming. In the centre was a Peck of Rice known as Muyangfu, in which were stuck the flags of the Five Grand Sections of the Deluge Family and the banner of the Commander-in-chief. On one side was placed a Red Club, having a phoenix engraved on one end and a dragon on the other.

On each corner of the altar stood a dwarf Cedar and Pine tree, symbolical of fidelity in oaths. Between them, ranged alternately on each side of the Muyangfu, was a red lamp to discern the True from the False; a seven-starred broadsword indicating that by the sword the Manchus will succumb and the Mings be restored; a Rule by which men can measure their conduct; a Pair of Scales to weigh Ming against Tsing, the True against the Traitors; an Abacus to reckon the time for their destruction; a Mirror, as was handed down by Nu Wo, to show who are good and who are evil; a White Fan for calling together the members of the Deluge Family; a Pair of Scissors for ripping open the black clouds that obscure the Ming sky; and finally a huge double-edged sword by which the disobedient and traitorous are put to death. The roof in front of the shrine and between the braziers was open and the stars shone down into shadows filled with terror; into that silence where man broods.

Silently the procession entered this vast hall,

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which at one time had appeared to them all as a colossal deep of doom. The Great Elder Brother, the Incense Master and Instructor took their places before the Great Shrine, the other officers ranging themselves in order to the rear.

Solemnly the Grand Master lifted up the Peck of Rice called Muyangfu, and as he placed it on the Greater Shrine the officers behind him chanted their mystic verses. Then in the same manner he raised the Tripod, the Abacus, the Mirror, the Pine and Cedar trees, the Scales and Discerning Lamp, the White Fan and Cloud-Ripping Scissors. After all the symbols had been placed on the Great Altar, and the Incense Master had lighted the incense in the Stone Tripod and before each tablet of the Five Patriarchs, the whole assembly fell on their knees, chanting a requiem mysterious, known to none but them.

The Great Elder Brother now took his seat under the open space in the roof, so that the Eyes of Heaven could look down upon him and see that his acts were just. The Incense Master sat on his left; the Instructor on his right; then the Third Elder Brother on the left of the Incense Master; the Champion on the right of the Instructor; thus they arranged themselves: the General of the Van, the Red Club, the Five Generals and Tiger Generals, the Eight Guards and the Iron Soles, while at the end of the iron and copper

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bridge, under the arch of pendant swords, stood other guards. The whole assembly was arranged in the form of a crescent, the Great Elder Brother being in the centre, behind him the Great Shrine, on his right and left the braziers of fagots, before him the fiery moat; above—the stars of Heaven.

In the first anteroom waited the uninitiated, dressed in rough clothing, their queues unplaited and their shoes removed. The Guards stationed at the entrance of the second anteroom demanded of them why they came, and they replied that they understood soldiers were wanted and they came to enlist.

The Guards demanded who asked them to come, and they replied that they came on their own accord.

The sponsors of the candidates now led them into the second anteroom, where the guards demanded whence they came, and to which they replied: "From the East." The names of their sponsors were taken and the Guards warned them that they would have dangers and hardships to endure; that the food they were to eat would be three parts rice and seven parts sand, to which they replied:

“ Yu sha, king sha, wu sha king kiang ”—“ if there is sand we will farm it; if there is no sand, we will farm waves.”

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In the third anteroom the Guards asked them this terrible conundrum:

“Which is harder, the sword or your necks?”

They answered: “Our necks.”

The jackets of the candidates were unbuttoned, their right arms and shoulders bared and five lighted tapers of incense placed in their hands.

The General of the Van advanced and conducted them, walking on their knees, to the inner door, where he addressed the Guards:

“Guards of the Inner Portal, inform the Incense Master that the General of the Van conducts recruits to join our army and swear brotherhood. They desire to take Deluge for their family name, and may it please the Incense Master to pray before the Shrine of the Five Patriarchs that they may gaze down upon us and approve.”

The Guards replied that the Five Patriarchs commanded Tien Yu Hung to enter.

The General of the Van passed through the Inner Portal, across the fiery moat and addressed the Incense Master, upon which ensued an endless, mystic dialogue, sometimes sounding like the chatter of children; sometimes like the ominous muttering of thunder. It was occult, inane, full of wonderful and dreadful meaning, cabalistic, ridiculous, terrifying—all depending upon who listened. The sizzling of a fuse is amusing to a child; to an old soldier—death.

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The long mysterious debate was at last brought to a close by the Incense Master ordering the General of the Van to bring the candidates upon the bridge.

The doors were thrown open and the recruits led—still walking on their knees—through the entrance.

At the sight of the burning moat they drew back, cringing one upon another, but as the General of the Van advanced they shuffled after him, the tapers trembling in their hands. When their guide reached the other end of the bridge he stopped and they were obliged to remain crouching on the planks of copper and iron; below them a furnace, above an arch of swords shuddering in the heat waves, scintillating, threatening.

The Incense Master advanced toward them and, crossing his arms on his breast, uttered this prayer:

“O Imperial Heaven, O Sovereign Earth, Ye Spirits of Fire; Ye Spirits of Hills and Streams, and Land and Veins of the Earth: Ye Five Dragon Spirits of the Five Regions: Lin Ting, Lui Chia, Spirits Attendant, and all Ye Holy Spirits that wander through endless space, draw near to us, we entreat!

“Since Fuh created this Earth all has prospered, and what the Ancients knew they have given down

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to succeeding ages. This knowledge we have received, we are about to impart.

“Patriots now hang on the Bridge over Fires. They have come to swear to Ye, O Imperial Heaven, that they will live and die together. That they pledge brotherhood forever, considering sincerity the basis; kindness and righteousness the Ruling Principles; filial love and obedience above all.

“O Ye Five Spirits, throw down into the fire those that would to-night bring discord or treason into our midst. Let those that hang on the bridge know that no distinction of mine or thine can be allowed here.

“To-night we will kneel in front of the Incense Tripod and cleanse our hearts, mix our blood, swallow the mingled blood-drinking oath, and swear to live and die for our brotherhood—immutable as the hills and seas.

“Those that obey shall prosper; those that are disobedient shall perish. Those that assist their country in establishing Universal Peace shall be ennobled for a thousand ages; but those that are traitors shall die beneath the sword and their race become extinct.

“O Fuh Teh, Protector of the people and famed eternally for thy divine benevolence; and Ye, O Chung I, the ten thousand ages hero, the Recruiter and Commander of the valiant, we are now by

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order of the Five Patriarchs about to swear brotherhood in the blood-testing oath of our society. May Ye Gods in your wisdom and power make clear to these newcomers that it matters not what is their human relationship, all are born anew in the Deluge.

“Again, O Fuh Teh and Chung I, and all ye Intelligent and Discerning Gods, we humbly beseech you to look down upon us while we take the Thirty-six Oaths to manifest the truthfulness of our hearts.”

The candidates on the bridge, swaying back and forth, crouched and clung to one another. Panting for breath, great streams of perspiration ran from their faces and shoulders, their eyes bulged and rolled. Almost overcome by the heat and fumes that rose around them, each appeared about to topple off into the furnace.

The delay was not yet ended.

When the Incense Master ceased his prayer two Iron Soles stepped forward and received from him a scroll of yellow paper about six feet long by two broad, on which were written the Thirty-six Oaths. One of the Iron Soles knelt on his right knee and held one corner in his right hand, while the other knelt on his left knee and held the other corner with his left hand.

The Incense Master and members knelt.

During the silence that followed there pene-

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trated into this chamber of fire and shadows a roar, rumbling, subsiding. Only the men on the bridge did not hear this ominous growl.

Slowly, sombrely, the Incense Master read off the Thirty-six Oaths—and their thirty-six sentences of death. This finished, came a period of silence, then the members rose and the Iron Soles stepped forward and helped the candidates from the bridge. Some were almost unconscious, others glared stupidly about them.

The Iron Soles, leading, supporting, dragged them to the Incense Vessel before the Shrine of the Five Patriarchs, where each, as soon as able, inserted an incense taper into the vessel and repeated as best he could five verses. Removing their tapers from the Incense Vessel they dipped them into a bowl of water standing next to the tripod and as they were being extinguished repeated:

“May my life go out like the fire of these incense tapers if I prove a traitor to my oath!”

The Thirty-six Oaths were then placed in the Incense Vessel; the Incense Master took the basin and, repeating a ritual, dashed it upon the floor, whereupon all of the members repeated in unison, sonorous, ominous:

“May such be the fate of traitors.”

The Incense Master set fire to the Oaths and as the flames crept up the scroll there came again, nearer, louder, that distant growl.

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The Guards led the candidates beneath the opening through which shone the stars; a cock was brought, the head cut off, and its blood poured into the bowl in which the incense tapers had been extinguished. The Red Club now advanced, holding in one hand his huge weapon, in the other a flared, black blade. The two guards that preceded him seized one of the candidates and tore off his upper garments, leaving him naked to the waist.

The roar, now nearer, grumbled, muttered, then fell silent. But as the Red Club lifted his blade there came a terrific crash, followed by an overflow of wild noises such as man makes in his rage.

The knife hesitated.

The pent-up floods of the riot that had swollen to vast proportions after the cry had resounded over the city that Tai Lin's wife had been stolen by priests, burst almost simultaneously through the three southern gates and dashing, seeping through the suburban streets, converged toward the Mission. These dark streams, with flaming wave crests, gurgling with snarls, yelps and threats; frothing, eddying, scowling, soon filled the street of Changsha. One stream had burst out of the Dragon Gate, another out of the gate of the Great Bamboo, and the overflow of these two torrents came together in front of Lodge of the Tien Tu Hin. The noise that rose when they came together was indescribable. It was a frightful splash of

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snarls and curses; a splatter of taunts and growls, while above all, distinguished by its persistency and vigour, rose a common howl:

“Kill the priests.”

When this uproar with its rage and strange silences fell upon the Children of the Deluge in their Chamber of Shadows, there was a general movement. Merchants became uneasy, fearful for their stores; thieves became desirous for plunder; soldiers to return to their posts; beggars to join the rabble; officials to their Yamens; pirates to their junks; silk robes to their mansions, but the rags would not return that night to their cellars.

The Great Elder Brother rose from his seat; Guards placed themselves in front of him; the Incense Master, the Instructor, followed by all others, took their places and the procession filed out over the bridge into the anteroom as solemnly and silently as it had entered.

The vast hall was empty. The fagots in the iron racks flamed, flickered, and went out. The fiery moat glowed white, green, lurid, then dark spots began to creep into it. After a while only the stars shone down into the Chamber of the World's Dread.

The overflow from the Dragon Gate, being less than that from the Great Bamboo, was pushed back until there was a general commingling, then the whole rushed unresistingly downward toward

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the river and westward toward the Mission. Other torrents, chafing, foaming, hurled themselves against the walls of their narrow channels in mad endeavour to reach the river's edge through the labyrinthine writhings of the suburban streets. Like floods restrained, it sometimes appeared as if they would overflow and surge straight down across the roof tops.

It was the rumble of these torrents just after they had burst through the city gates that the man Tsang had heard as he sat at the tiller. And had the wind not been strong or had there been no bend in the river, he would soon have heard a roar more ominous, more dreadful, as these torrents of howls poured into the basin surrounding the Mission.

The streets north and east of the Mission Compound were first filled, then on the west. And when all were overflowing, so that stragglers, trickling, seeping in, were being pushed back in the direction whence they came; these torrents churned, swirled, then surged out into the open space between the Mission and the river.

The Compound was surrounded, and the mob, as a sea, billowed and splashed against its walls. Like a great rock the Mission remained silent, with a gloomy hauteur, a scornful taciturnity, so that these waves only dashed against it to fall back upon themselves.

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There were many similarities between this encircling flood of man with wave crests of flame and roar of tongues to a sea of waters. For this sea, girdling, eddying around the granite base of that gloomy parallelogram, ocean-like, broke and spattered. It had its froth and its depths, its calms and murmurs; its terrors; its tides and ebbs and billows. Sometimes its fire-crests, like those in the Bay of Tai Wan, moved forward in uneven undulations, then hurled against the granite barriers, flowed back and merged with another tide. Again these waves met in such a manner as to form whirlpools or a single force like a waterspout, only here a howl and flame-spout would drive its way ruthlessly through the waves and, lashing itself momentarily against the walls, subside and mingle with the rest. This sea had its evaporations and its residue; it accumulated, eroded and dissipated. But it howled where the ocean rumbled, snarled where it roared, and where the sea of waters murmured this flood talked to itself—a childish, terrible monologue.

Said one wave to another:

“What are you here for?”

“I don’t know.”

“Will you kill?”

“Yes.”

“What is the trouble?” asked another.

“That is what we are going to find out.”

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"Isn't it enough to know that this place must be destroyed?"

"That is true."

"What else is there to do when these priests have stolen Tai Lin's wife?"

"Neighbour, I tell you they have vanished. Is it in accordance with reason to believe that they would wait?"

Where this sea eddied around the southwest corner of the Mission, the tumult of one wave rose sonorously above the rest.

"O Ye Men of the Middle Kingdom," roared this wave. "Ye who have trod its soil, breathed the air of its Imperial Heavens; ye who have eaten the herb of its fields and for a myriad ages have drunk the dew of its benevolence, how long are you going to let these sea-imps devour your women and children? How long are you going to let these Western devils who pretend to be priests deceive you? Skin them of their robes and you will find that they are bats and snakes, who smile but to devour.

"Did they not sneak into our Kingdom like night monsters—these proud priests of the Hungry God? Answer, ye doubters; ye women-men; ye disgraceful progeny of the Ancients. Whoever trembled before priests or gods until these pallid demons came? Did not then the peace-flower bloom in our gardens; the song of the phœnix

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make men's hearts harmonious? Who now does not fear the breath of these priests? Do they not get fat on destruction? Do they not steal the wives of our Great Men? Destroy towns and cities? O ye black-haired men of Han! O ye——”

“Why doesn't someone climb the wall?” demanded one wave of another.

“They have cauldrons inside and when one mounts the walls they take off the lids and the fumes cause——”

“How do you know?”

“Bah! It is easy to reason with a wise man, but to convince——”

“Throw stink-pots over the walls!”

“Get the pung-dongs!”

These cries were taken up and echoed on all sides.

In the middle of the open space between the Mission and the river—now filled by the mob—a band of Taoist monks had congregated, mingling their weird cries and clash of their cymbals with noises about them, and there rose above all the rest a plaintive falsetto shriek:

“Disasters come upon the Middle Kingdom.
Foreign devils disturb the country.
They urge the people to join their religion.
No Gods they venerate.
Their backs they turn on Heaven.
They teach men to debase their ancestors.
Human obligations they hate.

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They force women to adultery.
These sea-imps are not the produce of mankind.
If you doubt this look at them carefully.
Their eyes are blue, like those of devils.
They look into the depths of the earth.
Their hair is red, which is the colour of hell.
They dry up the earth.
No rain falls.
The sky is parched.
This is because their blood-God is in the heavens."

At regular intervals the other monks joined in, in high falsetto wail:

"Burn the yellow written prayers.
Light the incense tapers.
Invite the Gods and Genii from all the Grottoes.
The Gods will come forth from their caverns.
The Genii will come out of the mountains——"

Thus this sea surged, rolled, grumbled, tossed, debated. All howled at once, all talked at once, and at intervals silence came simultaneously over them all. This still stillness resembled that strange quiet that often comes in the midst of battle or storm; it might be called the scowl of decision, ominous, portentous.

Fortunately for the Mission, this mob-thought, this contemplation of that turbulent flood, never lasted long enough to decide; some noise would disturb it, a whisper perhaps, but something, and tumultuous it wasted its force in surfy din.

Suddenly there burst above all its noise a deep

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boom from the river, followed by another and another. Like rockets or even meteors the cannon's spittle traced its fire over the waters.

The French gunboats had opened fire.

The man-flood that filled the open field and that murmured and howled or was silent, whose wave-crests of flame surged and eddied around the Mission walls, suddenly became a maelstrom of darkness and wild cries. Shell after shell fell into this maelstrom, which, contrary to other whirlpools, was not concentric, but might be called multiple; wherever a shell exploded a minor whirlpool was formed, the outer circles of which were made up of the living, the inner of the wounded, the centre of the dead, the torn. Thus the whole open space was filled with frightful eddies; eddies that bumped into one another, contended, merged. Medusa-like they scattered themselves into a dozen whirlpools, then devouring one another formed a huge indistinguishable mass; struggling, shrinking, climbing, crawling, wriggling. Here and there blown asunder; torn, mutilated, sighing.

The mass of wrigglers grew less and less.

Several houses on the western side of the open space were set on fire by shells exploding in them, and as the flames shot skyward they cast a lurid light over all.

The firing ceased. There was nothing to shoot at other than when a wounded man would jump

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up, run a little way, then fall. Some of these men ran to the river and jumped in; some ran to the Mission Gates and knocked entreatingly; others ran toward the buildings in flame.

Several boats loaded with marines now put off from the warships and rowed heavily across the lighted waters. No one opposed their landing, but as they started across the open space they involuntarily drew back at the frightful spectacle that lay before them. Lit by the red glare of burning buildings the place was as one vast slaughter pen. The dead lay strewn about in bunches; headless, legless, gutless, soulless. Here one with muscles twitching in death's agony, there one asleep. The eyes of some were glazed, others looked resignedly at the stars. Some sat erect, and as the marines approached laughed and—died.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WHITE LAMB AND YELLOW WOLF

A MONTH after the night-flight and night-riot, which the Propitiation of the Gods of the Waters had brought about, a defensive calm pervaded the Mission of Ying-ching and its immediate environs, although to the westward the noise of hammer and saw filled the air.

The fires that started from the bursting shells had swept westward to the street of the Golden Flower and north to Old River Street, where, owing to the greater width of these thoroughfares, as well as to the strenuous exertions on the part of the fire-fighters, the flames had been stopped, but only after an area almost an half-mile long and about an eighth of a mile in width had been completely gutted.

In a few days after that dreadful night, when the dead and mutilated had been removed from the open space and order had been restored throughout the suburbs, these people, as industrious ants, began to rebuild on the embers, amid ashes, their homes and stores and temples. Abroad over the black blot rose the garrulous noise of their labour; and over the debris, ash,

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and dead, creative life in its various phases hummed persistently. Men were coming and going, some carrying bricks, others chiselling granite blocks; some were whipsawing logs into floors, joists, beams, and doors, while others were putting together the piles of wood, brick and stone.

A kind of bitter happiness pervaded those building this new suburb in the midst of the old, and they chattered, cursed, railed. Hucksters with viands and sweetmeats passed and repassed; children played among the logs; soldiers moved back and forth; silent groups stood scowling along the waterfront, and among the brick-heaps and half-completed buildings troops of spectators came and went. Sometimes a lone being slunk along, looking vainly for some spot; if found—weep; if not—vanish.

At the northwest and northeast corners of the Mission Compound the marines had thrown barricades across the Old River Street and had mounted ordnance on each. Sentries patrolled these barricades as well as the whole circuit of the Mission Walls. On the river opposite the open space a French cruiser and gunboats still anchored; their cannon covering all approaches and even holding the city at their mercy.

One day about a month after the night-feast of the Gods and toward the third hour after sunrise, the sentries on the east barricade noticed a move-

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ment among the Chinese patrols stationed farther down Old River Street.

Presently a single sedan with four bearers and one attendant came swiftly toward the barricade. Near the redoubt the sedan stopped and the attendant cautiously advanced toward a sentry, holding before him an open card. The marine reached down his gun and the attendant stuck the card on the bayonet.

After some delay a squad of marines marched out of the north gate to the east barricade and, with these sailors acting as an escort, the sedan entered the redoubt and disappeared within the walls of the Mission. At the entrance it passed through double ranks of marines standing at present arms and was carried into the building to the rear of the sombre Visigothic chapel. When it was set down in the bishop's own study, an old man, trembling, withered, tottered out of it.

The bishop came up to him and bowed.

"Your Excellency does me great honour. How will I ever be able to repay such kindness?"

Tai Lin made no reply. Aged and shrunk, without the strength of self-support, he sank into a chair beside a table and, leaning forward, buried his head in his arms.

The bishop sat down on the other side of the table and, lolling back in his chair, caressed his pallid hands, now and then cracking his knuckles.

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Sometimes a tremor passed through the body of Tai Lin.

Sometimes the bishop bit his lips.

Tai Lin raised his head and looked piteously at him.

"I cannot find her." Then the old man's head sank again upon the table.

"It is very unfortunate," communed the bishop in soft, sad tones. "Human frailty, alas, human frailty! When I sent the priest to be instructor to your wife, I thought him a noble, a virtuous man. It has broken my heart to find out that by being tempted he has lost his soul. What could be worse! I would rather the Mission be wholly destroyed than one soul lost. We came here to save souls, not to lose them. And now, in the opinion of your countrymen, all our benevolence, all our good deeds, our self-sacrifice, our prayers and labours are gone, utterly forgotten on account of this one evil act. You complain bitterly. You have lost a wife—God a soul."

Silence again ensued. Several times the bishop cleared his throat as if to speak.

Tai Lin remained motionless.

"Did you ever think that—that—perhaps the priest was not wholly to blame?" asked the bishop with mild concern.

Tai Lin looked at him dully.

"Yes; you are right. She was not to blame."

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He answered mechanically. "She could do no wrong.

"Once I gave her a little stool. She always sat on that at my feet. You do not know, but that is the way it was. She patted my hand—now, she is gone—all is gone."

The old quavering head fell forward upon the table. Sometimes a tremor passed through his body, but no sound broke the silence.

The bishop picked his teeth, white, narrow teeth, set far apart. This was a sign of meditation.

"Did you ever see this ring?" he asked gently, as he placed on the table the pearl that the wife had given to the Breton.

Tai Lin raised his head, looked at the pearl and shuddered.

"I noticed," continued the bishop sympathetically, "that he had this ring the very first day after his return from your wife. She made him promise not to part with it. I thought it might show a little—a very sudden—I may be wrong—but a woman's passion."

"My ring." Tai Lin's voice was almost inaudible in its calmness.

"Have you ever noticed any eagerness on her part for his coming?" asked the bishop with compassionate reluctance.

Tai Lin continued looking mutely at the ring.

"I did not know, but—I suspected it," went on

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the bishop in the same pitying tones. "I noticed that when he was prevented from going to your palace she would send long letters to him—as bishop I read them. They were filled with tender endearments, the most passionate riotous words. It is difficult for me to speak of this. I hope I have not offended Your Excellency, for there is only one desire in my heart—the truth. To seek the truth and to live uprightly have been the two master wishes of my life. But, alas, how hard it is to discover truth! To do this one must pray to God. There is no other way. And since this terrible affair I have been continually on my knees. God has smiled. His smile has penetrated the darkness surrounding this mystery and all is now clear, but to understand, one must first understand women.

"It is strange the attributes men clothe women in: Some deceive themselves into looking upon her as an angel, when they ought to close their eyes and cry, Scat! Others make her a tantalising riddle, and spend their lives trying to solve it; a sweet enigma, which they do not try seriously to know, lest knowing they find out what they do not wish.

"Woman is not a riddle, she is not an angel, she is not an enigma. She is an animal—that is all.

"To understand a woman, study a feline. She has all their attributes. Like them she only ceases to want when satiated; when she desires, she does

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nothing else—like an animal she follows the scent of her wishes. A woman never rests except when asleep; she never sleeps unless her hungers have been satiated. Nothing is more alarming than a woman with one eye open; like animals, when they doze they think of to-morrow's hunt. Women, as felines, have only three hungers: When these are allayed they are at peace; when not, they prowl—they cannot help it. Hunger and reason are always in conflict, but when reason is lacking there is no contention, no delay, and they hasten on the warm trail of their desires. There are no difficulties they will not surmount if the scent of the game is strong. Feline-like they are velvety-heeled, and we hear not their comings nor goings. One never suspects they have claws until they lacerate. They are not satisfied with one victim; they suck the heart's blood, then sniff for another. Old age has not much blood—no, not very much.”

For some moments the bishop cracked his knuckles in silence; his cavitous eyes fixed keenly on the old, withered man before him, who still looked dumbly at the pearl on the table.

“Yes; they are best caged,” resumed the bishop in soft, meditative tones. “And yet those closely confined are most dangerous when given a little liberty. The breath of freedom—that insane folly—soon heats the blood and leads them to wild excesses. Had I not felt so sure of the priest's vir-

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tue, I would not have permitted him to teach her and lay himself open to temptation. I did not think he would submit. But no risk is so great as to be lenient or careless with the caged. Open the bars and animals will go forth. Play with their claws and they will scratch. Tantalise their hungers and uncaged they will gorge. The wisest way is to teach them a few tricks—a very few, and when not performing keep them behind bars. Man's greatest self-deception is to believe that they are tamed. No animal has ever yet been so gentled that it could be left to its own instincts. Nothing is more dangerous. How many keepers have been lacerated to death by this one act of careless confidence!

“But I do not know how she could have managed it,” the bishop's tones became filled with deep concern. “Surely she was not so bold and immodest as to come from behind the screen?”

Tai Lin raised his eyes from the ring and looked startled, mutely about him.

The bishop wiped his lips, and behind the handkerchief a smile flickered.

“Yet there are worse things than her coming from behind the screen,” he continued compassionately. “If it had only stopped there, for the pride of beauty may have moved her unconsciously; impelled by nature she may have crept unseen to his side.

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"This manner of movement is peculiar to women and—snakes.

"Did Your Excellency know that during the first month of the world's birth these two met—a snake and a woman? Being unable to swallow each other, they made perpetual compact—to devour man.

"Since then they have possessed many attributes in common. Their tongues have the same forked rapidity; poison lurks in their kisses; death in their embraces. One-half of them is allurements, the other half desire. In gorgeous bedeckment they resemble flowers—men often mistake them for such. Their backs are beautiful with radiant colours, their bellies pallid. One coaxes what the other devours. Nothing can equal the subtlety of their movement! One never feels them until bitten; one never knows them until the heart has been clogged by their poison. Thinking them an innocent flower on account of their hues and beauty, one reaches out after them and finds—what Your Excellency has discovered."

A shudder passed through the old man.

The bishop picked his teeth.

Time passed.

Tai Lin sat up; never taking his eyes away from the ring, he spoke, but as much to himself as to the bishop, feebly, piteously calm:

"I do not know why she did this."

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There are some silences that men hesitate to break; the silence of a tempest, the silence of an abyss, the silence of a broken heart.

The bishop made no attempt to answer or break the oppressive stillness that followed Tai Lin's simple statement.

It was a long time before he spoke again, then his voice was quiet, but in his tardy speech lay decision not less terrible than it was calm.

"Yes; it is all over. I am glad you told me. She shall suffer. When you said they were animals you told the truth. I always believed that, but thought her different. I was not mistaken. She has been more a snake than beast. Your words have been learned, only there is no such poison in a snake's mouth as in a woman's heart.

"No; I do not ask you why you did not stop this crime when you saw its beginning, because I know you have made roguery holy to escape its responsibility and to enjoy its profits. You have your own protection, but she shall die."

The bishop, who had been picking his teeth, leaned forward.

"She shall be lyngcheed," added Tai Lin softly.

"But she may be a Christian," interposed the bishop.

"Lyngcheed," reiterated Tai Lin meditatively.

"She may be a Christian," said the bishop again.

"Yes," continued Tai Lin, heedless of the

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bishop's words. "Yes, that is her punishment by the laws of the Empire."

"But she may have become a Christian."

"Yes; it is necessary that she shall die."

"She is undoubtedly a Christian by this time," interrupted the bishop decisively.

"What do I care if she is a Christian!" and Tai Lin rose up savagely, quaveringly before him.

"Well—you know," and the bishop wrung caressingly his bony, bloodless hands, "Christians are entitled to our protection. Yes, yes, we could not permit you to——"

"She is my wife and by the law shall be punished."

"Christians are not subject to your laws. They are under the protection of the Church. The Church does not recognise your pagan marriage. By becoming a Christian she is free and entitled to our protection——"

"I will hammer this Mission into dust!" and Tai Lin brought his trembling fist weakly down upon the table.

"There are three warships in the river," commented the bishop softly.

"I will sink them!"

"There are battleships at Hong Kong; ten thousand troops at Saigon. A word from me and this city will be bombarded. A cable from me and ten thousand French troops will be landed. You

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know I speak the truth. Do you want to be held responsible for the death of a myriad multitude? Responsible for the loss of three kingdoms——

“How posterity would revile your name! How contemptuous will be held your descendants! Even then you cannot regain her.

“Beware! Beware!

“Disaster surely falls on him that opposes the Church, for it is God’s world-child; mankind and kingdoms its servants. Do not think that this child sleeps, curled up in a lotus-bud, or is drifting to a Nirvana. It is moving onward to Universal Power.”

The bishop leaned farther over the table; turning his head he looked up into the face of Tai Lin and, flushing from the intensity of his feelings, became ashen. His lips were parted, showing the long, narrow gleam of his teeth, while his jet eyes, set so deep in their sockets, glittered and had a speech of their own.

“You think, in this country,” he continued in a voice intense with feeling, “that the Church is the cat’s-paw of European nations; that they get missionaries killed to have an excuse for conquest? Bah! What are these nations? The Church’s hammer and tongs. The Church commands, they obey. You cannot injure a servant of God with impunity. You cannot oppose the Church without ruin. The Church of God must be the Spiritual

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Ruler of the world. It cares not who holds the few hours of temporal sway. Accept our Spiritual Dominance in peace and be your own rulers; attempt to destroy and you shall become the Servant of the World.

“You know that no army ever landed in this country that did not come at our wish and command. Why are all of these gunboats creeping up and down your rivers? Who are they to obey? Dare you punish a Christian without our leave? Has not the church placed them above your laws? And yet you come to me and threaten to destroy this Mission; kill this priest and lynch a Christian woman! What could be more ridiculous? How would you do it? Where would you begin and where would you end?”

After a moment of silence the bishop drew back in his chair. Gradually his ashen flush faded and he again became pallid.

Tai Lin stood motionless. Presently his head sank upon his bosom, but the frown on his withered face did not go away.

The silence was broken by the bishop, speaking compassionately.

“I am sorry for Your Excellency. You are a wronged man. When one is cast out by a father one can forget; when one is scorned by a son one can grieve and forgive, but when a man's wife discards him he cannot forget, nor grieve nor for-

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give. He has been injured internally and abroad. His heart has been splintered; his name befouled; his thoughts and hopes, like green scum, are cast adrift; his children and children's children are bastardised; he is alone in the profundity of his sorrow and yet conspicuous because of her sin.

"Most of our sins die with us, but the sins of such a woman live on. Like abhorrent weeds they have seeds, which by Time's winds, are scattered abroad to tare the fields of men. Quick should be her cut-off. There is no law in this land wiser than the one that makes death the penalty of her crime. It is the same law that God himself gave to Moses, our Great Elder. I can understand the threefold reason why you should have her lyngcheed and sympathise with you.

"A man should be known before the world as just; the laws of the Empire should not be deceived; the stigma should be removed from your descendants, for if not, men will ever say there was baseness in your household and your whole progeny will be heralded as bastards. How can the wick of one's memory be tended by those whom the world repudiates?"

The bishop leaned close to Tai Lin and lowering his voice spoke with greater intensity.

"Would you have me aid you?"

Tai Lin looked at him dully, incredulously.

The bishop tapped the table with his finger-tips.

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"You called her Christian," mumbled Tai Lin.

"Yes, yes; but you don't understand. You were going to act against the Church, not with it."

The bishop caressed his hands.

"Now if you and I could come to some agreement."

"You?"

"Yes; whereby the Church withdraws its protection——"

"I agree," cried Tai Lin. "Where is she! Where is she!"

"What will you agree to?"

"Anything," cried Tai Lin hoarsely, groping feebly the table's edge.

One by one the bishop pulled his fingers until the knuckles cracked in each, which he did only in moments of great pleasure.

"Will Your Excellency agree to deed your park to the Church if it withdraws its protection and sanctions her punishment?"

"No!" answered Tai Lin decisively.

"But if she is found and given over to you?" interposed the bishop eagerly.

Tai Lin did not answer for some time.

"No," he said finally. "You will take my park and then squeal Christian! Christian! Christian! I know you rogues."

The bishop picked his teeth. Once in a while he

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clacked his tongue, which was a sign of perplexity. Presently he smiled.

“ We will draw up a contingent bond signed and attested to the effect that the park shall not become the property of the Church until the last stroke of the lyngchee.”

A purple pallor overspread the seams and wrinkles of Tai Lin's face; his glowing eyes became vacuous.

The bishop moved uneasily.

Tai Lin fumbled at the throat of his robe.

Suddenly he bent over the table toward the bishop.

“ The priest? ”

The bishop rose and whispered for some time in his ear.

“ Make the bond! ” commanded Tai Lin huskily.

The bishop hastened from the room and when he returned he brought with him the commandant of the marines.

The bonds were drawn and signed.

Tai Lin rose. For a moment he stood looking thoughtfully at the ring on the table, then, without noticing the bows of the bishop, got into his sedan.

As he was being carried out of the Gateway he caused his bearers to stop, and, lifting the blind, looked back long and fixedly at the House of God.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AND SO IT ENDED

AFTER passing under the waterfall curtaining the doorway of the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon, one apparently stands upon the edge of an abyss out of which come blasts of cold moist air and a stillness, which, in contrast to the splashing roar of the cataract, is appalling. The floor of the cavern slopes downward some ten degrees, and in the subdued rays filtered through the prisms of falling waters the nearby walls with their columns and pilasters cleave imperceptibly out of the dim light, white as the clearest marble. The floor is covered with a dust piled about like drifted snow and swept by the cave winds into hollows, ridges and crescents. Water dripping from stalactites trickles over corrugated pilasters, and farther down the incline runs in greater volume from their bases. This crystalline seepage has formed colossal cups, which in their endless overflow have made saucers, then platters and these, running out from each side of the cavern, overlap toward the centre. These accretions of calcareous ooze form more and more, as one advances, a series of overlaying crusts

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which, in the lower incline, become the roofs of abysses, resounding with an hollow rumble when stepped upon. Sometimes, like the covering of a tiger's trap, they support one man, sometimes an hundred. These covered abysses—no other than the maw of the Sleepless Dragon—probably hold the bones and accoutrements of the Manchu regiments that pursued so relentlessly the youthful Emperor. In them also are the bones of treasure hunters, robbers, and nameless, numberless others for whom the Sleepless Dragon accounts not.

However, there came a day when the danger of the abysses was averted to those that entered and stopped long enough on the threshold to become accustomed to the soft, shadowless light that lay about them; or to those that impatiently lit their resinous torches, for there had been made in the snow-like drifts a distinct trail of foot-steps which, passing and repassing, had trodden down the dust; and along this new path were marks such as one sees in winter where boughs have been dragged through the snow. This trail made of feet and boughs began where the mist from the waterfall floated and continued down the incline until it almost reached the edge of the first plate-like formation of calcareous deposits, then turned to the right and ran straight into the wall between two huge corrugated stalagmites. In a jagged recess almost behind the left-hand stalagmite was a

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narrow opening, the lower part of which was ragged, the upper chiselled and smooth. This exit, heading away from the concealed abysses, had in some ages past been made by man into a doorway.

Passing through this secret portal the passage is confined for some distance by narrow walls, and the low roof makes it necessary in places to crawl upon the knees. The tunnel ends by opening into a vast cavern similar to the one first entered; but on advancing the walls and ceilings grow invisible to the light of torches and it becomes like a vast field. Here and there brooks of crystal water gurgle dully as they trickle into a circular lake that fills the lower basin. When torches are held over the edge of this lake there streams upward out of the abysmal depths shoals of pallid, eyeless fishes.

From this subterranean field caverns, like highways, diverged in several directions. And one of them—fortunately or otherwise—led into what was once a little corner of Paradise, cast like a gleaming pearl into this damp cellar of earth. In the centre a fire of pine branches had once blazed and crackled cheerily, giving the shadows of the chamber the soft whiteness of a snow-drift, but where the light of the pine blaze fell it sparkled and glistened as though incrustated with jewels. In the sides of the cavern were numerous openings; at one end curved a half arch, in the other a hole

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that led to the underground field. From the dome jewelled stalactites ten to twenty feet in length hung pendant, while here and there rose great stalagmites like fluted pillars. The walls were hung with draperies falling in unbroken, graceful folds, now softly white as a swan's breast, now a curtain sown thick with precious stone. Around the wall's base cups had formed similar to those in the first cave, and were filled with transparent water. Pearly, diamonded furniture was crowded about. Thrones, pedestals, dais and couches draped lightly in gleaming folds, coruscating as though studded with all the jewels of Yu Ngao. In this cavern joyousness and laughter echoed.

The wife, like an uncaged lark of an hundred spirits, was Happiness itself; and when laughter was not on her lips her song found its way through the columned depths. To her bird-like notes, numberless echoes blended in perfect harmony as though some subterranean chorus had taken up her song and was sending it through the uttermost caverns as she had sent it into the hearts of men. Sometimes, after she had ceased, her words could be heard, echoing, echoing, echoing. These caverns and grottoes were reluctant to yield up their music, and slowly smothered or rather caressed their tones into silence as much as to dumbly signify that it was the first time an echo from heaven had drifted thither.

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One day not long after they had taken up their abode in this pearl-shell, Tsang's wife, smiling and chattering, bustled about the fire. Tsang sat on his heels and smoked contentedly by her side. While on a high couch of marble, the wife directed, commenting, sometimes with laughter, sometimes with the gayest mockery. The Breton sat at her feet, smiling at last and at all times, for since the night of the Propitiation of the Gods of the Waters he had at no time ceased to do this.

Suddenly the wife's laughter stopped and she knelt down beside him.

"What is the matter?" she demanded fearfully.

The Breton had laughed.

"Did you ever do that before?" Her demure anxiety and troubled looks brought another uncertain, low laugh from his lips.

"Tsi, did you hear him?" she demanded, turning to Tsang's wife.

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"Tsang, did you hear him?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

Then she turned to him and said beseechingly.

"Do it again."

In gayest hours, however, it seems that moments of sadness or foreboding must inevitably

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intrude, as sea-fogs slink in and envelop sunlit meadows. In such a manner one day there came into the song and laughter of the wife this uneasy unrest. She appeared trying to escape from something, but it overtook her and her song-laughter stopped.

She moved closely to the Breton.

“Why were you and Tsang gone so long to-day?”

“We were looking for the treasure of Yu N——”

“Treasure!” she interrupted indignantly, drawing away from him. “And I thought you different.” She drew farther away.

“I do not know why men care for nothing else,” she complained, half sorrowfully, half angrily. “From children to old age they think of nothing else. They go into war for it, and temples and jails and yamens; no mud can cover it, nor filth stick so closely but what they fondle it more than——than——”

The Breton reached out his hand toward her, but she drew back.

“You would rather——” Tears were creeping into her complaint.

“But, Your Excellency,” commented Tsang opportunely, “what can you do without money? Fate is the only thing on earth that cannot be marketed for it.”

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She turned on him scornfully.

“Oyah! This whole Ming treasure cannot coax one lark to sing.”

“It could persuade kingdoms.”

“It cannot open a single night-closed lotus bud.”

“It could turn night into day.”

“It cannot stop a tear.”

“Some it could.”

“It cannot add one hour to life.”

“Life is spanned by its pleasures; the rich have three lives to the poor man’s one.”

“It cannot buy——” She hesitated and nervously picked the hem of her jacket.

“Why don’t you answer me?” she pleaded, turning to the Breton.

“Yes.”

“Will you never learn to talk?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“I would interrupt you.”

She leaned close to him and looked up forgivingly.

“I was not angry, but I don’t want you to go away and leave me for so long. I—I——”

“What is it?”

She turned her head away, then answered guiltily.

“I dreamed something that I cannot forget. If

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I only had not dreamed it," she cried as she snuggled closer to him.

"It is nothing," he added reassuringly.

"Yes; I know," she answered, "that you will call this dream just some airy tapestry of sleep, strangely woven, perhaps, and hued, but still the gauzy slumber-work of my foolish mind, which in waking hours I should see plainly through; and yet—I cannot—won't you let me tell it to you?"

She put her little hand in his and looked up imploringly, then nestling closer, she continued with naïve intentness:

"I know this dream came late in the night, because it was for hours and hours that I could not sleep. Fear's tugging finger many times caused me to rise and peer into the shadow where you and Tsang were sleeping. It must have been after the third watch, when he builded the fire, that I dreamed. I know you will think this a very foolish dream."

For a long time he looked into her upturned eyes; then putting her hand against his cheek, she turned his face away.

For some moments there was an hushed, uncertain silence, then suddenly she burst into tears, and throwing her arms about the neck of the Breton she clung passionately to him.

"Do not let dreams disturb Your Excellency," commented Tsang. "What are they? Reflections

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in the Great River whereon we float. Now how can reflections stem the river or check the course of our craft?"

"Tsang!"

"Tsang!" said his wife, leading him aside, "do you know that was a very bad dream?"

"Boil your rice, Tsi, boil your rice! How can dreams affect the stringed puppets of Fate, squawking and crowing, thising and thating, squeaking out our long or short verse until Fate gets weary and snaps the string. Bah! What have we to do with this inane performance? Go pluck your fowl."

"I know, Tsang, but I tell you that was a bad dream, a very bad dream, and nothing good will come of it."

"You are always dreaming."

"Yes, and——"

"What! those lice-familiar bonzes."

"They told——"

"Bah!"

"Women's tears are peculiarly like rain from heaven. Every so often in the strange azure of their being are gathered fleeting rifts of storm clouds, and when these are full swoln and all rays of sunshine hid, it takes but a small clap of thunder to bring on a storm, while a world of prayer and beseechment cannot stop its flood or drizzle—as the storm may be—until self-exhausted, then

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one word and, like the formula of God, there is light."

"To-morrow," said the Breton, "I will send Tsang to see if we can go away."

"Will you?" Again her lips, upturned, quivered with joy, and her eyes, smiling through tears, shone like stars through mists.

"Tsi," she cried, rising and clapping her hands, "we are going away from this dreadful place."

"That dream may turn out all right after all," answered Tsi, "but——"

"Oh, dreams are nothing," interrupted the wife with merriment, "unless"—looking mockingly at the Breton—"they are mist clouds of yesterday blown across to-night's darkened dome, or as Tsang says, 'contorted images reflected in the river of Life.' No, Tsi, we should not worry when scholars so wise have spoken," and she bowed roguishly to the Breton as her laughter, charming and tender, fell gratefully upon their ears. So again hapiness reigned within the Tomb of Yu Ngao.

The wife, the Breton, and the two peasants were gathered about the fire; the wife was helping Tsi prepare the meal, moving in rhythm to the song she was singing, while the Breton watched her with eyes round and bright.

"Come, rice is ready." She beckoned im-

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periously to him, holding out her hand, but as he came to her side she drew up, tossing her head haughtily.

"Sit down!" Then seating herself beside him, she slipped for a fleeting moment one little hand into his.

"No, Tsang," commented the wife mockingly, "I do not think you will make a good farmer, unless you do as I say. You are too weanless from Fate. If your rice failed to grow, you would at once allot it to Fate, and on your doorstep smoke your pipe. Now, Tsang, you should inquire into the many reasons that prevent your rice from growing. On this river of yours, you drift and do not try to row."

"Yes, Your Excellency, that is true. But to contend against Fate or to make rice grow would be to seek disaster. We cannot hasten what Fate has decreed must go slow, or retard that that by Fate is moved speedily. Fast or slow the River moves on, and whether we row with it or against it this boat of ours makes the same landing."

"Why don't you change boats, fateful man?"

"How can we, Your Excellency, when we are but luggage to be tossed hither and thither at the will of the Great Boatmaster? Sometimes he throws us into a junk, sometimes into a flower-boat; again we cling to a bit of wood."

"How ridiculous!" she interrupted gaily.

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“Life is no such muddy stream; rather it is the expanse of heaven wherein we are birds of passage, and all that great width from horizon to horizon have we to flit in. All the heavens, Tsang, are ours, and we may mingle as we please with exuberant flights or, solitary, seek the reedy marsh. There is no restraint; eastward, westward, upward, or downward, whither we will so we may go. We may rise, singing like a lark to the very floor of heaven, or crouch in a hollow—an owl, but of the plumage of Fate, Tsang, we have our choice. Haven’t we?” and taking hold of the Breton’s ear she pulled his head toward her, looking fondly up into his eyes.

“But I am a good farmer,” said Tsi, gazing compassionately at her husband, “for I was raised in the paddy-fields of Hungshan.”

“On our farm, Tsi, we will not plant any rice, only tea-shrubs or mulberry trees, and among them azaleas and bushy camelias, where the chickens can hide their nests. How I love to hunt eggs and tend those little fuzzy chickens when they go peek, peek——”

“Listen!” said Tsi, springing to her feet.

They listened, and presently from some distant cave came a murmuring rumble.

“Tsang!”

“Sit down! What comes, comes, and that is the end of it.”

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The Breton, on hearing these sounds, looked at the wife, paled, but did not move. Presently the rumble grew more distinct, and the Breton, without a word, left the chamber by the small hole in the end.

It was some time before he returned, and when he came into the circle of light a cry rang from the lips of the wife and, throwing herself on his breast, she clasped her arms about his neck.

Those few moments had altered the Breton. His face was stony and life seemed to have gone from him. When he spoke his tones were less speech than gloomy reverberations.

“They have found us.”

Tsang came up to him, holding in his hands a huge, double-edged sword of the Mings.

“Fate has overtaken me at last,” he commented contentedly. “Thus it ever is. It hauls men out of bed as well as devouring them on fields of battle. Who can hope to escape by panting up into lofty towers or sneaking into the earth’s rumbling guts? Bah! But I can save you and get vengeance for their stealing my house. This is a Ming sword. As they come through that narrow hole I will cut their heads off one by one. You can get out. I will give myself up to the magistrate and tell him that more than fourteen days ago you went down the Si Kiang into Tong King; you can go to Pakhoi

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then get a junk for Singapore. Let my wife get the babies and take them all with you."

The Breton made no reply.

"Her Excellency?" the voice of Tsang pleaded.

He hesitated.

The wife unclasped her arms and, turning to Tsang, pointed into the darkened recesses.

"Go!" she faltered.

Stumbling, reluctant, the two peasants went into the darkness, then looking up into the Breton's face she again put her little hands upon his breast. For a moment she wavered, then her eyes closed and softly as a flower whose stem is severed, she sank to the floor.

The Breton fell on his knees beside her and lifting her head to his breast brokenly endeavoured to coax back that consciousness which had left him alone in the depths of earth and dismay.

In the outer caverns the rumbling noises grew louder.

The fire smouldered though, and the red glow of the dying embers still lighted the two still forms.

One by one the embers darkened.

Suddenly a priest, followed by others, burst into the cavern and in a moment it was filled with their red-glaring torches.

The Breton did not move nor raise his head.

Holding their flaming knots overhead, the

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priests surrounded the two motionless figures on the cavern's floor, but as they looked their clangour and jibes grew still, for that silencer, Grief, was amongst them.

Presently one of them stepped from out of the circle and rested his hand on the Breton's shoulder.

"Come."

CHAPTER NINE

JUDGMENT

WHILE the penal laws of China are the old codes of the ancient world, their antiquity is not significant of their decay, and though some of them were in force on those days when the Rameses held their High Courts; when Moses judged from Sinai and Solon revised the Laws of Draco, they still deal out justice to mankind. While Egypt's Empire is buried under a waste of ages and the marbles of Athens are the sarcophagus of its laws and their makers. The Children of God, no longer dwelling under their splintered Mont, are lawless and scattered abroad as small dust. Yet the old Code of China remains vigorous and pristine, exercising in the same lands their power over one-third the human race.

This Code, begun at that period the Occident regards almost as civilisation's break of day, is not less than a Promethean performance, regardless of the fact as to whether it was proclaimed in the beginning of human institutions or at the present time. No example of man's intellect is more remarkable. It not only has all the principles of

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modern legislature, but it has them tempered and strengthened by the experience of the fullest ages of man; it gives the right of pardon, the right of appeal, respect for individual liberty, and holds responsible magistrates charged with repression of crime. It is majestic in its plainness, its reasonableness, its consistency and moderation. Without incoherence, it calmly, concisely lays down laws for man's conduct, and no European Code is at once so copious and consistent or is so free from intricacy, bigotry, and fiction as are these old laws of China.

Yet few penal codes portray so many apparently paradoxical principles of judicature; the unaccountable mixture of cruelty to prisoners, mingled with a paternal solicitude for the welfare and happiness of the people; with a constant fatherly effort to coax them into obedience and yet with the hand of cold rage punishing the guilty. But in this strange attitude is exhibited one of the basic principles of Chinese criminal law; by the rigour of its punishments it is intended that the law shall operate *in terrorem*, and the penalties laid down in the Code are almost always higher than the punishments intended to be inflicted. This is done, not only that the sovereign may exercise his mercy beyond the bonds of the law,—the commonness of which proving its beneficial effects,—but also that those tempted to commit crime are by

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the very terror of relentless punishment restrained in pathways of uprightness.

Let it be said, however, that in all its phases the Code of China—notwithstanding the terror of its punishments—shows a paternal solicitude for those over whom it lifts its terrible but not unkindly hand. Like a father it threatens and coaxes; like a mother it punishes and caresses. Thus the common name by which the people address magistrates is “Our Father and Mother.” With parental care this heavy Code endeavours to legislate for every possible contingency and exercise its power justly in all of the infinite shades of difference that grow out of human contention. It is minute yet concise, redundant but direct; it is restrictive, making the responsibility of officials such that they can be put to death for not enforcing the laws; and yet it permits magistrates many liberties provided they do not interfere with the ultimate execution of justice. Under this Code there are no juries to panel, there are no lawyers to delay the course of justice nor pervert it. The magistrate is judge, jury, and lawyer. He summons, questions, decides. Trials are open to the public and there is heard the testimony of witnesses; there it is considered and judgment rendered.

So the time came when this ancient Code was to render judgment upon the wife of Tai Lin; this

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same old code that had for almost innumerable generations punished and protected a vast portion of mankind; a code that they looked up to and revered, a code possessing for them awe and fear and gratitude, for they were the laws their fathers made untold ages ago, and as dutiful children they loved as they dreaded and shunned them. So the hour came when a lone magistrate empowered by the solemn authority of laws by time sanctioned was to render judgment upon her. There was to be no one to defend her, no one to prosecute her. It was simple; was she innocent or guilty? If guilty, were there extenuating circumstances? If the testimony showed that she was in most part innocent she should go free; if guilty, since her husband demanded it, she must die. If she denied her guilt she should be recommended to the sovereign for mercy. If she confessed, then must she be cut into a thousand pieces naked before the eyes of the multitude.

Under the first cold pallor of day, down before the Tablets of his forefathers in the Great Ancestral Hall, sat Tai Lin. All night and part of the day before had he been seated there with his face buried in his hands. Long and still had he waited for the breaking of this day and now when the pale, inevitable hour had come, mingling its wane light with the radiance of the tapers, he did not move.

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Toward the second hour after sunrise the magistrate of Namhoi arrived, followed by the bishop and French Consul together with their retinues. They entered the Ancestral Hall. Tai Lin lifted his head heavily from the table and returned their salutations as they slowly crossed the hall and took their seats beside him. Along the left side sat the officials of the magistrate's court; on the right the French Consul and priests of the Mission; all of which Tai Lin saw dully, then his head sank again upon the table.

The magistrate raised his hand; there was a movement among those stationed in the lower part of the hall, but the prisoner did not respond to this silent command. And this court so strangely convened in the sanctuary of Tai Lin's fathers, waited, frowned, and grew restless.

Suddenly in the midst of this increasing impatience a low involuntary ejaculation burst from the lips of the priests.

On the left side of the hall through an oval aperture, half hid by a silken curtain and illumined by a shaft of morning sunlight, stood the wife, so radiant, so beautiful, that those priests who had seen her only as dead in the red glaring dusk of their torches gaped incredulously. For a moment she fluttered in the sunlight, then stepped lightly, daintily into the Hall of the Dead. But on finding herself in the midst of men staring at her in silence,

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she stopped, her lustrous eyes widening in frightened wonder and clasping her hand upon her bosom she pressed back against the curved lintel.

The magistrate hesitated, frowned, then made the sign for her to come forward and kneel down before him, but she drew back, her great imploring eyes looking dumbly about her. Finally he raised his hand and the first clerk on the left rose and read the charges; namely, that she, the wife of the great man, Tai Lin, had, on the night of the Propitiation of the Gods of the Waters, stolen away with a foreign priest and had lived alone with him in the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon. As the clerk read the charge and its details she cast a hurried, appealing look around her and trembling, clutched the curtain for support.

The bishop raised his hand, at which sign a priest rose and testified how they had gone into the Great Cavern and in one of its darkened chambers came upon this woman and a priest. She was lying upon the floor with her head resting upon his breast. Tai Lin lifted his head and fastening his dull gaze on his wife devoured each detail of the priest's recital, and as priest after priest testified how they came upon the guilty pair alone in that cavern's most solitary chamber his face began to twitch and darken, while a glow came into his eyes.

Suddenly in the midst of a priest's testimony he

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cried out, a choking strangled cry, a cry inarticulate and yet so vivid in its anguish that it sent a tremor through all those in that great room.

The wife straightened up, for a moment she wavered, then going swiftly over to him she fell on her knees before the table and resting her little fingers upon the edge looked up into his face.

“My husband, do not do that. You do not know how it hurt. No, no, you must not—I have done wrong. Do not be angry and cry out as you did. It was terrible for you to do that, because it is all over and I have suffered more than all these Yamen-men can lay upon me. Forgive me, my husband, send these men away. You do not know how they frighten me. Won't you forgive me? You must not let these two wee moons of fault outweigh my years of love. Don't you remember how I used to sit on the stool at your feet; and you let me pull your ears. Won't you forgive me, my husband?”

“No, no, you must not! He just came each day and went away. I do not know how it happened. At first I did not understand, then I tried to harden my heart, but each day when he returned my frozen resolution melted as the sun of the fourth moon melts the earth's bosom and brings forth again the verdure of spring. I do not know how it all happened. But as a swimmer in the sea was my little heart in the blue deep of

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his eyes, and each day their tides overwhelmed my strength and bore me away on their flood.

“No, no, he did no wrong—his love was not other than the will-less tide that some light from heaven——”

Tai Lin brought his fist feebly down upon the table. He tried to speak. For a moment the tiny tips of the wife's fingers clung to the table's edge. Frightened, she looked up into his face convulsed with rage, then her fingers slipped and she fell sobbing beside the table.

The bishop leaned over and spoke to the magistrate.

“Do you confess your guilt?” he demanded.

There came no answer but her sobs.

“Did you not live with the priest in the Sleepless Dragon Cavern?” interrupted the magistrate.

Paying no attention to his question, she again lifted her hands to Tai Lin. For some time there was silence, then the bishop began to speak in a low, firm voice that would have been chilling had it not been tempered by a purring gentleness.

“This is very sad,” he commenced in tones full of pity, “but it is necessary that justice be done. This wife insists that she is innocent—someone must be guilty. If she is without sin the priest must have by force stolen her away and upon him punishment must fall. Since he is guilty, he shall die.”

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As the bishop leaned back in his chair an approving murmur rose from all parts of the hall.

The wife's sobs suddenly ceased. She no longer held her hands to Tai Lin. And forgetful of all those silent men around her she dumbly, beseechingly looked up into the bishop's face.

"The guilty alone must die," he repeated in the same gentle, decisive tones.

"No! No!"

"Yes; we must have justice," he interrupted firmly, "for the knowledge of our uprightness is spread over all countries and the people look up to us for it."

"Oh, why do you say that?" she cried, holding out her hands to him. "Is it not better to give mercy than to demand justice? I know you men of greatness love justice, but it is so deep, while mercy is like the heavens where every little act shines out as the light of a star and tinges the depths of whole regions! Oh, Great Sir, don't be just and your fame will spread over all lands. Nothing is so wide as mercy. Wherever the skies cast their shadows, wherever stars shine, wherever dews fall from heaven, men will love you. Oh, do not hurt him—if you only knew——"

Tai Lin, listening to her sobbing appeal, again brought his fist down upon the table.

The bishop leaned forward and said gently:

"If he is guilty, he must die."

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She made no reply.

The loud ticking of the Consul's watch reverberated through the silent hall.

The bishop watched her keenly and a frown came upon his pallid brow as her head sank lower and lower upon her bosom.

The ticking of the Consul's watch was now drowned in the deep breathing of those about her.

Presently the wife raised her head and searched long and questioningly the eyes of the bishop; then slowly she rose to her feet and looked over the head of her judges, somewhere beyond the Great Golden Altar of the race of Tai. A calm and contented expression came into her face; the colour flowed back into her cheeks and a happy light filled her eyes.

"I am guilty," she said demurely.

The thin lips of the bishop twitched, and he looked over at Tai Lin, who sat grasping the table's edge with both hands, his mouth half open, his eyes dull.

"What! Do you confess?" demanded the magistrate.

"Yes," she replied in low tones, still looking over their heads beyond the altar.

"You confess to all charges?"

"Yes."

"Did you persuade the priest?" inquired the bishop mildly.

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She looked at him in startled wonder, then again her head sank upon her bosom and only the bishop, her husband, and magistrate heard the scarcely audible answer.

“Yes.”

The hand of the bishop trembled as he held it before his lips; again he looked over at Tai Lin, who momentarily sat as one strangling, then rising, overturned the table before him and passed half down the hall. Suddenly he stopped, clutched at his throat, and would have fallen had not those near took hold of him and half carrying, dragged him from the hall of his fathers.

The magistrate turned to the bishop.

“Does he mean that?”

“Yes.”

“Then she shall be given the silken scarf that she may die in the seclusion of——”

“Is that according to his complaint? Is that in accordance with the law?”

“What! You would not——”

“Yes,” interrupted the bishop decisively.

“I cannot,” feebly muttered the magistrate.

“It is his demand—the law of the Empire! Dare you fail to enforce it?”

The quiet tone of this last question was ominous and the magistrate moved uneasily; he pondered the marble floor; sometimes he glanced sideways at the bishop and once, lifting his eye to

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the wife, shuddered. Then the bishop touched him firmly on the arm and, turning to the first secretary on his left, he lifted his hand and the clerk brought him the Vermilion Pencil.

"It is done."

Again the lips of the bishop twitched.

"Remember," he said, leaning over and whispering in the magistrate's ear, "I hold you responsible for the carrying out of the law. Beware she does not die beforehand."

The magistrate rose without replying and, followed by all of his retinue other than the first clerk, passed out of the hall. The bishop leaned back in his chair, pulled and cracked his long bony fingers until one of the priests came and spoke to him. A frown passed across his face, but he rose hastily, and, as he passed the wife she looked up, moving close to him.

"Will he be free?" she asked timidly.

The bishop lowered his head and, as he whispered, her eyes sparkled with joy. She clapped her little hands together and uttered a happy cry.

Then the bishop followed by his priests passed out of the hall.

The first clerk still continued writing, apparently oblivious to the beautiful woman, who, smiling to herself, still gazed over, somewhere beyond the Golden Tablets of Tai.

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"Foolish woman, why did you confess?" he demanded brusquely.

"Oh, I did not know what else to do," she answered lightly, turning her head to one side.

"No doubt," he replied gruffly; "but it is not the first time a woman's tongue has been the knife to lynch her body."

"Indeed?" she inquired mockingly.

"Woman, why did you lie?" he continued harshly.

She turned away.

"Why did you lie?" he demanded again.

"Oh, I don't know," she interrupted with gay raillery. "Don't you see that I but follow the ways of Nature, wherein the straightest trees are felled the soonest, and the cleanest wells are first drunk up; wherein the most innocent bird is quickest netted, and the tenderest flower is first plucked, that it for one fleeting instant might pleasure man's nostril? Thus in such fashion, Mr. Clerk, must my uprightness be cut down; my good name and virtue drunk up; my innocence conquered and confined while the little flower of my life—plucked and cast aside—— Oh, well, I do not grieve," she continued carelessly. "They can take me away from earth, but not from him. The silken scarf is for the neck. Whoever heard of it strangling the heart?"

"Unfortunate woman! Unfortunate woman!"

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interrupted the clerk, rising. "There is to be no silken scarf for you."

"What do you mean?" she asked, startled.

"Woman, do you not know the law? You are to die naked before the multitude."

Lifting her little hands to her temples she swayed and fell down before him.

"No, no," she cried, clutching his robe. "They have all gone and left me but you, won't you save me? No, no, don't go," she pleaded, holding on to his robe as he started to move away. "Talk with me. How can you leave? Listen! Why can I not have, in all this wide house of the world, just one little corner to die in?"

"I can do nothing," he replied, his rough voice trembling. "You are to die by the lyngchee."

Her eyes opened wide as she looked up at him, then she sank down, pallid on the floor in the Hall of the Dead.

CHAPTER TEN

A FRIEND

THE law does not procrastinate in China; and the execution of the wife was fixed on the following afternoon. When the sun rose that day out of a fogless sea it proved to be one of those gentle winter mornings of the semi-tropics. In northern latitudes such mornings are often called the smile of spring, but in this land they are more than the birth from winter's womb—they are an awakening on the bosom of summer and there pervades abroad an inexpressible atmosphere of compassion. On such mornings it is said that the tiger comes forth from his lair and in the sunned jungle glade lounges heedless of his quarry, so that neither men nor the most timid of jungle deer have fear of him, for the peace of the day has gone into his terrible heart and he purrs and purrs and purrs like a kitten on a woman's lap.

In other lands, upon this same twenty-fourth day of winter, whole nations were meeting together around their Christmas hearths; their spirits also gentled by those feelings of domestic love and attachment, which they regard as hal-

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lowed; songs and laughter burst from their lips and happy with remembrance of months past, joyous with anticipation of those future, their carols were rising upon all sides, while with kindnesses and benevolence they sought to lift their hearts above earth and with the shepherds from their sheepfold, cry peace and good will unto all.

But the sunlight of this day as well as its spirit seemed to have shunned the Catholic Mission of Yingching. Within its Compound were neither songs nor laughter—only a brooding silence, while around the stern Visgothic Chapel ranged, patrols of soldiers. Whether it had been a matter of policy with the bishop or whether it had been included in the agreement between Tai Lin and himself, is not known, but from the time the Breton was brought from the Grotto of the Sleepless Dragon he had been confined in this gloomy chapel and surrounded by a battalion of Chinese troops.

About the fourth hour after the sun had passed the zenith and light rifts of fog were beginning to drift in from the sea, a man passed hastily through the south gate of the Mission Compound and emerged from the cloisters of the bishop's dwelling. After searching with quick but penetrative glances the court surrounding the Chapel, he let his chin rest upon his bosom and, putting his

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hands behind his back walked slowly, thoughtfully, toward the Chapel.

At the circle of troops he was stopped.

“What!” he cried indignantly, with piping sternness.

The soldiers did not move and an officer came up.

“Command these men to stand aside. I am the bishop.”

The soldiers drew to one side and the officers bowed. In front of the Chapel door a sentry barred his passage, but at the command of the officer who had followed, the door was unbolted and the stranger passed within.

“Ha, ha, diplomacy! diplomacy!” he chuckled to himself as he stood blinking in the gloom of the low, vaulted vestibule. “Ha, ha,” and he pattered down the aisle toward the altar, crying in a shrill, gleeful voice:

“Well, well, let me coax you when they asked me to get off the bund; they never knew what I would do. To obey is to conquer; to smile is to be supreme as Mrs. Hook——”

The Breton rose from his seat on the altar steps, and resting his two hands on the shoulder of his visitor, looked down into his eyes.

The Reverend Hook wriggled, smiled furtively, and squirmed from under the Breton’s gaze.

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“ Well, here I am; diplomacy, mind you, diplomacy. Made up my mind to see you; see you I would—knew it would not be for long. I suppose you are next? But you know all about those caves and your knowledge must not be lost. That would never do. Heard you were more than a mile inside—my—my—— Now the first thing I want you to tell me——”

The Breton turned wearily away and sat down again on the steps of the altar.

“ Am I hurting his feelings? Poor diplomacy, poor diplomacy,” muttered the Reverend Hook to himself.

“ Well, I went down on the bund this morning,” he resumed cheerily, keeping his eye on the Breton. “ It is all fenced except the waterside, and in the very spot—neither a foot more nor less—exactly where you used to stand—the very place where I gave you the maps to the Grotto—they have put up the crucifix. At the bottom are two black stones and a tub, but not a very big one. On the left, under a red silk canopy, are three chairs—don’t understand why there should be three. Just then a priest came along and said I had not been invited—think of that! French soldiers strutting up and down—French gunboats anchored along the waterfront. Now, I want to know who is doing this execution—Frenchmen or Chinese? You know I am a good friend of yours—or I would never

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have given you those secrets of the Dragon Grotto, —but I want to say that these Catholic priests are trying to run this country. I went over to our Consul. He just swore. He said if he were God—he is a blasphemous wretch—he would invent something new in hell for these priests. Kept getting madder and madder, then he grabbed me by the collar and threw me out of the door. That crazy Consul has the Missionphobia—but he won't last. He can't mistreat an American Methodist missionary with impunity; let me coax you. What have I got to do with this business on the bund? I gave you the secrets of the Grotto, but how did I know that all this was going to happen?"

For some moments the Reverend Hook became contemplative, then he began to shake his head.

"Terrible, terrible, so young, so beautiful, so beautiful, so beautiful—and I will never see her, and all those others will. And they will take off her clothes. Oh, oh, oh."

His breath and words failed him. He pattered back and forth before the altar in little restless strides.

The Breton sat bowed upon the altar steps.

"Why don't those countries with gunboats stop it! Why don't they stop it!" he cried shrilly, never ceasing his nervous patter, and casting hurried glances at the priest as he repassed the altar steps.

THE VERMILION PENCIL

Suddenly he stopped.

“Why don't you do something?”

The Breton raised his head.

“Why don't you do something?” repeated the Reverend Hook in shriller tones.

“Do what?” asked the Breton wearily.

“Do what? Stop it! Stop it!”

The Breton looked at him.

“The execution!”

“I have nothing to do with it,” replied the Breton.

“What?” screeched the Reverend Hook, jumping back and throwing up his hands. “You have nothing to do with it?”

The Breton with a sigh bowed his head, while his visitor stood looking at him appalled.

Presently he began to walk back and forth, muttering aloud.

“I did not think it—how can he do it? Gave up everything for him—so beautiful, so beautiful. Thus they throw themselves away; always have done it, always will, all except Mrs. Hook. Now they are going to take off her clothes—before those Frenchmen—cut the skin of her beautiful brow and let it hang down over her eyes—eyes that made men tremble. Then they will cut off her little ears and pieces from her cheeks. Then her lips—and to think he has kissed them. Then her white arms—then her beautiful—beautiful—

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Oh! oh! oh! And he sleeps here, doubled up like a ground-hog!"

The Reverend Hook's excitement overcame him, and weeping copiously he pattered over and stood in front of the priest. After several efforts he mumbled lugubriously.

"I am going, but I want to say that I didn't think it."

The Breton looked up.

"You are going?"

"And I want to say that I didn't think it," he sobbed.

"What?" asked the Breton drearily.

"That you would let them kill her."

The Breton sat erect, his eyes searching. Then springing to his feet he seized his visitor and thrust him back to where the last glimmer of narrow sunlight fell upon his face.

"Don't, don't—at sunset they lyngchee——"

Sometimes there comes from the lips of men a cry that no one can describe, unless it be compared to that abandoned cry that is said to have come from a Crucifix some centuries ago, but which echoes yet at times from hearts of other men; so now there came such a cry from the lips of the Breton. He staggered back, and his hands clutching at his throat, tore open the bosom of his long black robe; he tottered against the altar and bent over it. Then it was that the Great Symbol of the

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Tien Tu Hin fell from his bared bosom and lay gleaming upon the outer folds of his robes, its terrible green jewel glistening in the dun shadows of the Chapel as the tiger's eye glitters in the jungle's dusk.

Suddenly the Breton drew himself up, and shaking his head and shoulders as a wounded animal, threw open the Chapel door; for a moment he stood under the vaulted entrance and the slanting rays of the sun fell on the Great Symbol.

The sentry looked up, hesitated, looked again at the glittering Eye, and dropped upon his knees. A patrol of soldiers started to rush forward, then stopped; awe and reverence overcast their features, for there, under the gloomy vestibule, in the red sunlight, calm and yet awful, stood their prisoner—upon his bosom the Eye of the Age's Wrath.

As the Breton advanced toward them many fell upon their knees and struck their foreheads thrice upon the ground. An officer from one of the buildings in the rear shouted for the soldiers to seize him, but this command was no sooner heard than those kneeling rose, and marshalled themselves behind him. Other soldiers came with their guns and formed another line, and those that did not follow saw upon the faces of this guard, which constituted more than half of the battalion, the sternness of death. As the Breton moved toward

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the north gate, apparently oblivious to those that followed him, the soldiers dropped their queues over their right shoulders in a loop, then bringing the end around the neck, tied it in two loose slip-knots to the loop—all of which is called the Sign of Shou. Carrying their guns in the left hand they held their right hands over their heads with the thumb pointing upward, and as they went out of the Mission gate there went up that terrible cry:
“Hung Shun Tien!”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACTHANI

EARLY upon the day of the execution four French gunboats and a cruiser got up steam and moved slowly down the river toward the bund. The cruiser anchored opposite the place of execution with the gunboats on either side of it but nearer to the bund, so that the five vessels formed a cordon in shape of a semi-circle. From within this space all river craft were driven out and the guns of the warships trained across the empty waters upon the bund, where early in the morning guards of marines landed. On these warships the day wore slowly, tiresomely along, and it was not until lengthening shadows began to creep reluctantly across the river that they became enlivened with men clustering over their rigging and sides, laughing with jests.

The Viceroy, to prevent the execution from precipitating a riot or collision with foreigners, had previously posted proclamations that no one should come forth from their homes or traverse the Street of the Sombre Heavens for seven blocks back from the bund; neither were they to be seen upon the waterfront for seven blocks east and west of the Street of the Sombre Heavens. So

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that, when the soft, mellow sunlight of this eventful day streamed down upon the deserted streets, bathing their unaccustomed solitude in a serene, peaceful warmth, it made these turbulent thoroughfares appear like village streets basking in spring sunshine.

About the third hour in the afternoon sedan chairs, soldiers, officers on horseback, and pedestrians began to come into the vacant Street of the Sombre Heavens, and soon the enclosed space on the bund became a scene not less brilliant than it was ominous. The crowd assembled there stood about in the form of a crescent blunted on the left horn and facing the river; petty mandarins in official gold-brocaded robes, red-coated soldiers, and French marines in white and blue, Manchus clothed in rich stuffs, and French officers, gold-laced and brilliant, formed in parts this bizarre horn, in whose centre stood a crucifix with black stones and tub beside it.

Over all brooded a silence.

About an hour before sunset a salute was fired from the cruiser, and two boats crossed the open waters. In their sterns were the Bishop of Ying-ching and officers of the Fleet. As the boats approached the bund the marines were drawn up in double ranks, extending from the landing stage to the three ebony chairs under the silken canopy.

The bishop was first to ascend the ladder, and

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as he stepped upon the bund he drew himself up to his fullest stature, scrutinising those assembled before him; then with slow steps, with haughtiness, solitary and full of unmeasured pride, walked down the files of marines to the elevated platform beneath the canopy. For a fleeting moment he hesitated, then sat down in the middle chair. A group of French officers, glittering in gold lace, followed and took up their station to the right, while part of the marines drew off to one side of the gate, part on the other.

The sun was sinking.

The French officers gaily carried on their animated conversation. The bishop was silent. And the Chinese, in spite of their brilliant robes, were grave, uneasy; anxiously they cast their eyes at the sun slanting through the rigging of the warships, but not until it had sunk below the gun-platforms on the masts did the rolling boom of kettle-drum break the oppressive stillness. This was echoed from without by clash of cymbals and blare of trumpet; the marines presented arms and the Chinese troops drew up in order.

The magistrate approached.

When the flag-bearers and musicians came on the bund the spectators rose upon their tiptoes to see enter three stolid men dressed in flowing garments of the Ming dynasty, and from whose caps waved the golden pheasant's long, slender plume.

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The first carried a huge beheading sword upright before him, glinting in the red rays of the sun. One of the others carried a small basket of knives—the cutting up knives, while about the neck of the third were suspended ropes and chains. These men went over and stood beside the crucifix. Behind the executioners had followed a half-dozen men carrying red, oblong boards attached to long handles and inscribed in golden characters; some denoting the magistrate's honours and rank, others commanding the people to keep out of the way and be quiet. Two officers on horseback rode behind them, followed by three men, one bearing an official fan, another a crimson table to place before the magistrate, while the third bore a gold-embroidered umbrella of state. After these came men dressed in long red robes and black, conical hats, who were the "wolves and tigers" of the Yamen, and their passage was of crackling whips, the rattle and grind of chains; the clanking crunch of implements of torture. After them came men swinging censers, which left streams of fragrant smoke along the pathway, and half hid in these clouds of incense pattered two old men, receiving petitions from the people. The sedan of the magistrate now entered, followed by officers on horses and soldiers carrying arms and flags.

When the magistrate stepped out of his sedan under the canopy he started in unrestrained as-

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tonishment. The bishop, without rising, nodded his head in salutation. Slowly the magistrate went and sat down on the bishop's left, and before him was placed the crimson-covered table; upon it the Vermilion Pencil.

The sun had sunk below the house tops of Honan.

The bishop frowned and glanced impatiently toward the gate.

Flecks of night fog scurrying along the sky were being tinged with the last rays of the sun, when a solitary sedan was borne swiftly, silently through the gate to the vacant chair under the red canopy.

Those that had known Tai Lin looked in horror at the shrunken, quavering old man, who now sat down on the bishop's right—a shuddering of shrivelled skin.

“Is he alive?” whispered one man to another.

“Yes.”

“I doubt it.”

“Look at his eyes.”

They were like coals. The spectators were fascinated by them, and the terror of what was to happen crept upon all. Many furtively looked toward the gate; others turned away to the river; some watched the three executioners beside the crucifix; others looked at the bishop.

Suddenly there was a movement among the

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troops at the gateway as a sedan, mournful in blue and white and thickly surrounded by soldiers, was carried across the bund and silently put down in front of the magistrate. The soldiers filed to one side, the curtain was drawn and the wife stepped daintily out.

When her eyes rested upon the magistrate who had judged her she drew up to her full height, tossed back her head, while a flush darkened the delicate pallor of her cheeks.

The spectators surged forward, and as they looked upon her there went over them something like a great sigh.

The wife, turning away from the magistrate, perceived the bishop leaning forward in his chair. Instantly, as a shaft of sunlight, a rare, sweet smile dimpled her features, and in the joy of her gratitude she moved closer, spontaneously holding out her hands. But as she stepped toward him smiling so happily, so gratefully, the bishop became immovable, as one paralysed by fear. His thin, tight lips opened, his cavernous eyes grew dull, his face became chalky, then, with an effort, he shrunk back in his chair.

Tai Lin had never moved nor uttered a sound since he had taken his seat, but when the bishop recoiled from the tiny thankful hands of the wife, he was no longer hid from her, and she looked up into his burning eyes, into his face, where over

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the loose-hanging skin a myriad deep-crossed wrinkles characterized the pain and wrack of a strong man's heart. For a moment her slender form swayed, she pressed her little hands together, then held them up to him; her lips parted, and falling before him she clasped his legs in her arms.

The straining ears of the spectators could hear no sound as they watched her body tremble with sobs; nor could they see any leniency creep into the face of Tai Lin as he leaned over and peered down at her.

Blindly she reached up her hand, and the crowd saw him shrink back, a sweat breaking out upon his face when, in her blind fumbling, she found one of his nerveless hands and drew it down to her cheek. Breathlessly, fearfully the spectators watched the flames in his eyes flicker and then—go out: they saw him reach down his other hand and rest it upon her head; his lips moved, but no one heard what he said unless——

The bishop straightened up in his chair, a scowl swept across his face, and touching the magistrate on the arm, spoke to him, with an imperious gesture toward the wife sobbing at the feet of Tai Lin.

The magistrate hesitated, then picked up the Vermilion Pencil. Slowly, weighingly, he lifted it, and two of the executioners sprang forward and, seizing the wife, dragged her over to the crucifix.

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Tai Lin sat for a moment stupefied then, half-rising and uttering a cry, he held out his hands. Again a frown swept across the bishop's face and leaning over he spoke to him in low, rapid tones. As he talked, now and then snapping his fingers, an uneasy movement began to ebb in the crowd. Presently Tai Lin's head sank upon his bosom and the bishop, turning away, nodded to the magistrate. The Vermilion Pencil was again lifted from the crimson table. The executioners that had dragged the wife to the crucifix tore in twain her long outer robe and threw it aside. At this her tears and supplications ceased. Two spots burned redly in her cheeks.

Tai Lin bent forward, grasping the arms of his chair. Those spectators that once looked at him did not turn away nor look at the wife. The fascination of her beauty was less than that of his terror. They watched his eyes glow and burn in their sunken sockets until a dull film came over them. Yet no one in all that great crowd saw him breathe nor show any twitching signs of life. He looked to many like the carven image that is found in the Temple of Death.

The executioners ranged the black stones side by side so that there was a space of about three inches between them. They stood the wife against the crucifix, but in stretching out her arms found that the cross piece was low and in their haste

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they were a long time altering it. During these painful moments not a sound nor movement came from those crowded there.

Finally they tied her to the cross with thongs about her wrists and ankles and one that pressed into the soft delicate contour of her neck. Thus she stood looking somewhere over and beyond those assembled around, her great, mournful eyes filled with the light and shadows of other thoughts, but wholly oblivious to the terror about her and to the fear that brooded there.

The executioner stepped up to her and rested his hand upon the bosom of her silken jacket. But as he moved his hand to tear it off there came a choking cry.

Tai Lin had risen to his feet; heavily he lifted his hands and the spectators could see he was trying in vain to speak as one gasps in a nightmare. He shook his quavering head and a foam oozed out of the corners of his mouth. Then as the executioner again raised his hand, Tai Lin with stupendous effort held out his heavy arms to her. His face became purple, his lips black, and a bloody ooze seeped out of them. A tremor passed through his gaunt form. For a moment he stood still and erect, then his arms fell to his side and he sank down lifeless in his chair. A convulsive movement shot through the multitude, followed by breathless silence.

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The wife waited with closed eyes for the brutal hand. She did not see Tai Lin rise from his chair; she did not hear his choked cry, nor know that he had fallen dead. Now and then a tear struggled out and lingered momentarily on her long lashes. These little salt globules were the only signs of life in her, and the eyes of some watched them trickle away drop by drop.

Presently men turned to look at one another, then a wave of consternation swept over the bund. They began to whisper. And it was in the midst of this terrified hum that the magistrate raised his hand in command of silence.

“The Great Man, Tai Lin, has saluted the World. He alone was the accuser. The prisoner is free.”

As the executioner cut the deep-sunk thongs away and the wife sank down unconscious at the foot of the crucifix, there rose a noise half a sigh, half a strange murmur, the voice of this multitude, a crowd of men that shrank, shivered, then surged forward to look at the dead man still in the chair and a slender body lying limp at the foot of the cross, beautiful even in the guise of death; neck-laced with a ribbon of bruised flesh, braceleted with wristlets of angry red.

It was over this swaying, murmuring mob that the bishop rose and lifted his hand imperiously.

“How is it,” he cried in clear, ringing tones,

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“that a magistrate of the Middle Kingdom dares hush up a public crime? This guilty woman was taken in the midst of her sin. In trial she confessed her guilt and was condemned by the law and her husband’s command. Dare a magistrate act contrary to this? Dare he act contrary to the three hundred and eighty-first section of the Code? Let him beware!”

The bishop turned, and with his thin lips curling looked sternly down upon the astonished magistrate. Over the bund fell a stillness—the silence of suspense. The eyes of the spectators, propped widely open, did not look away from the pallid man towering above them—with his relentless gaze rivetted upon his fellow judge.

The magistrate moved uneasily in his chair. He looked at the warships riding sombrely at their anchorage, he contemplated the marines drawn up at the gateway and the chained, watchful cannon. He studied thoughtfully his Vermilion Pencil. Presently he raised his hand.

“Does the Eldest Son of the Great Man Tai Lin demand death?”

There came no answer.

“Does any member of the Tai family demand her death?”

Not a sound replied but the crowd’s deep breathing and a faint wavering hum from the city.

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“Does any man of the Middle Kingdom demand the cutting into pieces of this woman?”

The multitude held its breath, straining to catch the slightest sound that might be the noise of a human voice. But they heard only the running waters sobbing below their feet and the last distant echo of the day's work.

The magistrate lay down his Vermilion Pencil and looked triumphantly at the bishop, but his implacable gaze did not alter and the smile of the magistrate was lost.

“She is free.”

“Ah!” The bishop uttered this exclamation so softly that the magistrate alone heard and he looked furtively away.

“It is in accordance with the law,” he replied.

“Ah!”

“No one demands it.”

“Ah!”

“You are not a man of the Middle Kingdom.”

A slight smile curled the bishop's thin lips as he drew a package from his robe and threw it down upon the table.

The magistrate carelessly, even with hauteur, opened it. As he read, a pallor came into his yellow face and his hand shook as though with palsy when he refolded the document. Again he turned his eyes toward the grim warships in the river;

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again to the calm, stern array of marines and their cannon unchained and alert.

He leaned over his table as one in a stupor.

Immovable the bishop towered over him, his lips tight drawn, his eye fixed.

The magistrate lifted the Vermilion Pencil.

The spectators had watched this conversation between the bishop and the magistrate without comprehending what had passed between them, but when they again saw the Vermilion Pencil rise slowly, when they saw the executioners lift up the still unconscious woman from the foot of the cross and revive her, a shudder passed through them. They swayed backward as from a sudden yawning of an abyss. They were shoved backward one over another until the bund around the crucifix was again clear.

The executioner, having revived the wife, bound her once more to the crucifix; again the thongs hid the red rings around her wrists and neck. Her eyes, still moist with tears, cast one fleeting, reproving look around her, full of injured, startled wonder.

Then the executioner with the beheading sword came and stood on the right of the crucifix; the one with the reviving sponge stood on the left, while in front of her was the other, his sleeves rolled up and by his side a small basket of knives. These men did not take their eyes away from the

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pencil of death, which again lay on the crimson cloth.

The Pencil moved.

Involuntarily the spectators turned away as they heard a cry of gentle protestation.

The executioner cut the left shoulder of her jacket, laying bare her arm and part of her bosom, which was not unlike ivory sheened with the pink of silk. She looked up into the face of her slayer, and those spectators that dared to raise their eyes saw his hand waver. Then the ascending Pencil stopped. The first stroke was now to be given.

When the Breton went out of the Mission gate followed by the Children of the Deluge, he turned east upon Old River Street and as he went along there rose at certain intervals that terrible cry, "Hung Shun Tien!" Men stopped in their labour at the sound of this, and when they saw the tall black-robed Breton with the Great Symbol gleaming on his bosom, when they saw the stern, armed array behind him holding overhead their right hands with thumbs pointing upward, they either drew back in consternation or put aside the implements of their labour and joined themselves to this body of sombre men. They asked no questions; they looked neither to the right nor to the left, but simply dropped their queues over their right shoulders in a loop and brought the end

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around the neck, tying it in the Sign of Shou. Then they held their right hands overhead and when the others cried out: "Hung Shun Tien!" so cried they.

In this manner beggars peeped out of their holes and joined them. Merchants came from their gilded shops and rolling up their silken robes took their places beside the beggars. Thieves crept out from their hidings and sentries left their stations. Hucksters put down their trays and scholars their brushes. Itinerant barbers, physicians, cooks, fortune-tellers, robbers, clerks, silk robes, and tatters; youths and tottering old men; from mansions and cellars and hovels and holes came the Children of the Deluge to follow the black-robed man upon whose bosom the Symbol rested.

As the Deluge burst through the labyrinthine windings of the suburbs in their race with death, the old men and those that were feeble, panting, and wheezing, dropped out, but new recruits took their places and the flood was swollen as it rushed along, so that before the head debouched into the Street of the Sombre Heavens the rear could no longer hear the battle-cry of the van falling sonorous and terrible upon the silence of twilight.

The wife had closed her eyes, waiting for the stroke that would cause the drooping brow to

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close them forever. The executioner had raised his knife when there fell upon the silence of the bund a rumble, a roar, and then that cry of terror:

“Hung Shun Tien!”

While the marines endeavoured to get their cannon in position, the Chinese troops ran thither and thither, uttering cries of terror. The spectators separated into two parts, one panic-stricken while the other threw their queues over their right shoulders in the sign of Shou and echoed that terrible cry.

A deluge of men overflowed the whole bund, and marines, spectators, and soldiers were lost in it.

As though unconscious of this great flood of mankind aroused by him the Breton went through the way which the Eye gleaming sullenly on his bosom opened for him. And as he stepped out into the open space toward the crucifix, this now vast multitude became silent. Those that were near saw him draw his hand across his eyes; shag-gily shake his head and shoulders, then go slowly over to the crucifix.

The executioners drew away as he approached, and two fell upon their knees obedient to the mandate of the Eye aglitter in the gathering gloom.

The Breton stood for a moment silently beside the crucifix.

“I have come,” he said softly.

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A smile passed over the lips of the wife, but she did not open her eyes.

“I have come,” he repeated in the same soft, questioning tones.

Uncertain, fearful, her eyes opened. She looked at him and smiled. She looked at him again, and out over the bund echoed a cry so full of joy that the falling night seemed turned into the break of day, and the lark's note quivered in the air. Some men in the multitude smiled foolishly and wiped away a tear, others laughed to choke a sob.

The Breton picked up the beheading sword at his feet, handling it as lightly as a knife. Without haste, seemingly oblivious to all about him, he cut the cords from her wrists. No one moved. They watched, fascinated, the great sword play delicately about her; cutting the cords of her ankles, severing the thongs about her wrists and neck.

The wife was free. Holding out her hands, she clasped them around his neck. He drew his black robe around her so that only her head was seen nestling beside the Great Symbol.

For some moments thus they stood—motionless beside the crucifix, while the army of the Deluge, gigantic and terrible, awaited his command.

The Breton hesitated.

Presently he began to move backwards toward the bund's edge, carrying the wife in his left arm and still grasping in his right the executioner's

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sword. Behind and below him called the old voice of the river—before him the old silence of man.

The Deluge pondered.

The crucifix held out its arms in the gloom; one to man and one to the river. The husband dead was unseen; the bishop crouching in his chair became a part of the approaching void of night and the bond of blood on the bund at his feet fluttered and in the night wind vanished.

The day was done.

Thoughtfully and for some time the Breton gazed at those before him, without anger or wonder or pain. Then he looked down in the face upturned to his, where eyes were full of laughter and delight, where lips smiled and murmured and caressed.

Her little hands tightened around his neck and drew his head down until their lips met.

Darkness was falling. The fog coming in from the sea scudded low down on the river and its veil was being drawn over multitude and water. All distant were hid in it other than upon the bund's edge, where still stood a darkened figure.

Suddenly the Deluge began to move.

Night had fallen: from its shadows came only the crunch of that remorseless flood as it moved onward—back into those abysses whence it had come forth—the Night of Time, the Heart of Man.

THE END













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Gen. Homer Lea, whose new book, "The Day of the Saxon," is just published, and Archibald Colquhoun, author of "China in Transformation," have reached, from different starting-points, some similar conclusions. Both —American and Englishman — see certain grave dangers to the Saxon race in Russia's slow but unchecked advance toward the sphere of Indian interest, and in the immigration of Asiatic people into Australia.

