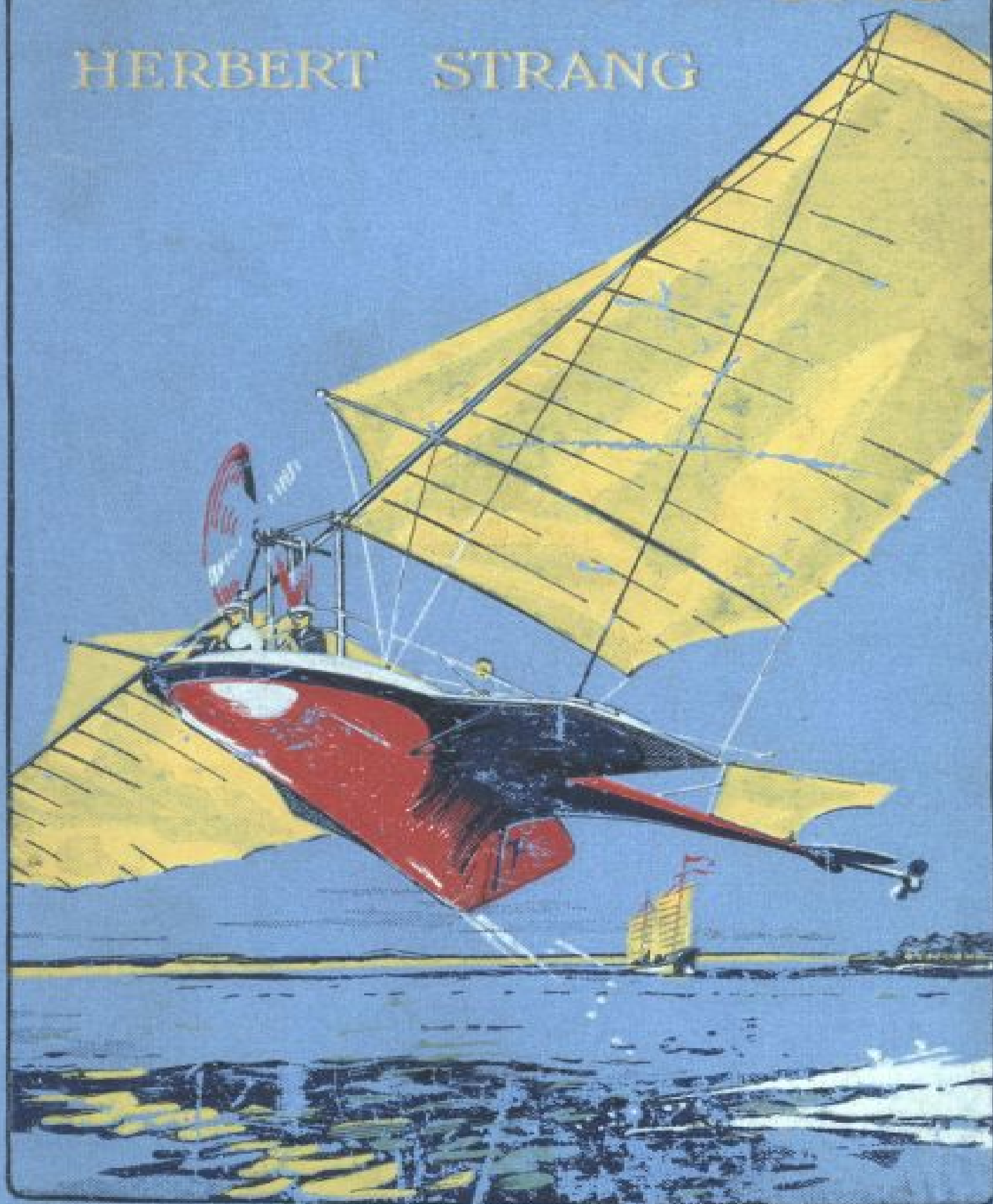


The FLYING BOAT

HERBERT STRANG



THE FLYING BOAT

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MR. TING ASTONISHES THE SCHOOL

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MR. TING ASTONISHES THE SCHOOL See page 14

THE FLYING BOAT
*A STORY OF ADVENTURE
AND MISADVENTURE*

BY
HERBERT STRANG

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CHAPTER I ENTER MR. TING

The term was drawing to its close, and all Cheltonia, from the senior prefect to the smallest whipper-snapper of the fourth form, was in the playing-field, practising for the sports. The centre of the greatest interest was perhaps the spot where certain big fellows of the sixth were engaged in a friendly preliminary rivalry for the high jump. There was Reginald Hattersley-Carr, who stood six feet two in his socks--a strapping young giant whom small boys gazed up at with awe, the despair of the masters, the object of a certain dislike among the prefects for his swank. There was Pierce Errington, who beside the holder of the double-barrelled name looked small, though his height was five feet ten. He was the most popular fellow in the school--dangerously popular for one of his temperament, for he was easy-going, mercurial, speaking and acting impulsively, too often rash, with a streak of the gambler in his composition--though, to be sure, he had little chance of being unduly speculative on his school pocket-money. And there was Ted Burroughs, Errington's particular chum, equally tall, almost equally popular, but as different in temperament as any man could be. Burroughs was popular because he was such a downright fellow, open as the day, a fellow everybody trusted. He always thought before he spoke, and acted with deliberation. He held very strong views as to what he or others should do or should not do, and carried out his principles with a firm will. As was natural, he did not easily make allowances for other men's weaknesses, except in the case of Errington, to whom he would concede more than to any one else.

It was known that the high jump would fall to one of these three, and their performances at the bar were watched with keen appreciation by a small crowd of boys in the lower school. Hattersley-Carr had just cleared five feet three, and Errington was stripping off his sweater, in preparation for taking his run, when the school porter came up, an old soldier as stiff as a ramrod, and addressed him.

"A gentleman to see you," he said.

"Oh, bother!" said Errington. "Who is it, Perkins?"

"A stranger to me; a sort of foreigner by the look of him: in fact, what you might call a heathen Chinese."

"Bless my aunt!" Errington ejaculated, with a droll look at Burroughs. "Did you tell him where I was?"

"I said as how you were jumping, most like; and he said as how he'd like to see; not much of a sport, either, by the looks of him."

Now hospitality to visitors was a tradition at Cheltonia, and with the eyes of the small boys upon him Errington knew that he must accept the inevitable. But it was the law of the place that an afternoon visitor should be invited to tea at the prefects' table, and Errington, with a school-boy's susceptibility, at once foresaw a good deal of quizzing and subsequent "chipping" at the embarrassing presence of a Chinaman.

"Rotten nuisance!" he said, in an undertone. "Still!"--and with a half-humorous shrug he put on his sweater and blazer and walked across to the school-house.

A few minutes afterwards there was a buzz of excitement all over the field when he was seen returning with his visitor. It was an unprecedented spectacle. Beside the tall athletic form of Errington walked with quick and springy steps a little Chinaman, not much above five feet in height, slight, thin, with a very long pigtail, and a keen, alert countenance that wore an expression of vivid curiosity. There was a tittering and nudging among the smaller boys, who, however, did not desist from their occupations, and only shot an occasional side-long glance at the stranger. The members of the sixth looked on with a carefully cultivated affectation of indifference. Errington led the Chinaman to the spot where Burroughs and Hattersley-Carr were standing together, and with a pleasant smile introduced his school-fellows.

"This is Burroughs--you've heard of him. They call him the Mole here. Hats--Hattersley-Carr, our strong man--Mr. Ting."

Burroughs shook hands with the Chinaman, who shot a keen look at him, as if trying to discover why, his name being Burroughs, he was called the Mole. Hattersley-Carr had his hands behind him, gave the visitor the faintest possible acknowledgment, and then looked over his head, as if he no longer existed. Errington afterwards declared that he sniffed. Burroughs caught a twinkle of amusement in Mr. Ting's face, as, glancing up at the supercilious young giant towering above him, he said, in a high-pitched jerky voice, but an unexceptionable accent--

"Once a servant of Mr. Ellington's father, sir."

Hattersley-Carr paid no attention. Errington flushed, and was on the point of rapping out something that would hardly have been pleasant, when Burroughs interposed.

"Buck up, Pidge; we've both cleared half-an-inch higher," he said. "The tea-bell will ring in a jiffy."

Whether it was that Errington was in specially good form, or that he was spurred on by Hattersley-Carr's impoliteness, it is a fact that during the next twenty minutes he twice outdid his two competitors by half-an-inch. Mr. Ting was as keen a spectator as any boy in the crowd, which, now that the jumping furnished a pretext, had grown much larger by the afflux of many who were more interested in the Chinaman. The bar stood at five feet five, and Hattersley-Carr had just failed to clear it at the third attempt, when Mr. Ting turned to Burroughs at his side, and said--

"Most inteesting. Is it allowed for visitors to tly?"

"Why, certainly," replied Burroughs, hiding his astonishment with an effort. "But----" He glanced down at the

clumsy-looking Chinese boots.

"I should like to tly," said the Chinaman, and, lifting his feet one after the other, he took off his boots, tucked up his robe about his loins, and walked to the spot where Hattersley-Carr had begun his run.

There was what the reporters call a "sensation" among the crowd. The idea of this little foreigner, a Chinaman, actually with a pigtail, and without running shorts, attempting a jump at which Hats had failed, seemed to them the best of jokes, and they lined up on each side, prepared to laugh, and pick up the little man when he fell, and give him an ironical cheer. Hattersley-Carr stood by one post, his hands on his hips, his lips wrinkled in a sneer. Errington and the Mole stood together near him, the former's face shaded with annoyance, for it was bad enough to have to entertain a Chinaman at all, without the additional ridicule which a sorry failure at the jumping bar would entail. The expression on Burroughs' countenance was simply one of sober amusement.

A dead silence fell upon the crowd. Mr. Ting had halted, and was tucking up the long sleeves of his tunic, and putting on a pair of spectacles. He began to run, his feet twinkling over the grass. His pace quickened; within three yards of the bar he seemed to crouch almost to the ground; then up he flew, his pigtail flying out behind him, the eyes and mouths of the small boys opening wider with amazement. There was the bar, steady in its sockets; and there was Mr. Ting, standing erect on the other side, his features rippling with a Chinese smile.

Then the cheers broke out. "Good old Chinaman!" "Well *done*, sir!" "Ripping old sport!" (Mr. Ting was thirty-five.) A dozen rushed forward to shake hands with him; a score flung their caps into the air; a hundred roared and yelled like Red Indians. Errington grinned at Hattersley-Carr; Burroughs stepped forward quietly with Mr. Ting's boots; and Hattersley-Carr stood in the same attitude, with the same supercilious curl of the lip.

The warning bell rang; there was a quarter of an hour for changing before tea, and the throng trooped off, some to the changing-rooms, the idle onlookers to talk over the Chinaman's performance. Burroughs led Mr. Ting towards the house, Errington and Hattersley-Carr following together.

"You *silly* ass!" said Errington.

"How much?"

"He was my father's comprador--confidential secretary, factotum, almost partner."

"Well, he said servant: how was I to know your rotten Chinese ways?"

"Anyhow, you shouldn't be such a beastly snob."

And at that Hattersley-Carr turned on his heel and strode alone out of the field, and out of this history.

CHAPTER II

ERRINGTON MAKES A FRIEND

Pierce Errington, known at school as Pidge, was the son of a Shanghai merchant who at one time had been reputed to be the wealthiest European in China. But Mr. Errington was his own worst enemy. Generous and impulsive, he lacked balance; and though he had a positive genius for business, at times his business faculties seemed to desert him, and he showed a rashness and audacity in speculative ventures that amazed his friends. While his wife lived, this trait was not allowed to over-assert itself, but after her death he became more and more reckless, and ultimately lost almost all his fortune in one black year. When he died suddenly of heart failure, it was found that he had left just enough to complete his only son's education, and to provide the boy with a trifle of pocket-money when he went out into the world.

Pierce was twelve years old, and at a preparatory school in England, at the time of his father's death. He was

committed to the guardianship of a distant relative, a merchant in the City, who fulfilled his trust with scrupulous honour, but with no excess of kindness. Pierce became very sick of hearing from his guardian, at least once a term and more often during the holidays, that he had no prospects, and must look to himself for his future. "I'm a self-made man," the merchant would say proudly; and Pierce, when he was a public school-boy and began to have ideas of his own, would think: "A precious bad job you made of it."

Mr. Errington's oldest friend was a fellow merchant in Shanghai. John Burroughs was a plodder. He might never be so rich as Errington, but certainly he would never be so poor. He had often tried to check his friend's wildest speculations, and then Errington would laugh, and thank him, and say that it was no good. The two men were about the same age, and their sons were born within a few months of each other. When the time came for them to go to England for education, the boys were sent to the same preparatory school, and entered at the same public school. They had been companions since babyhood, and the friendship between the fathers seemed to be only intensified in the sons. They were the greatest chums, and being equally good at sports and their books, they had kept pace with each other through the schools, and reached the sixth and the dignity of prefect at Cheltonia together. Each was now in his eighteenth year, and neither had been back to China since they left it, eight years before.

During those eight years, Errington had received very regular letters from a correspondent who signed himself Ting Chuh. At first these letters bored him; as he grew older they amused him; and latterly they had given rise to a certain perplexed curiosity. Why did Ting Chuh take so great an interest in him? Why was he continually poking his funny old proverbs at him? "An ox with a ring in his nose--so is the steady man." "Remember never to feel after a pin on the bottom of the ocean." "It is folly to covet another man's horse and to lose your own ox." Sentences like these occurred in all Mr. Ting's letters--all warning him against attempting impossibilities, or leaving the substance for the shadow, or letting his impulses run away with him. Of course Errington knew that Mr. Ting had occupied a special position in his father's household, and he remembered vaguely that he had been quite fond of Tingy in his early years; but he was at a loss to understand why the Chinaman appeared to have constituted himself his moral guardian--why he sent for copies of all his school reports, and wrote him such exceedingly dull comments on them. "But he's a good sort," he would say to himself, and forget the homily and Mr. Ting until the next letter arrived.

Ting Chuh had made money while Mr. Errington lost it, through sheer native shrewdness and industry. The relations between master and man were very close and confidential. On Mr. Errington's death, Mr. Ting set up for himself in business, and acquired wealth with wonderful rapidity; everybody trading on the China coast knew him and trusted him, except some few "mean whites" who were incapable of any decent feeling towards a Chinaman. He had now taken advantage of a business visit to London to call upon the boy in whose welfare he was more deeply interested than the boy himself knew. The time was approaching when Errington must leave school, and Mr. Ting had certain private reasons for wishing to judge by personal observation what manner of man had developed from the little boy of ten whom he had last seen on the deck of a home-going liner.

Errington's uneasy forebodings as to the result of the Chinaman's appearance at the tea-table were agreeably dispelled. Mr. Ting was the hero of the hour. He talked fluently, with an occasional quaintness of expression that lent a charm to his conversation; and when it came out casually that his business in England had involved several interviews with the Foreign Secretary, he went up as high in the estimation of the prefects as his athletic feat had carried him with the younger boys. Moreover, at his departure he showed himself very generous and discriminating in the way of tips, and he was voted a jolly good sort by the school. He was particularly cordial in his good-bye to Ted Burroughs.

"I hope to see you again befo'e long," he said, "and I thank you for yo' kindness."

The summer ran its course. Just before the holidays Errington and Burroughs each received a letter from China that filled them at once with regret and with excitement. Mr. Burroughs wrote that Ted was to return to Shanghai

and take his place in the business. Errington's letter was from Mr. Ting.

MY DEAR LAD,

You have now completed your book learning, and it is time to fill your own kettle with rice, as we say. With approval of your guardian, I have obtained for you a post in the great company of Ehrlich Söhne, who have manifold activities, and lots of branches in all parts of China. With them you will gain valuable experience of intrinsic excellence. You will not be blind fowl picking after worms. Your friend Mole is to come to China next month; I vote you come with him, for pleasant company shortens the longest road. You will have liberal allowance for outfit, for as your proverb says, do not spoil ship for ha'porth of tar. Until I see you, then, I write myself your true friend,

TING CHUH.

No boy likes to leave school, but the regrets of the two friends were tempered by their anticipation of novel scenes and fresh experiences. They were delighted at the prospect of going out together, and found themselves looking forward eagerly to the end of the term. One day an advertisement of the North German Lloyd caught Errington's eye.

"I say, Moley, I vote we go out on a German ship," he said to Burroughs. "It will be a jolly sight more interesting than a British ship, and we shall get a good deal of sport in studying the funny foreigner."

Burroughs agreed, and in due time they booked their passage on the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*. It did not occur to them that the "funny foreigner" might also find some interest in studying them; but after certain exciting experiences which befell them during the next two years, they remarked on the strange consequences that came of a single advertisement in the *Times*.

They joined the vessel at Plymouth, and would perhaps have attracted no attention among their fellow-passengers but for a somewhat unusual object among their belongings. Burroughs, unlike Errington, had always enjoyed plenty of pocket-money, and being fond of boating, he had bought first a skiff for use on the river during holidays and then a small motor launch. Just before leaving school he had happened to see a hydroplane in the Solent, and it occurred to him that he and Errington, when they got to China, would find such a vessel useful, or at least exciting, on the Yang-tse-kiang. Accordingly he exchanged his launch for a small speedy hydroplane of the best type: and the novel vessel aroused a certain curiosity in some of the passengers as they saw it lowered into the hold.

For a day or two after quitting port they kept pretty much to themselves, exchanging notes about their fellow-passengers, and finding some amusement in watching their deportment in the dining-saloon. One man in particular engaged their attention. He was a German of florid aspect, with hair cut short and standing up brush-like, and a thick brown moustache which he evidently took some pains in training à la Kaiser. This was not so uncommon as to mark him out for special notice; but the boys observed, after a few days, that this man, though possessing the most engaging manners, seemed to be somewhat shunned by the rest of the German passengers. They did not actually cut him, but they appeared to hold themselves aloof. He belonged to none of the sets into which passengers on a long voyage invariably split up; he was never invited to join their card-parties. The vague impression formed by the boys was that the Germans felt a sort of distrust for their compatriot. The only man on board who appeared to admit him to terms of intimacy was a German major-general who was proceeding to Kiau-chou, the German settlement. These two were often to be seen of an evening under the awning on the foredeck, remote from the other passengers, conversing in low tones, though with no appearance of secrecy.

One evening, after dinner, the boys were leaning over the rail, idly watching the incandescent play upon the surface of the sea, when the German sauntered past them, turned, and made a pleasant remark about the charming weather. He spoke English very well, with scarcely anything to reveal his nationality except the customary difficulty with the *th*. There was something attractive about the man, and Errington, seeing that he seemed disposed to continue the conversation, offered him a cigarette, and invited him to place a deck-chair beside those which the boys

had opened for themselves.

"I zink I may almost call myself an old friend," said the German. "Am I mistaken, or are you ze son of ze late Mr. Herbert Errington, of Shanghai?"

"Yes; did you know him?" asked Errington.

"He was a great friend of mine: you are very much like him. His death" (he pronounced the word "dess") "was a blow to me. And you, Mr. Burroughs--I hope I may call myself a friend also, if your fazer is Mr. John Burroughs of ze same town."

"Yes," said the Mole simply.

"I am charmed to meet you," said the German cordially. "Your fazer's firm is concurrent wiz mine. You have been long absent, at school, no doubt; and you, Mr. Errington, will not remember me; ze years wipe out early impressions; but when you were a child I saw you often when I visited my old friend, your fazer. My name is Conrad Reinhardt."

"I don't recall it," said Errington, "but then I was only a kid when I left Shanghai. We've been at school, as you guessed, Mr. Reinhardt, and we're going back now to start work."

"Ah yes, ze days of school must end. Zey are good days, especially ze sport. You will find good golf in Shanghai. No doubt you go to join Mr. Burroughs?"

"The Mole does--Ted, you know: we called him the Mole at school because he's Burroughs; but I'm going to a German firm: of course you know them--Ehrlich Söhne."

Burroughs was a trifle annoyed that his companion was so communicative: but "It's just like Pidge," he said to himself.

"Indeed!" said the German, in response to Errington's last remark. "Zat is my own firm. I am delighted zat I shall have you for a colleague. It is a good firm: naturally I say so; but every one says ze same. You will have opportunities zat few ozer firms can offer. Zere are great prospects."

He proceeded to dilate upon the vast business conducted by his firm; their transactions in silk and cotton and grass-cloth fibre; their difficulties with the Customs and with river pirates, and so on, incidentally giving many descriptions of the ways of Chinamen, which the boys listened to with interest.

"You know Mr. Ting, of course?" said Errington presently.

"Ting Chuh? oh yes, of course," replied the German; and Burroughs, closely observant, noticed a scarcely perceptible constraint in his manner. "An excellent man of business; a little difficult, perhaps. I remember, he was your fazer's comprador, Mr. Errington. You have nozink now to do wiz him?"

"Not officially, if that's what you mean: but he's kept up a correspondence with me, and it was he that got me this crib with your firm."

"Indeed! Zen zat is a great compliment to ze firm, and, if I may say so, also to you. Ting is a good man of business, highly respected. To place you wiz us shows zat he has a great opinion of us, and also of you. Zis information interests me extremely."

From this time forth Mr. Reinhardt was often in the boys' company. He was always very pleasant, and they wondered more and more why the majority of the passengers avoided him. But when he began to teach Errington some card games of which he had never before heard, Burroughs felt uneasy. On the first occasion, when he was asked to join them, he declined, and they did not ask him again. Knowing how easily Errington was led, and remembering indications of his having inherited his father's propensity for speculation, he ventured one night to enter a mild protest.

"I say, Pidge," he said, "I don't think I'd play cards much with Reinhardt if I were you."

"Why on earth not? Sixpence is our highest stake: are you afraid of my ruining myself?"

"Of course not, but--well, Reinhardt isn't liked on board; there may be something shady about him."

"Come, that's dashed unfair. You know nothing against the man. For goodness' sake, don't get starchy and puritanical."

The natural boy's horror of seeming preachy or priggish kept Burroughs from saying more; but his manner towards the German grew chilly, and he could not help noticing that Errington was somewhat nettled at his friendly warning. One day, for his own satisfaction, he put a question bluntly to the captain, with whom he was on good terms.

"Do you know anything against Herr Reinhardt?" he asked.

The Captain fingered his beard before he replied.

"No," he said slowly, "I *know* nothing. But don't let your friend become too thick with him."

Burroughs went away less satisfied than before, and watched the growing intimacy with more and more uneasiness.

CHAPTER III

A MOVE UP COUNTRY

The two young fellows settled down easily to their new life at Shanghai. Though they had been absent from China so long, the impressions of their early years had not been obliterated, but were only overlaid by the later impressions received in England. Thus they felt little of the sense of strangeness which a man feels on coming into contact with what is absolutely new to him. The narrow dirty streets, half the width of an ordinary room, paved with stone slabs, and crowded all day long with people chaffering in shrill voices, and picking their way through immense heaps of fish, pork and vegetables; the low open shops, displaying silks and porcelain, ornaments and bronzes, and a thousand other varieties of merchandise more or less costly; the numerous tea-shops and dining-rooms, more frequent even than public-houses in the east end of London; the immense variety of smells, in which Shanghai surely outrivals Cologne: all these features of the native city soon ceased to have the charm of novelty; and the clean, well-paved, well-tended quarters of the European community differed little in general characteristics from the towns of the west.

The boys met with nothing but the friendliness which Europeans settled abroad always extend to new-comers, and Errington in particular became a great favourite. Mr. Burroughs insisted that he should live with him and his family. Somewhat to Errington's surprise, he saw little of Mr. Ting. The Chinaman had met him at the quay on the boat's arrival, but after inquiring about the voyage, and promising to give him any assistance he needed, he left him to Mr. Burroughs. Reinhardt passed the group as he walked off the gangway, and Ted Burroughs noticed that he gave Mr. Ting a markedly effusive greeting, which the Chinaman returned politely and with an inscrutable smile.

Burroughs was vastly relieved when he learnt that Reinhardt was not permanently stationed in Shanghai. The German was in charge of a branch establishment of his firm at Sui-Fu, a populous treaty port many miles up the river, and paid only occasional visits to head-quarters. Errington never alluded to him, and Burroughs felt that he had perhaps been a little over-hasty in misjudging a mere shipboard acquaintance. His uneasiness returned, however, when, during a visit of a fortnight in Shanghai, Reinhardt invited Errington to several card-parties, from which he returned flushed and excited. Remembering the result of his former expostulation, Burroughs said nothing; he felt that he could not play the grandmother with his friend; but his disapproval was easily seen, and for a day or two there was a slight coolness between them.

One day Mr. Ting met Errington in the street as if by chance: in reality he had waylaid him.

"Getting on nicely?" he said.

"First chop," replied Errington, with a laugh: he had picked up some pidgin English.

"That is good. You have many flends," said the Chinaman. "Good flends are a delight in plospelity, and a stay in advessity. Bad flends--but of course you have none. Leinhadt is, of course, no flend of yours."

"I rather think he is," said Errington, nettled at once. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, you may eat with a flend, and talk to a flend, and play cards with flends, at home; but the men you play cards with away from home, they are not often flends."

"Look here, Mr. Ting, I don't understand what you are driving at. I play cards with Mr. Reinhardt: you seem to know it; have you got anything to say against it? Is he a card-sharper? Has he swindled you or any one else? If he has, you'd better say so, and then I shall know what to do."

"He has not swindled me, or any one else, that I can prove."

"Well then," cried the lad hotly, "I'll thank you to mind your own business. You bored me with your sermons when I was a kid at school; but I'm no longer a schoolboy, and I tell you flatly I won't be watched and preached at by you, if you were ten times my father's friend. I'm quite able to take care of myself."

"I could wish nothing better," said the Chinaman quietly. "I was your father's flend, and I hope I shall always be yours."

Errington had already repented of his outburst, and Mr. Ting's dignified reception of it made him feel ashamed of himself.

"Of course you are," he said. "I was always a hot-tempered brute; I'm sorry."

And the two parted on the best of terms.

After about a year, when both Errington and Burroughs had begun to get a grip of their work, the former came home from the office one evening, and seeking his chum in the little den they shared, said in a tone of elation--

"I say, old man, I'm getting on. They're going to raise my screw and transfer me to Sui-Fu."

"Under Reinhardt?" asked Burroughs quickly.

"Yes. I shouldn't wonder if he got me the crib. He has to be away a great deal, and though there's a capable comprador, they seem to think a European ought to be on the spot. I wish you were coming too."

"I should like it. It's a lift for you, Pidge, and I'm glad."

Errington talked on in his impulsive way about what he would do, and how he would make things hum, while Burroughs listened and said little. He had already made up his mind to go with Errington if possible; scarcely confessing it even to himself, he wanted to keep an eye on his friend when he came directly under the influence of the German; but he did not wish to hint at the possibility of arranging a transfer for himself until he had spoken to his father.

Late that night, when the rest had retired, he went to his father's study.

"Well, Ted, what is it?" said Mr. Burroughs, looking up from some papers.

"I'd like to go up with Pidge if you can manage it, Dad," replied the boy, coming straight to the point.

"You would, eh? What an excitable fellow he is, Ted! He talked about nothing else at dinner--or hardly anything, and it's all done so pleasantly you can't resent it. Well, you want to go: any particular reason?"

"Well, you see, we've always been together, and ... Dad, why do people dislike Reinhardt?"

"Off at a tangent, aren't you? I think it's a case of 'I do not like thee, Dr. Fell; the reason why I cannot tell.' Some say he's got a brute of a temper behind his pleasant manner, and he's rather fond of cards; but I never heard any definite charge against him."

"Well, I detest the fellow, and I don't like to think of Pidge constantly in his company. You've seen enough of

Pidge to know what I mean, dad, so I'm not giving him away. He's a jolly good sort, the best of pals, wouldn't do a dirty trick to any one; but he's hasty, makes friends too easily, thinks every one is as decent as himself----

"In short, you think he wants looking after."

"Oh, I'm not ass enough to want to hold him on a lead; but I do think if I were with him I might be useful. You see, if Reinhardt is a bad egg, and Pidge finds it out, he'll never look at him again--if he doesn't give him a kicking by way of good-bye. If I'm on the spot, I can keep my eye on the fellow, and perhaps open Pidge's eyes in time. Can't you shift me to your branch there?"

"You would have gone there anyhow in course of time, so if you're set on it I shan't raise any objection. It won't do you any harm to be in charge of a branch, and with Sing Wen there--a capital fellow--you won't have the chance to make many mistakes. We'll consider that settled, then."

"Thanks, Dad; I thought you'd agree. Pidge will be glad: he said he wished I was coming too."

"He won't resent the curb, eh?"

"He won't feel it if I can help it. He's very touchy, and I learnt a lesson on the boat. Good-night, Dad."

"Good-night, old man. By the way, in case I forget it when you go, always carry a revolver with you up there, but never use it except as a last resort. That's a good working rule for a European in an up-river district. Good-night."

Another person besides Ted Burroughs was uneasy at the prospective transference of Errington to Sui-Fu. Mr. Ting, who knew everything that was going on, or at least as much as he wished to know, heard of it as soon as it was decided, and would have taken some trouble to prevent it if he could have urged anything definite against the character of Reinhardt. But he was a very discreet person. He had reasons of his own for maintaining cordial relations with Errington, and reflected that even at a distance he could still find means of looking after him. And when he learnt that Burroughs was to accompany his chum he felt more at ease; he had great confidence in the steady, down-right Mole.

Reinhardt invited the boys to go up river in his motor-launch, a very powerful vessel in which he made his journeys between Shanghai and Sui-Fu. The launch had been bought out of the German navy as a condemned vessel; but some people remarked that if the Germans could afford to condemn vessels of this kind, their navy must be even more "tip-top" than was supposed. As the boys intended to take their hydroplane to their new quarters, they declined Reinhardt's invitation, resolving to follow in the wake of the launch and test the relative speed of the two vessels.

The hydroplane was now by no means identical in appearance with the vessel that had roused a passing curiosity at Plymouth. During the year they had been in China the boys had devoted all their spare time to turning it into a hydro-aeroplane. They replaced the original hull with a much lighter frame of canvas, fitting a kite-shaped half-keel under its forward part. They kept their engine, but adapted it to work two propellers, one at the stern, below the water-line, for driving the vessel through the water; the other raised some feet above the forepart, for driving it through the air. To the sides they fitted floats, and large planes, capable of being folded back when the vessel was to be used as a hydroplane, and adjustable at various angles. By means of differential gearing they contrived that the power of the water screw could be gradually reduced, while the air tractor gained in the same proportion. The effect of their arrangements was that as the speed in the water increased, the vessel rose a little; then, bringing into play an elevator and the tractor, they made the vessel rise completely out of the water and behave in all respects as an aeroplane.

The flying boat, as it came to be known in Shanghai, gave them at first as much trouble as it gave amusement to their friends. Their early experiments with the new model were exasperating. They found that they could rise above the water for a short distance, but then fell, not always gently, and sometimes with anything but pleasant

consequences to themselves and the machine. More than once they had diverted the spectators on the bank by having to swim for it, and subsequently to fish up the machine from the bottom. They had never yet risked a flying experiment in deep water; but the good-humoured advice of their friends to let the boat remain a boat only made them the more determined to succeed.

The journey up the great "outside old river," as their Chinese servants called it, was full of interest to the young traders. At first so wide as to seem rather a sea than a river, six hundred miles from its mouth it was still nearly a mile wide, crowded with fine cargo steamers, and innumerable native junks, rafts, lorchas and cormorant boats, conveying the produce of the interior to the various treaty ports. They passed large riverside villages teeming with an industrious population: then came into vast stretches of swamp choked with reed-beds, beyond which the country for miles presented an unbroken vista of forest, or of luxuriant crops. Here clustered a village almost at the edge of the stream, the quaint pagoda-like houses raised several feet above the level, behind stone or brick embankments, necessary in time of flood. At another place the houses were perched on a cliff, nestling picturesquely among trees and shrubs. Between Ichang and Chung-king they entered a region of rock-strewn rapids, which, however, were now partly obscured by the summer floods. The river here swirled seaward at the rate of from seven to ten knots, forming dangerous whirlpools, and needing skilful navigation. Reinhardt had performed the journey many times, and his crew were familiar with every part of the course. The launch thrashed its way against the current, and the hydroplane had no difficulty in following in its wake, escaping the full force of the enormous volume of water by skimming the surface. In mere speed it was the superior craft.

Reinhardt had not been very well pleased when he learnt that Burroughs was to join his friend. He was too astute not to be aware that the boy disliked him; but he was also too astute to betray his consciousness of it, and his manner towards Burroughs was if anything even more conciliatory and gracious than to other people. On the day of their departure, when they met at the quayside, he greeted him with the effusiveness of an old friend; and after their arrival at Sui-Fu, seemed to lay himself out to please. But the more pleasant he was, the more distrustful Burroughs became; and the younger man was always annoyed with himself because he feared he only imperfectly concealed his real feelings.

Sui-Fu was a large city at the junction of the Min and the Chin-sha rivers, which unite to form the Yang-tse-kiang. It was a busy place, and contained a considerable European community, whose houses stood in wooded grounds on the river bank. After spending a few days in the English consul's bungalow, the two friends started a little chummary near the river--a sitting-room, and a bedroom apiece, with a compound and outbuildings for their native servants. In addition to a cook and a man-of-all-work, they had each a personal servant. The two Chinamen soon cordially hated each other, as is the rule in such cases; but neither had any dislike for the other's master. Lo San, Errington's man, was just as attentive and respectful to Burroughs as his own man, Chin Tai. The Englishmen more than once had to intervene between the two Chinamen when they were fighting with their feet and nails, and they threatened at last to dismiss them both if they could not keep the peace. The threat was effective so far as it prevented fights and shrill abuse; but the masters would have been amused, perhaps, if they could have seen how the servants in their own quarters managed to express their hate without making a noise.

There was a difference between the positions of the two boys at Sui-Fu, inasmuch as Burroughs was nominally head of his branch, whereas Errington was only an assistant to Reinhardt. But it turned out that the German was very often absent, travelling inland in various directions. He appeared to have an extensive acquaintance among Chinese viceroys and other high officials, and had a very large personal correspondence, which apparently had no relationship to the business of his firm. The result was that a great deal of the routine work of the office was left to Errington, who in a short time had practically as much responsibility as Burroughs. The two branches were in a sense competitors--that is to say, they dealt in the same class of goods, and bargained with the same merchants and

dealers. But thanks to the personal relationship between the two Englishmen, their firms, so far as the branches at Sui-Fu were concerned, acted in concert, to their mutual benefit, because the Chinese merchants were unable to play one off against the other.

One day, after the conclusion of a certain transaction between Burroughs and a cotton-grower, Reinhardt remarked dryly to Errington that Ehrlich Söhne had lost a chance of making a considerable profit.

"I dare say," said Errington quickly, "but Burroughs and I must either work together, or definitely work against each other. If we are going to cut each other's throats I'd better go back to Shanghai."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow: nozink farzer from my soughs. You do very well; only I am vexed to lose good business."

The matter dropped. Reinhardt found Errington too useful to be willing to quarrel with him. But a little later he let fall a hint that if Errington held his tongue, it would be possible to carry through certain business deals from time to time without Burroughs' knowledge. Vague as the hint was, it disgusted Errington, and he felt a dawning distrust of Reinhardt; but the German, quick to read him, laughed it off as a joke, saying that no one could suppose that Damon and Pythias could for a moment be separated. Errington did not mention these matters to his friend, from a reluctance to admit that Burroughs' opinion of Reinhardt was justified.

It was soon evident to them both that Reinhardt, however much he might be disliked by the community at Shanghai, enjoyed somewhat unusual privileges. His frequent absences were known to his principals, and he made many visits to Shanghai and Kiauchou--visits which Errington, who had good means of judging, knew were not connected with the business. A little light was thrown on the matter by Burroughs' comprador, who told his master one day that he had a brother whose brother-in-law kept an opium den at a small town a few miles up the river. Opium-smoking was forbidden in China, but, like gambling and lotteries and other prohibited things, it was winked at by the local mandarins in many parts of the country, in consideration of heavy bribes. Reinhardt's launch was often seen anchored off the place, sometimes when he had gone there ostensibly to transact business with a cloth-dealer, at other times as a stage in his longer journeys. He had not the appearance of a victim of the opium habit, and Burroughs concluded that he gave way to occasional bouts, of which the effects were temporary.

CHAPTER IV

RIVER PIRATES

One day Errington had occasion to go some sixty or seventy miles up river, to look after a consignment of goods which had been wrecked in one of the native junks. He had some reason to suspect that the wreck had not been merely an accident. There was a good deal of unrest in that part of the country. Various cases of piracy had been reported both up and down the river, and in Reinhardt's absence Errington thought he had better run up himself, see that the cargo was safe, and make a few inquiries into the state of affairs generally.

Burroughs and he had devoted much of their spare time to their flying boat, which they were determined should thoroughly deserve the name by the time they visited Shanghai again. The journey offered an opportunity of testing it over a longer distance and in deeper water than hitherto, so Burroughs was nothing loath to accept his friend's invitation to accompany him, and took a day off for the purpose. They employed the vessel as a hydroplane on the way up, being reluctant to run any risks until Errington's business had been attended to.

On arriving at the scene of the wreck, Errington found that to all appearance this had been purely accidental. He arranged for the salvage of the goods, and the forwarding of them in another junk, and then set off in the early

afternoon on the return journey.

It was a brilliant day, with very little wind; and having no further anxieties on the score of business, they felt free to experiment with the vessel in the air. They had no doubt of the power of the motor to generate sufficient speed to lift the hydroplane from the surface; their only concern was the stability of it when flying. Opening out the planes, which lay folded close to the vessel, like the wings of a dragonfly, when not required for aerial use, they fixed the collapsible stays and switched their motor on to the air tractor at the bows. The vessel was already planing under the stern propeller; she now rose from the water and sailed along for some time within a few feet of the surface. Then, tempted by the apparently favourable conditions, they rose gradually to a greater height, and felt very well pleased with their success.

Unluckily, however, they came suddenly upon an air pocket, caused no doubt by the difference between the temperature of the air above the banks and that of the cooler air above the river. The machine dropped with a rapidity that took them both by surprise, for as yet they were not very expert airmen. It plunged heavily into the water. They had provided themselves with air-bags, so that the immersion lasted only a few seconds; but the ignition of the engine was stopped, and they found themselves in the unfortunate position of being unable to use the vessel now even as a hydroplane.

With some difficulty they managed, with the help of their Chinese engineer, to get the machine to the bank. Recognizing the awkwardness of their situation if they should find themselves overtaken by night so far from home, they set to work energetically to overhaul the engine. It was a long time before they could make it work again. Meanwhile dusk was drawing on, and they were at least fifty miles from Sui-Fu. When at last they were satisfied that the engine would work well enough to propel them through the water, they knew that it would be quite dark before they reached home.

They pressed on with all the speed of which the engine was capable, keeping well out in the broad river in order to avoid the masses of reeds that fringed the banks. The sky grew darker and darker, though there was a little more light on the water than over the surrounding country. Suddenly their attention was attracted by a continuous whistling, evidently from the siren of a steamer some distance down stream. They felt some curiosity as to the reason of so prolonged a noise; but they had already learnt that in China people do such inconceivable things at such unusual times, looked at from the Western standpoint, that their interest was not seriously engaged.

"Some old buffer of a Chinaman amusing himself, I suppose," said Errington. "They seem to like to hear how much row they can kick up."

They were travelling at the rate of about twenty-five knots, and the whistling grew louder moment by moment. As they steered somewhat nearer to the bank, to take a short cut round a bend, they suddenly came in sight of a small steamer about three hundred yards ahead of them. It was now so nearly dark that the vessel was not very clearly distinguishable.

Almost as soon as they caught sight of it, the scream of the siren suddenly ceased; but immediately they became aware of a shrill babel of voices--cries and shouts in the high tones that Chinamen invariably employ. And as they drew swiftly nearer, they perceived that the vessel was surrounded by a number of sampans, the low punt-like boats used by the lightermen of the ports, and also by the pirates who infested the river.

A moment later they recognized the steamer. There were few vessels of the kind in these high reaches of the Yang-tse-kiang, and they had lived long enough at Sui-Fu to be able easily to distinguish them.

"It's Ting's vessel," said Errington.

Scarcely had he spoken when two or three pistol shots rang out. There was not a doubt that the steamer was being attacked. Burroughs, at the wheel, steered straight for it. Errington snatched up his revolver, but an uneasy suspicion suggesting itself to him, he snapped it, and found that its immersion had rendered it useless.

Only a few seconds had passed since they had first caught sight of the steamer. Unarmed as they were, they meant to take a hand in behalf of Mr. Ting. Each seized a heavy spanner from their tool chest, and Burroughs, telling the engineer to tie the machine to the steamer's stern rail, shut off the engine and drove the hydroplane among the sampans, sinking two of them by the impact.

Then seizing the stern rail, the two lads drew themselves up, and vaulted on deck. There was no one at the wheel, but a crowd of struggling forms was to be seen scrambling up the narrow gangways to the bridge, where there or four men were striving desperately to force the assailants back. At a glance Errington saw that the men on the bridge were the officers and crew of the vessel, and shouting to Burroughs to take the port gangway, he himself made a dash towards the starboard one, and fell upon the rear of the crowd.

The darkness, the excitement, the noise of the fight, had prevented the attackers from discovering the approach of the hydroplane, so that the sudden onslaught of the two white men, wielding heavy iron tools with the vigour of sturdy youth, took them completely by surprise. Both Errington and Burroughs were very "fit" through much exercise, and three or four of the crowd at each gangway had gone down under their vigorous blows before those in front became aware of their danger. When they turned and found that their new opponents numbered only two, they rushed upon them with yells of rage. But they had now to reckon with the men on the bridge, who instantly took advantage of the diversion, and springing down the gangways, threw themselves upon what was now the rear of their assailants.

But for this rapid movement, the fight would have gone badly for the Englishmen. One or two pistols were snapped at them, and they had already received several gashes from the ugly knives of the pirates. But it was evident from what happened now that the men on the bridge had been husbanding their ammunition. Shots fell thick among the pirates huddled on the gangways and the deck adjacent. One slightly built Chinaman, his pigtail streaming behind him, flung himself down from the bridge towards the spot where Burroughs, half stunned by a blow from a burly ruffian, had been beaten to the deck. This little man carried a knife in each hand, and used these weapons with such demoniacal fury that in a second or two he cleared the space between him and the fallen Englishman.

The sudden turning of the tables took all the spirit out of the pirates, who, though they were still three to one, sprang overboard on both sides of the vessel, and swimming to their sampans, scuttled away like rats shoreward.

"A velly good fight," said Mr. Ting, wiping his knives and raising Burroughs from the deck. "No bones bloken?"

"It's nothing," said Burroughs. "I got a whack over the head that made me see stars. Jolly glad you came to the rescue, sir, or there wouldn't have been much left of me."

"Hai! I think it is all vice vessa. Without you and Pierce, where should I be? You got a whack, Pierce?"

"Oh, a baker's dozen or so, but I've had worse at rugger," said Errington coming up. "No: hang it! they've cut me, I see; we don't use knives in our scrums. What's it all about, Mr. Ting?"

"As you see, these pilate hogs attacked me. I was going back after doing a little business--plomised myself I would dine with you. But let us see who these pigs are."



A BRUSH WITH RIVER PIRATES

A BRUSH WITH RIVER PIRATES

His crew had already thrown overboard two dead bodies, and collected several wounded at the foot of the gangway. A lamp was lighted, and one of the prisoners, whose head bore plain marks of contact with Errington's spanner, was recognized by Mr. Ting's engineer as a notorious bandit and pirate named Su Fing.

"The blessings of Heaven descend upon the just," murmured Mr. Ting. "This man is the worst water-lat of the liver. He is plotected by one of the secler societies that are the cuss of this countly, and all the mandalins and plefects and likin[#] officers are aflaid of him, and hate him as much. Suppose we take him to the yamen and accuse him befo' the mandalin, he would be aflaid to pass sentence upon him. Why? Because he would be killed dead by the assassins of the secler society. No: we will take him to the Consular Court at Sui-Fu; there we shall have justice.

Of course his punishment will not be so heavy as if he was condemned by a mandarin. Then he would have his head cut off, or stand in the cage, after a beating with the bamboo or the leather. The consuls do not punish thus. But when you cannot get the moon, a cheese is velly acceptable: that is what we will do."

[#] Customs house.

The pirate captain and his wounded men were conveyed on the steamer to Sui-Fu, and Mr. Ting accompanied the boys to the consul's court to see the matter through. The consul declared, however, that since the crime had been committed against a Chinaman, he as an Englishman had no jurisdiction, and the prisoners had to be brought before the local mandarin. The result was as Mr. Ting had foreseen. The evidence was so clear that it was impossible, even for a Chinese magistrate, to decide in favour of the pirates. He condemned them all to be beaten on the cheeks with the leather, and then to stand tiptoe in the cage, with their heads held up at the top so that they could get no ease from the intolerable pain. But the administrators of the beating laid their strokes on very lightly, and the custodians of the cages left the fastenings conveniently loose, so that within a few hours the men were at large. They remained quiet for a few weeks, while their wounds healed: then it was evident, from reports brought down the river, that they were at their old trade again.

"A nice country this is," said Errington in disgust. "We'll take care in future, old man, to keep our revolvers dry."

CHAPTER V

DIVIDED WAYS

With the coming of winter the two Englishmen found fewer opportunities of employing their leisure time. They both paid short visits to Shanghai, but could not long be spared from their branches. The intense cold made hydroplaning or flying a pastime of doubtful pleasure, and they had to fall back on their own resources, or on the recreations afforded by the European society of the town.

Burroughs did not care for what he called "racketing." He was fond of reading, and preferred an evening with his books to social functions. He joined Errington in games of draughts, chess or dominoes; but these sedentary amusements had few attractions for the more active and restless member of the chummery, who could not find in reading, either, a substitute for his usual recreations. Occasionally they went out shooting together: the reed-beds of the river abounded in wild fowl; but the country was becoming more and more disturbed; the unrest which is always fermenting in out-of-the-way parts of China broke out in riots and other disorders; and one day they received a polite request from the viceroy of the province to keep within the precincts of the settlement. The viceroy had a nervous dread lest they should come to some harm, and their Government cause trouble, which would result possibly in his dismissal from office and the consequent loss of opportunities of enriching himself, or even, if the matter were very serious, in the loss of his buttons. As peaceable traders they had no option but to comply as gracefully as possible with this request: though if they had had no business interests to consider, they would have been prepared to take the risk of the attacks to which small parties of Europeans are frequently exposed in the remoter provinces, especially during periods of popular excitement.

The result of this enforced idleness on Errington was that he fell more readily than he might otherwise have

done to the temptation of Reinhardt's card-parties, which became during the winter a nightly institution. Reinhardt was now seldom absent, and with one or two other Germans in the settlement he spent the long evenings over cards. Errington would sometimes rise from his seat in the little sitting-room he shared with Burroughs, pace the floor restlessly, then, with a glance at his companion engrossed in a book, slip out, more or less shamefacedly at first, but afterwards with scanted offers to justify himself, and make his way to Reinhardt's bungalow, where he was always assured of a warm welcome.

It was unfortunate that he should find himself possessed of an unusual aptitude for cards: still more unfortunate that for a time he had the luck that proverbially attends beginners. The card-players played for stakes, and as the season advanced, the amount of the stakes, as so frequently happens, advanced too. Errington never deliberately intended to play high, but he was almost insensibly led on by the example of the older men; and having begun, he lacked the firmness to withdraw, and shrank from appearing less of a sportsman than the others.

As was only to be expected, the luck presently turned against him, and one night, after long play, he found himself not only stripped of all his money, but in debt to Reinhardt. This position was irksome to a high-spirited temperament. The idea of owing money to his superior was unendurable, and after a restless night, during which he slept little, he resolved to borrow from his chum enough to clear him.

"Got a few dollars to spare, old chap?" he said with an assumed light-heartedness at breakfast.

Burroughs flushed, and cast his eyes upon his plate: an onlooker would have thought from his manner that he was the culprit. He knew very well what was coming, and felt instinctively what Errington had suffered inwardly before he could have brought himself to this point.

"You can have what you like, Pidge--in reason, of course."

"Thanks. I could do with twenty or thirty dollars just now. Sorry to trouble you."

"Oh, hang it, man, don't talk such rot. What's mine's yours any time you like."

Errington pocketed the money hastily, and spoke of something else. His discomfort was so obvious that Burroughs hoped he would drop the card-playing forthwith. Until the monthly cheque for his salary arrived, indeed, Errington absented himself from Reinhardt's parties. He repaid Burroughs at once, and for a week or two never went out in the evening. But then the old restlessness crept upon him; once more he joined the jolly party; then not an evening passed without his leaving the chummery as soon as it was dark, not to return until long past midnight. His losses became more serious, and he played again in an attempt to retrieve them, only to plunge deeper still.

One morning, with pale face and stammering lips, quite unlike his wonted self, he asked Burroughs for the loan of a hundred dollars.

"All right, old man," said his friend, determinedly cheerful, "but aren't you going the pace rather?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Errington hotly, his old resentment at restraint flaming forth.

"Well, it's no affair of mine, of course, but it's a pity, don't you think, to let that fellow Reinhardt get the whip hand of you?"

"Confound you, why are you always girding at Reinhardt? What's he done to you? Anybody would think he's an ogre, waiting to crunch my bones, to hear you talk." He ignored the fact that for months Burroughs had not once opened his mouth on the subject. "What's a fellow to do if he can't enjoy a harmless game? It's all straight; you don't suppose I'd play with sharpers; and one can't always win. You don't want me to shirk it when I lose, I suppose? I tell you what it is: you're getting mean and miserly; you're afraid you won't get your beastly money back."

"You know me better than that, Pidge," said Burroughs quietly. "You're a bit off colour, old chap. Here's your hundred; pay me when you like."

If Errington had obeyed his impulse at that moment he would have apologized to Burroughs, and renounced Reinhardt and all his works once and for ever. But shame, the sense of being in the wrong, false pride, and above all

the gambler's perpetual hope of success, tied his tongue, and the precious moment slipped away.

Burroughs was very much surprised to get his money back within a few days--before, as he knew, Errington had received any further remittances from Shanghai.

"Much obliged, Moley," Errington said as he laid the notes beside his friend's plate one morning.

Burroughs glanced up, but Errington would not meet his eye; so with a "Thanks, old man!" as casual as Errington's own remark, he put the notes into his pocket and began cheerfully to talk shop. But he was much disturbed in mind. If his chum had won the money, it would encourage him to go on gambling. If he had not won it, how had he obtained it so soon? Burroughs hoped with all his heart that he had not borrowed of Reinhardt or any other German of the set. It was bad enough that Reinhardt should entice his subordinate to play at all; and the low opinion that Burroughs held of him fell still lower.

He would have been even more perturbed had he known the real source of Errington's money. Restive under the disapproval, of which he was conscious, though Burroughs never again uttered it, the lad was foolish enough to apply to the Chinese money-lenders. They were ready to oblige a young Englishman, and fixed their interest to match the risk, as they said: which meant that they would squeeze as much as possible out of him by working on his fears of exposure and disgrace.

The nightly card-parties went on, and Errington became a constant attendant. There grew up a constraint between the two friends. Burroughs was anxious and worried, and could not help showing it. Errington, in his own worried state of mind, was annoyed at his friend's manner, all the more because he knew very well that he himself was in the wrong. His high spirits gave way to moodiness and irritability, and after a time he avoided Burroughs. It was a trying position for both of them, inmates of one lodging. They saw less and less of each other, and when they could not but meet, what conversation passed between them was almost confined to business matters.

Naturally the affairs of the few Europeans in the town were freely discussed by their native servants and their cronies. Vague rumours came to Burroughs' ears, after a long round, of what went on at Reinhardt's card-parties. It appeared that Reinhardt himself was frequently the winner when the stakes were high, and Burroughs became less and less tolerant of a man who ought to have been particularly scrupulous in keeping his subordinate out of mischief. Reinhardt was always very polite and pleasant when he met Burroughs, but on more than one occasion the latter was rude to him. There were no half measures with Burroughs.

One day, talking shop because they seemed to have now no other common topic, Burroughs mentioned to Errington that he was negotiating a very large transaction with a Chinese broker, and stated the terms on which the consignment of goods was to change hands. Errington congratulated him on the prospect of doing a good stroke of business, and the subject dropped.

Next day, however, at the last moment, the negotiations fell through, to Burroughs' great annoyance. It was a loss to his branch, and incidentally to himself, for both he and Errington had a small interest in the turnover of their branches, as well as a salary. He was also vexed at having mentioned the matter to Errington, when it was so unlike him to talk about things that were still uncertain.

What was his surprise and irritation a few days later to hear from his comprador that the transaction in which he had failed had been completed by Errington, who had overbid him.

"Nonsense! Absolute rot!" he said to the man, feeling indignant on his friend's behalf.

The comprador spread out his hands deprecatingly and said--

"Allo lightee savvy all same, sah. Mass' Ellington he go buy all jolly lot."

"Shut up; I don't believe it."

The Chinaman shrugged: surely his master was very short this morning! But he said no more. Two days after, however, he brought Burroughs the order for the goods, written on the official paper of Ehrlich Söhne, and signed

with Errington's initials. At this, even a friend of long standing might well be staggered. Burroughs remembered that his chum had been looking more and more worried of late. He came to breakfast with a pale face and weary eyes, and the look of a man who had not slept. Could it be that, in his urgent need of money, he had fallen to the temptation of snatching this business out of the hands of the other house? If it had been Reinhardt, Burroughs would not have been at all surprised; but that Errington had taken advantage of the information casually given him to steal a march on his friend was inconceivable. Burroughs knew perfectly well that at the time when negotiations were in progress with him, Feng Wai, the Chinese merchant, had made no overtures to the German firm, so that there was no question of the firms being played off against each other. Besides, it had always been an understanding between the two old school-fellows that, a price having once been named, each should abide by it.

The position was unendurable to Burroughs, who at once stepped over to Errington's office, and walked, as he had always been accustomed to do, though not frequently of late, straight into his room. Once, Errington would have sprung up from his seat with a hearty word of greeting: now he remained sitting, with a look of embarrassment.

"I say, Pidge," began Burroughs, trying to speak in an ordinary tone, "what's this I hear about Feng Wai doing better with you than with me? I told you, you remember, that I had practically concluded the deal."

Burroughs was but a poor actor, and his manner, rather than his tone, told Errington that he was labouring under some strong feeling. Nervous and irritable as he was, Errington at once took offence.

"I shouldn't listen to gossip, if I were you," he said; "next time come straight to me."

"As it happens, I have come straight to you as soon as I had seen with my own eyes what I wouldn't believe when I heard it. I don't want any more information than your signature."

"Look here, do you mean to be offensive, or can't you help it? Say straight out that you think I've gone behind your back, if you do think it."

"Well then, if you want it straight, you shall have it," said Burroughs, losing his temper. "I've seen your order, signed with your initials. After our agreement it would have been bad enough if I'd said nothing to you; but having myself given you the terms, in confidence, as I supposed----"

"That's enough!" cried Errington, springing up, his eyes ablaze with anger. "You've been looking accusations against me for months past, and I've had enough of it. You always had the makings of a fine prig. Until you beg my pardon, I swear I'll have nothing more to do with you."

And flinging out of the office, he slammed the door behind him.

Burroughs was as much hurt as enraged. This was the first serious row between them since their early school-days. But he was not inclined to apologize. He felt that he had asked for information in a perfectly civil way; and though, in his heart, he could not help suspecting that there was possibly some mistake, the sarcasm of his old friend had wounded him too bitterly for him to hold out the olive branch.

When he went home to the chummary, the gravity of the quarrel was proved by the fact that Errington had removed all his personal belongings.

"Where's Mr. Errington?" he asked of Chin Tai, his servant.

"He gone wailo Mass' Leinhadt," said the man, grinning. He was glad to have seen the back of Lo San, Errington's man.

And next morning, when Lo San brought an envelope containing a remittance for the entire amount that Errington owed him, Burroughs felt still more deeply incensed. To repay him with money borrowed from the German seemed the finishing stroke to their old friendship. In the old days, a quiet talk would have set matters right instantly; but the previous coolness between them, due to Errington's gambling, rendered that course now impossible.

The explanation was exceedingly simple. Errington had received an inquiry from Feng Wai immediately after

he had heard from Burroughs of the negotiation in progress. He had quoted exactly the same terms, and the bargain was struck. But the Chinaman found that, the rates having gone up slightly, he was unable to supply the goods, and went to the office to ask to be released from his contract. It happened that Errington was out at the time, but Reinhardt was there. Scouting a chance of raising a difference between the two friends, Reinhardt agreed to give the enhanced price, merely altering the figures in the contract note, taking care to make the new figures as like Errington's as possible. The Chinese merchant is usually as good as his word; but Feng Wai had had only a verbal understanding with Burroughs, and thought himself justified in concluding the transaction at the higher price. Reinhardt stipulated that the extra price should not be disclosed; but Burroughs' comprador often got information through private channels, and it was not long before he was aware of the terms of the bargain.

The appearance of Errington at his bungalow that evening, in a towering rage, told Reinhardt that his scheme had succeeded, but he was scarcely prepared for the completeness of the breach between the friends. He owed Burroughs the grudge which a mean and dishonourable man often owes a more honourable one for no other reason than that he is more honourable. He was now anxious that Errington should not discover the change of price, for he knew that, if he heard of it, he would at once seek to put himself right with his friend. Errington was too angry at first to give any explanation of the quarrel; but presently he said--

"What's all this tosh about outbidding Burroughs with Feng Wai? Nothing in it, is there?"

"Of course not. You initialled ze contract yourself, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Ze invoice will prove it: I show you zat to-morrow when we go to ze office."

Before night he had made a private arrangement with Feng Wai that the goods should be invoiced at the original price, and that the difference should be made up by Reinhardt himself. His intention was to recoup himself by an adjustment in his private ledger under what an Englishman would call "squeeze." The invoice, consequently, satisfied Errington that there was no foundation for Burroughs' suspicion, and he nourished a deep resentment against his old friend for harbouring it. Reinhardt was, of course, careful to file the altered contract note among his private papers: to alter the figures back again could hardly be done so neatly as to escape the notice of one so keen as Errington.

Thus Errington became an inmate of Reinhardt's house, and the breach between the two friends widened. In a place where there is only a small community of white men, a disagreement of this kind is at once set right, or it becomes far more acute. With Errington, the mere idea that he could be suspected by his friend of such a trick as he had accused him of rankled more and more as time went on. He found himself harbouring bitter thoughts, not only of him, but of Mr. Ting; for in his perverted state of mind he was ready to listen to Reinhardt's suggestions that the Chinaman had profited by his father's losses, and was actually enjoying a wealth which, if right were done, would be his own.

By and by his bitterness of spirit was if possible aggravated by the suspicion that Reinhardt cheated at cards. Being more continuously in the German's company, he noticed little things, slight manifestations of character, which had before escaped him. He watched his host more and more carefully, and though he was unable to bring the matter home to him, he grew at length almost convinced that Reinhardt was a swindler. This, coming upon the loss of his friend, which in his better moments he felt deeply, so worked upon him that he found his situation unendurable, and applied to his firm for a transfer still farther up the river. The managers at first hesitated, but his threat to resign unless his application was granted, coupled with reports of his business aptitude from all with whom he had come in contact, produced the result he desired. Rather than lose his services, the firm put him in charge of a small sub-branch at Chia-ling Fu.

CHAPTER VI

MR. TING SPEAKS OUT

During the whole of the winter there had been much speculation among the European residents in the treaty ports as to the cause of the unrest disturbing many different parts of the country. Disorder of one kind or another is always smouldering in China. Sometimes it is due to the oppression of the officials, sometimes to hatred of the foreigners, often to obscure causes which not even the older white residents in the country can understand.

For some time past there had been risings in various districts which puzzled even the acutest and most experienced. A rumour had gradually arisen that they were due partly to the secret societies which supported predatory bands in many parts of the empire, partly to direct incitement from without. Germany had always expected far greater things from her possession of Kiauchou than had actually sprung from it. Her appetite for colonial extension had grown by what it fed on, and been whetted especially by her successful deals with France over Morocco. Her colonial party hungered after a big slice of the Middle Kingdom, but while China was at peace with herself and the rest of the world, there was little that Germany could do, without risking armed opposition on the part of other interested Powers.

From time immemorial it has been the custom of strong states desiring territorial aggrandisement to make an opportunity of fishing in troubled waters. Many people in China now said that German agents were at work in more than one part of the empire, stirring up the forces of disruption which were always latent in the country. Whether rightly or wrongly, Burroughs had begun to suspect, from various small matters that fell under his observation, that Reinhardt was such an agent. His comprador reported that the German had been seen in communication with the river pirate who had been captured in the attack on Mr. Ting. He said that it was whispered in native circles that German money had bribed the officials to connive at the bandit's escape. At first Burroughs merely smiled at these reports, but they were so persistent that, taken in connection with Reinhardt's frequent unexplained absences, they at last made an impression upon him. Perhaps there was something in them after all.

From the newspapers which he received regularly from Shanghai he learnt that the German fleet in Chinese waters was to be strengthened by the addition of several river gunboats, for the protection of German subjects who might be threatened by the growing disorder. Inasmuch as the disturbances were not as yet serious--no more alarming than the outbreaks that occur about every five years in one part or another--Burroughs shrewdly suspected that in this case the wish was father to the thought. It was becoming a favourite move of German diplomacy to send a gunboat to some centre of disorder, which could only be removed by some one paying compensation. When, therefore, the smouldering disaffection broke into an active rising about a hundred and fifty miles up the river from Sui-Fu, a German gunboat was moved up as far as she could proceed with safety, and several launches were sent still farther.

The total German population for whose lives the German Government professed to have such a tender regard consisted of Reinhardt and two or three compatriots at Sui-Fu, together with about an equal number at stations on other parts of the river. No similar move had been considered necessary by any of the other Powers. The Chinese Government protested, explaining that the disorders were slight, and would be at once suppressed. But the Germans refused to go back, and China was not certain enough of the unanimity of the other powers to risk a war with Germany unaided.

The Chinese officials saw that it was of the greatest importance to keep the peace along the river, so that the Germans should have absolutely no excuse for intervening.

When the movement of the German vessels took place, Reinhardt was absent from Sui-Fu. Errington had been established for some weeks at Chia-ling Fu. On Reinhardt's reappearance at his station it was rumoured among the Chinese that he had actually been in the camp of the revolutionaries, whose leader was none other than the river pirate of Mr. Ting's adventure. There was a very persistent report that the insurgents were well supplied with money, a circumstance sufficiently remarkable in itself to lend support to the suspicion that the Germans were secretly backing the insurrection.

Errington meanwhile, in his new position at Chia-ling Fu, had gone from bad to worse. The city itself was more attractive than Sui-Fu; it was situated at the junction of the Min with two other rivers, amidst very fertile and picturesque country. Errington might have found much to interest him if he had cared to make friends with the missionaries, or with the Englishmen in the town. But his connection with a German firm brought him necessarily into closer contact with the little German colony, among whom there was a careless, card-playing section. Cards were practically the only recreation; and Errington, deprived of any steadying influence, fell more and more under the fascination of gambling. Absence for a time from Reinhardt dulled his suspicions of that gentleman's honesty, and when the German paid occasional visits to Chia-ling Fu he found Errington as ready as ever to associate with him. At the card-parties luck was steadily against the Englishman, and in course of time he was heavily in debt to Reinhardt and others. He went to the money-lenders again; but they declined to give him any further assistance, and began to press him in regard to the amounts he already owed them.

Reinhardt also happened to be pressed for money. An American globe-trotter of great means came to Sui-Fu, and was persuaded by Reinhardt to join his card-parties. He proved more than a match for the German, who, piqued at his losses, played higher and higher, until at the end of a fortnight he was many hundred dollars to the bad.

One day he ran up to Chia-ling Fu in his launch, and called on Errington. After a little general conversation, he said casually--

"By ze way, zose little sums you owe me--will it be convenient to pay up?"

"I'm rather stoney just now," replied Errington, with an uneasy laugh. "Can you give me a little time?"

"Sorry, my boy, I would if I could; but I also am stoney. I must have ze money. But zere is a way for you. Why not go to Mr. Ting? I do not say it is true, but zere are many who believe zat Ting has still moneys of your late fazer, my old friend. A compatriot of mine, a man I know, once heard your fazer say in ze Shanghai Club zat whatever happened to him, ze boy--zat is you, naturally--would be provided for. Ting, said he, would see well to zat."

"My guardian in England told me I had next to nothing," said Errington, much surprised; "and my education was so expensive that by the time I came of age there'd be precious little left."

"I know nozink about zat. I know only what my friend told me. How stands ze matter? You owe me five hundred dollars; I cannot afford in zese times to wait for ze money; zerefore I say, apply to Mr. Ting."

Errington thought over the suggestion. The suspicions already planted by Reinhardt had not taken very deep root, but this fresh hint that Mr. Ting might be actually turning to his own use money that did not belong to him made Errington resolve to broach the matter at the first opportunity.

Mr. Ting at intervals travelled up the river on business. It happened that he came to Chia-ling Fu a few days after Reinhardt had made his suggestion. He called on Errington, as he had often done before, gave him news of friends in Shanghai, and showed no sign of any change of feeling towards his old employer's son.

Errington was restless and ill at ease all through the interview. His natural pride revolted against the course he was forcing himself to take. At last, just as Mr. Ting was leaving, he said hesitatingly and with a shamefaced air--

"Could you--would you mind lending me a thousand dollars?"

The Chinaman showed no surprise.

"You find your pay not enough?" he said. "It was incleased, was it not?"

"Yes, but----"

"And you are a young man," Mr. Ting went on. "You have no wife nor pickins. I think with your pay, and your commission--velly good, if I hear true--you can live velly well. Plaps you tell me what you want so much money for."

Errington began to walk up and down the room. He was struggling with himself: should he make a clean breast of it? Shame, an ill conscience, and the suggestions of Reinhardt combined to tie his tongue.

"Betting?" said Mr. Ting quietly. He put on his spectacles, a curious trick of his at serious moments.

"No, I don't bet."

"Card-playing?"

"There's no harm in an occasional rubber, is there?" said Errington, his temper rising.

"Gambling?" went on the remorseless Chinaman.

And then the storm burst.

"What right have you to question me?" demanded the boy furiously. "You are not my guardian. You profess to be a friend of mine, and when I ask you for a slight favour you preach at me. You're rolling in money, and won't lift a finger to help a fellow. I don't want your money, though if what people say is true, the amount I asked you for is a precious small portion of what I might claim from you as a right, and no favour."

"Hai! What fo' you talkee so fashion? What foolo pidgin you talkee this time?" cried Mr. Ting. In his indignation at what was in truth a charge of bad faith the Chinaman lapsed for a moment into the pidgin English of his childhood. Then, recovering his composure, he said with quiet dignity: "You are the son of a gentleman who was my master and my flend, and I cannot say to you what I would say to any other man who insulted me so. I do not gludge the sum that you wish to borrow, but I am sorry that you want money for leasons that you will not tell, and which I must think are no credit to you. But I tell you now, I will lend you enough money to pay all you owe, if you will give me a promise, the word of a gentleman, that you will make no more debts in the same fashion."

Errington looked at him for a moment; then, muttering "Pledge my freedom to a Chinaman!" he flung out of the room in a rage.

CHAPTER VII

A DISCOVERY IN THE SWAMP

The situation of the young fellow was now pitiable in the extreme. He did not know where to turn. There were six other white men in the place, of whom only two were English; and as he canvassed them one by one in his mind, he recognized that it was hopeless to apply to any of them. Remorse, bitter self-reproach for his folly, mingled with the harrowing fear of ruin and exposure. He thought of the pleasant months he had spent in Mr. Burroughs' house; the kindness all had shown him; the confidence they had put in him; and the thought of losing the good opinion of his friends was agony. He felt that he had kicked away the supports that might have been his. A word to the Mole would, he knew, bring his old friend to his help; but there was that miserable difference between them. A simple promise to Mr. Ting would save him; but pride held him back, and the suspicions that were poisoning his mind. Feeling utterly lost, he went to his room, and buried his aching head on the pillow.

Reinhardt came to him next day.

"Well, did Ting shell out?" he said.

"No," replied Errington. "Give me a week, Reinhardt; I'll pay you in a week, or----"

"Do nozink foolish, my boy. Zat's all right; I will wait a week; in a week anyzink may happen."

On Errington's part it was a mere staving-off of the evil day--a clutching at a straw; the last desperate hope of the gambler that time was on his side.

But how to kill time? He could not attend to his business; there was little else to be done except play cards, and besides having no money, he hated cards now with a savage hatred. Hearing, however, from one of the Englishmen in the place that there was good duck-shooting some few miles up the river, he resolved to go for a day's sport. The Viceroy's request that the Europeans would not venture beyond their own settlement was forgotten, in spite of the fact that it had lately been repeated with some urgency. The country was disturbed, and the swamps haunted by the wild fowl were in the midst of the district affected. They surrounded a number of small villages which were known to be the nests of river pirates, and hot-beds of the insurrectionary movement. To the ordinary traveller the villages were almost unapproachable, being situated on dry tracts encompassed by the reedy marshes that extended for some miles inland from the banks of the river.

One morning Errington started in a native sampan with his Chinese servant. On approaching the spot of which he had been told, he noticed that Lo San looked uneasily at some large Chinese characters painted in white on a rock at the river-side.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Ho tao pu ching," replied the man. "Way no flee."

"Not free! Not clear, I suppose you mean. Why not? There's plenty of room between the rocks."

"Pilates, sah; plenty bad fellas."

"Hang the pirates! It's very kind of the billposter, but we've nothing worth scooping. Go on."

But game appeared to be scarce. Duck were seen in the distance, but Errington could never get within range. Determined not to return empty-handed, he went farther into the swamp, and was punting towards a thick growth of reeds fringing a piece of open water, on the far side of which he had noticed some birds, when his eye was caught by a boat floating apparently towards this open water down a narrow and irregular channel from the Yang-tse. The channel was so much overgrown with reeds and rushes that it was not easy to distinguish the nature of the approaching craft. Errington took up his binocular and scanned it, expecting to discover that it was a sampan, like that in which he was himself travelling. But on closer inspection it proved to be more like a dinghy, and probably belonged to some vessel anchored in the neighbourhood.

It was too far off for him to see clearly the two men in the dinghy; they had their backs to him, but their general appearance suggested Chinamen. All at once a slight turn in their course revealed what had previously not been visible, they were towing an object of much larger size. It was impossible to distinguish it; it might be a raft or a large sampan loaded with goods.

Reckless as his mood was, Errington was not utterly rash, or disposed to court danger out of pure wilfulness. While he was watching the boats, he drew the sampan within the shelter of the clump of reeds through which he was making his way.

"Take a look," he said, handing the binocular to his servant, who, however, preferred to use his own eyes.

"China fellas, sah," he said in a low voice. "My tinkee better go back chop-chop."

The man had felt all along that his master was foolish to come alone into these parts, so far from the town; but he knew the Englishman's temper, and the rejection of his former word of warning had kept him silent since. Now, however, the sight of a strange boat, manned by Chinamen, near the haunts of the pirates, induced him to offer more definite advice.

But in vain. Errington was not the man to be scared by actual dangers, still less imaginary ones. The moving boats had frightened away the ducks, so that there was no present chance of sport. And having nothing better to do

for the moment, he drove the sampan quietly still farther among the reeds, bade Lo San keep still, and settled to watch the strangers.

As they drew nearer, he noticed something that piqued his curiosity. The men in the boat, whom he now knew to be Chinamen, looked cautiously around, as if to make sure that they were not observed. Screened though he was by the reeds, Errington had the curious sensation which watchers often have, that those whom he could see also saw him. But the men gave no sign of uneasiness; the dinghy passed behind the further edge of the clump of reeds, and disappeared.

Errington was now sufficiently interested to determine to wait. Ten or twelve minutes afterwards, the nose of the dinghy emerged from the rushes; the men turned it round, and made off in the direction from which they had come. But Errington saw at a glance that there was now no object astern of them. He wondered what it was, and where it had been left. Probably the circumstance would not have held his attention for a moment but for the men's cautious look around; their manner suggested that they were hiding something. It might be no business of his; on the other hand, it struck him that, since the incident had happened in a district infested by pirates, some of these pests had recently made a haul of goods. He felt that at all hazards he must satisfy himself; not that there appeared to be any danger, but he could not tell but that, behind the screen of reeds at the farther end of the open water, there might be an encampment of the water-rats, as these gentry were called by the Englishmen. The object with which Errington had set out was forgotten; duck-shooting was an exciting sport, but it did not challenge his imagination as did the possibility of a contest of wits or activity with men; and with nerves braced he resolved to investigate.

Venturesome as he was in ordinary circumstances, Errington was not without the instinctive cautiousness of the born scout. He did not, therefore, head straight across the pool, as any one who knew him slightly, and argued only from his impulsiveness, might have expected him to do. Instead, he forced the sampan slowly and with some difficulty through the margin of rushes bordering the pool. Many other channels besides that on which the boat had come, led from the open water to the river. Coming to one of these narrower passages, he glanced up and down before crossing it, to make sure that there were no other men who might see him and interfere with his movements. His object was to reach the wider channel, and then follow the course that had been taken by the dinghy.

It occurred to him that the dinghy, when it disappeared among the rushes, might have towed the second craft to a pirate encampment; and as the direction in which it had gone was on his right-hand side, he took the left-hand side of the pool, and punted slowly along until he came to a spot where the broad channel was open to his view for a considerable distance. He looked in the direction in which the dinghy was going when he last saw it. It was no longer in sight. With another cautious glance round, pausing for a few moments to listen, he crept out into the pool, and set out for the other side. It was not very difficult to find the narrow opening in the reeds through which the dinghy had passed with the other vessel in tow. But when he had once entered it, he saw how almost impossible it would have been to find his way had he not carefully noted the exact place of entry. Reeds grew out of the water on every side. There was no real passage; apparently it was not a regular waterway, and he ceased to expect to see any human habitation at the further end, wherever that might be. The water was shallow, and the only indication that it was navigable at all was afforded by the bent rushes where the two craft had previously passed.

After proceeding for a few yards, however, he found that the water became slightly deeper, and there were some signs of the reeds having been cut. An attempt had apparently been made to clear a channel. His former idea returned to him; perhaps it led to an encampment after all. He drove the sampan on with even greater caution, becoming more and more interested as he noticed how the channel wound this way and that among the thickest beds of rushes.

Threading this tortuous channel for perhaps a hundred yards, he came with startling suddenness upon the object of his search. The reeds came to an end, and on a stretch of firm ground, rising three or four feet above the level of

the swamp, four or five low ramshackle huts, constructed of poles and matting, stood about thirty yards back from the edge of the water. The space between them and the water was littered with an extraordinary miscellany of objects, all of them of a more or less imperishable character--pots and pans, vases, tiles, native images, and other things, which from their arrangement in bales, bundles, or stacks, appeared to be articles of merchandise, but not in actual use here.

With his knowledge of the kind of thing that went on in these swamps, Errington at once guessed that these objects were the spoil of trading vessels captured by the river pirates and brought to this cunningly devised or carefully sought hiding-place. There were black rings here and there on the ground that were without doubt the marks of camp-fires. But the place had a deserted, a neglected, look. The huts were boarded up, except where they were so tumbledown that no such precaution was possible. Three or four old and rickety sampans were drawn up at the brink. But the object which had been towed by the dinghy was floating, secured by a rope to one of the uprights of a ruined hut close to the shore.

Errington looked at it curiously. It appeared from its shape to be a boat of some kind, but being completely covered with matting its outlines were indistinguishable. Wondering what its contents could be, to be so carefully covered up, Errington punted the sampan alongside, and lifted a corner of the matting. What he saw gave him a surprise comparable only to a galvanic shock. Underneath was a stretch of canvas that exactly resembled a wing of the flying boat, folded back, as Burroughs' custom was when the vessel was not in use. Lifting the matting further, Errington had no more doubt. The object before him, shapeless and ungainly as it was under its cover, was indeed the flying boat.

Lo San's astonishment was equal to his own. The Chinaman uttered a smothered "Hai!" then looked fearfully around, as if expecting that the sound would bring a crew of the dreaded pirates yelling about them. But there was no sound, no sign of life.

Errington's first impulse was to tow the vessel out, and convey it to his own station. Then a doubt crossed his mind. The dinghy which had brought it to this spot had been unmistakably of European build. The vessel from which it had come was probably not far distant. Perhaps Burroughs himself was on it. Errington puzzled his brain to hit upon any reason why his old friend should have wished to conceal his hydroplane in this swamp. Had he come up on business, or pleasure? Could it be that Mr. Ting, in his journey down-stream, had called at Sui-Fu, informed Burroughs of the mess into which Errington had got, and persuaded him to come up and attempt to set matters right? The thought made him angry. He flushed hot at what, in his perverted imagination, he looked upon as a breach of confidence.

"Hanged if I'll interfere!" his thoughts ran. "I'm not the keeper of the thing, confound it!" (This was the vessel in which he and Burroughs had spent so many pleasant hours.) "A pretty ass I should look if I took it back, and found that the Mole intended it to be hidden. The place is evidently deserted. No, I'm dashed if I do anything. It's no concern of mine."

Dropping the matting back, he swung the sampan round, and begun to punt somewhat savagely towards the pool. The old sore was reopened. The occupation and excitement had for a time banished all recollection of his wretched circumstances; but everything now came back to him; the weight bore down again upon his spirit.

"Makee too muchee bobbely,[#] sah!" murmured Lo San anxiously.

[#] Noise.

The warning recalled Errington's caution. He was still within the pirates' hunting-ground. He took care to urge the

sampan less violently; but, on coming safely to the river, resumed his energetic movements. It was a long pull back, and he was tired when, late in the afternoon, he again reached the town.

CHAPTER VIII

CROWDED MOMENTS

Feverishly anxious not to be left alone with his thoughts, Errington was glad to accept an invitation to dinner that evening with an Englishman with whom he had lately become rather friendly. They were sitting over their coffee when a third member of the little community came in.

"Sit down, Hamilton," said Errington's host, whose name was Stevens. "Have a cigar? You look as if you'd hurried up. Anything wrong?"

"Same old thing. The rebels have licked the Government troops, and are marching on Cheng Tu. The same performance will be gone through, I suppose: riot and burning, a bit of a massacre, a scare among the Europeans; then the Viceroy will take it in hand; he'll pay for the capture of Su Fing; his head will fly, and then we'll have peace for a year or two. All comes of education, Stevens; you don't agree with me, I know; but if they weren't so desperately fond of examinations and remained in their primal ignorance, I believe there'd be no rebellions. Su Fing has passed more examinations than any other man in the province."

"Well, let's be thankful they're so far away. They won't trouble us."

"I'm not so sure. You know young Burroughs of Sui-Fu? You know him, of course, Errington?"

"Yes."

Errington had never spoken of Burroughs or his intimacy with him: the subject was too sore.

"Well, that flying boat of his of which we've heard accounts has disappeared. I don't know the particulars, but we got a wire an hour ago asking us to keep a look-out."

"A trick of the river pirates, I suppose," said Mr. Stevens: "nothing to do with the rebellion."

"Perhaps not; but Su Fing owes Burroughs a grudge for his interference in that affair with Ting Chuh. By the way, weren't you in that too, Errington?"

"I lent a hand."

"If Su Fing isn't in it himself, you may be sure some of his people are, and it looks as if we shall have trouble all up the Min."

"You're not going, Errington?" said Mr. Stevens, as his guest rose.

"If you don't mind. I've a bit of a headache, and mean to turn in early."

"Sorry. Well, come up to-morrow, and we'll have a rubber. Good-night."

The headache was not feigned, but Errington's principal reason for leaving early was that he wished to think over the news he had just heard. The flying boat had been stolen, then! He could hardly explain to himself why he had said nothing of his discovery; unconsciously, no doubt, he felt that to speak would have opened up the matter of his lost friendship with Burroughs--a matter which he could not have discussed.

"What a fool I was not to bring it away!" he thought. "Yet why should I bother myself? The Mole's no pal of mine now. Let him look after his own property."

But this attitude did not last. The roots of the old comradeship remained, though the leaves had withered. In the night recollections of former days crowded upon his mind, and his thoughts of the Mole became more kindly.

"Hanged if I don't fetch it, and send it back to him," he said to himself.

He got up about four o'clock in the morning, called Lo San, and told him to put some chapatties and soda water into the sampan.

"We're going to fetch Mr. Burroughs' flying boat," he said.

"No this time, sah," said the servant, anxiously. "No belongey leason.[#] Plenty bad fellas longside ribber."

[#] It's unreasonable.

"Sa-ni kow-tow[#]!" cried Errington, using a phrase often employed by the common people. "You no come, I go all-same alone. Savvy?"

[#] I'll cut off your head.

But Lo San, like most of his kind, had a sense of loyalty. He made no further protest, but went sullenly about the preparations for the journey.

Errington, now that he had made up his mind to get the flying boat, determined to leave nothing undone to ensure success. He took a rifle as well as his revolver, and gave similar weapons to his "boy." It occurred to him that he would have done more prudently in enlisting help among the other Englishmen; but he took a sort of grim pleasure in setting out unaided; it would be heaping coals of fire on Burroughs' head, he thought, to restore the flying boat to him. And he did not mean him to know to whom he was indebted for its recovery.

They left the town before sunrise, when nobody was about. In his pursuit of sport on the previous day Errington had been led on so insensibly that he had not taken particular note of the course; and as Lo San, with the China boy's usual indifference, had left everything to his master, they were some hours in discovering the channel through the swamp. Then, however, they proceeded rapidly, though with great caution. On arriving at the broad pool, they moved slowly round it, prying up and down the channels opening from it, to make sure that no other craft was in sight. Then they crept into the tortuous passage to the right among the reeds, and silently approached the shore where they had seen the flying boat.

Errington had reason to bless his circumspection when, on rounding the last curve, he caught sight of six or eight sampans drawn up on the shoaling ground. He instantly checked his own craft and withdrew a few yards into the reed-bed, where he could see, without being seen. Two or three of the better shanties, which on the day before had been boarded up, were now open. A wizened old Chinawoman was cooking fish at a small stove in the open space in front--no doubt a late breakfast for the crews of the sampans, who were resting after nocturnal prowlings.

Errington considered what he should do. In his decision impulse and calculation had an equal share. An alarm would bring perhaps a score of pirates after him, and it would be impossible to tow the flying boat fast enough to escape the pursuit of the pirates' sampans. Even with nothing in tow, he could not propel his craft so rapidly as these men who lived on the river. Nor could he bring the boat away by its own power, for the engine could not be started without noise; and supposing he got away in time to escape the rifles of the pirates, he would almost certainly stick in a reed-bed and fall an easy prey. Besides, the engine might not be in working order. If the flying boat was to be brought away, swiftness and silence were equally necessary. There was little doubt that as soon as the meal was cooked, the Chinawoman would rouse her employers.

The bow of the flying boat touched the shore, where, as Errington had noticed on the previous day, it was held by a rope attached to a ruined hut. The stern was partially concealed by a thin clump of rushes. Errington made up his mind that he must get on board, approaching through these rushes, and discover whether the engine was in

working order, and whether there was any petrol on board. If the engine was workable, Lo San must tow the vessel out until he reached clear water, while he himself got ready to run it under its own power.

It was a chilly morning, but Lo San was shivering rather with fright than with cold. He looked aghast when his master told him in a rapid whisper the plan he had formed. But he knew that his best chance of saving his skin was to do as he was told, and at Errington's order he gently propelled the sampan until it lay within the shelter of the reeds near the stern of the flying boat. Telling him to remain perfectly still, Errington let himself gently down over the side, carrying a rope; then, keeping the flying boat as much as possible between himself and the old Chinawoman, he waded the few yards that separated him from the stern of the vessel. To this he made fast the rope; then, gently lifting the matting a foot or two, he clambered as quietly as possible over the side and into the hull.

A little light filtered through the meshes of the mats, but not enough for his purpose. Accordingly he took out his knife and cut a slit in the covering on the side away from the huts. Then, crouching low so that the matting should not be disturbed by his movements, he crept to the engine.

He found that the petrol tank was nearly empty, but luckily there were two or three unbroached cans of the spirit. One of these he opened, and poured the petrol in a slow noiseless trickle into the tank. It was impossible without noise to test the machinery, but he examined it as carefully as he could in the dim light: everything appeared to be in order.

Now crawling into the fore part of the boat, he slipped his hand between the matting and the gunwale, and cautiously cut through the mooring-rope. It fell into the water with a dull splash; fortunately the vessel was so low built that the rope had only a foot or two to fall. Waiting until the unbroken silence without assured him that the old woman had not taken alarm, he crept back again towards the stern, lowered himself into the water as silently as he had raised himself before, and began to haul very gently. The shore was soft, so that the movement of the keel over it made no sound; on the other hand, the soil clung to the keel, and to move the vessel required more force than Errington expected. But it slid inch by inch towards the water, and might have floated in absolute silence had Errington been able to see what he was doing. But just at the critical moment, when the most minute care was needed, he pulled a little harder than he should have done, and the bow dropped into the water with a splash.

Errington, hidden behind the stern, did not see the little contretemps which might have provoked a smile from Lo San, if he had had any sense of humour, and had not been quaking with fright. At the splash the old woman looked up from her cooking, in the direction of the waterway through which the sampans had come. Seeing nothing there, she muttered a malediction, and was turning to her stove again, when she happened to notice that the mat-covered craft a few yards away was floating free, and that the mooring-rope lay on the shore. Without any suspicion other than that the vessel had somehow worked loose, she dropped the fish she had been preparing, and hobbled down the shore with the intention of tying the boat up again. Quickening her steps as she saw that it was moving away, she leant forward to clutch it, missed her footing, and plunged headlong into the water with a stifled scream.

Hitherto Errington had carefully kept out of sight; but at the double sound of scream and splash he could not refrain from peeping round the side of the boat. The old woman was floundering in the effort to regain her feet. The water was no more than three feet deep, but the bottom was muddy, and the woman, scared by what was probably the first immersion of her life, could not stand up, but was still on hands and knees, only her head showing. Errington had never heard such screaming. Fearing that the old creature would be drowned, he rushed forward in his impulsive way to help her.

His chivalry deserved a better reward. The old crone, as soon as she saw him, let out a series of even more piercing shrieks than before, and, finding her feet at last, scrambled ashore, and with a limping trot like that of an aged cab-horse, fled towards the huts. "Fan-kwei! Fan-kwei[#!]" she screamed, rubbing her wet face with her fishy fingers.

[#] Foreign devil.

Even as he had reached her, Errington repented of his impulse, for the woman's shrieks had already drawn a grimy head to the entrance of one of the huts. The pirate was presumably too sleepy, or too much confused at the sudden awakening, to see clearly what was going on, for he gave Errington time to dash back to the stern of the boat. Hauling it through the reed-bed--and it required little force now that the vessel was afloat---he fastened the stern to the sampan with a few turns of the rope, telling Lo San to paddle with all his might towards the water-way.

The Chinaman needed no second bidding. The huts were already discharging their fierce-eyed occupants. Lo San paddled with an energy of which he had never shown himself capable in the service of his master. Errington waded beside the flying boat, doing what he could to fend it off the reed banks. He was already out of sight of the huts, but the yells and execrations behind showed only too clearly that the pirates were launching their sampans in pursuit. Had he got sufficient start of them to gain the pool?

"Ossoty! ossoty[#]!" he cried to Lo San, and the panting Chinaman put still more force into his strokes. Errington looked behind, but the windings of the channel, and the encumbering reeds, prevented him from seeing how near the pursuers had come. His momentary turn caused the boat to jam against a clump of rushes, and a few seconds were lost while he went to the bows and with a heave of the shoulder sent the vessel once more into the stream.

[#] Make haste.

In a few seconds more, Lo San gave a jubilant shout of "Hai galaw!" He had come to the pool. Instantly Errington sprang into the flying boat and, telling the boy still to paddle hard, flung off the matting and switched on the current. To his intense relief the sparking was instantaneous.

"Stop!" he yelled.

Lo San dropped his paddle. The propeller was whirling round, and Errington with his hand on the wheel turned the vessel towards the open channel. A sampan shot out from the network of reeds behind them. The man in it uttered a shout, threw down his paddle, lifted his rifle, and fired. Lo San tumbled into the bottom of the sampan, which was now being towed by the hydroplane. Errington did not see him; his eyes were glued on the channel in front. He dared not as yet put the engine at full speed; the reed-beds on either side projected here and there too far into the water-way; if the propeller became entangled the game would be up. More sampans emerged from the rushes; more shots were fired; but the pirates' marksmanship was wild, and seeing that the hydroplane was going at a slow pace, they ceased firing and paddled frantically on, hoping to overtake the vessel before it came clear of the channel into the main stream.



A CRITICAL MOMENT

A CRITICAL MOMENT

The foremost sampan was within a few yards of the little craft in which Lo San, quite unhurt, lay cowering in the bottom, when Errington at last considered it safe to open his throttle. The hydroplane shot forward at a pace that seemed to snatch the following sampan out of the very hands of the pursuers. From this time the chase was hopeless. The pirates paddled on a short distance further, then stopped, yelling with rage, and firing after their quarry with blind fury. Not a shot took effect. The hydroplane was soon out of sight, if not out of range.

Errington looked behind. Lo San was not to be seen. With a qualm lest the boy had been hurt, Errington slowed down, stopped, and waited anxiously until the sampan came up by its own momentum.

"Are you hurt?" he cried, seeing the boy inert.

"No, sah: velly muchee funk," replied Lo San, without offering to rise.

"Then get up, you owl, and come aboard," said Errington. "Lug the sampan up after you. First chop numpa one fightee man *you* are."

"My no likee fightee pidgin," mumbled the boy, as he clambered up.

"You belongey chow-chow pidgin,"[#] said Errington. "Sit down."

[#] You're better at eating.

And starting the engine again he ran into the open river, and rushed up-stream against a strong current at the rate of twenty-five knots.

On arriving below the town, he steered the vessel into a narrow unfrequented creek, lowered the sampan, and finished the journey as he had begun it.

"Don't say a word about this, or I'll sack you," he said to Lo San.

He walked up the town, to the office of the local agent of Mr. Burroughs.

"Mr. Ted has lost his flying boat, I hear," he said unconcernedly.

"Yes," replied the agent. "It was stolen yesterday."

"Well, the thieves apparently didn't know what to do with it. You'll find it in the creek just below Mr. Stevens' wharf."

"You don't say so, Mr. Errington! That's extraordinary. I'll wire to Sui-Fu at once."

"You had better say that you'll send it down in tow of the first steamer. That'll be safe enough, I think."

"I'll do that; but maybe Mr. Ted will come up and fetch it himself. I'm glad it's so soon found, any way."

"Yes. And oh!--I say, you needn't mention me," said Errington as he walked out of the office.

The agent telegraphed the bare news of the recovery of the vessel, and asked for instructions. But thinking over the matter, he felt a little puzzled at Errington's manner, and made a shrewd guess that he had somehow gained possession of the stolen vessel. He wrote next day to Burroughs, mentioning his suspicion.

Burroughs, who had himself housed the flying boat on the night preceding the disappearance, and heard of the theft early next morning, was naturally delighted to hear that his vessel had been recovered. But he felt somewhat surprised that it had been found at such a distance up the river. He had at once suspected that the theft was the work of river pirates, but so far as he knew they were quite unfamiliar with the working of a petrol motor, and they could hardly have towed the vessel so far against a strong current in the time which had elapsed between its loss and its recovery. He telegraphed to his agent to report how much petrol there was on board, and the reply that the tank was nearly full, and that there were two unopened cans besides, confirmed his belief that the boat had not travelled under its own power.

This made him suspect that it had been carried up on some larger vessel; but no steamer had gone in that direction, nor was it in any case likely that the boat would have been put on board any of the regular steamers--unless some one had purloined it for a joke. That was inconceivable. He mentioned the matter to his comprador, Sing Wen, who said that he would make inquiries.

Later in the day, the comprador reported that Reinhardt's motor launch had been seen within a few miles of the port, shortly before dark on the evening of the theft. A telegram to his agent brought the news that the launch had passed Chia-ling Fu on the following morning. Putting these two facts together, Burroughs came to the conclusion that the German had been concerned in the theft, though for what motive he could not imagine.

His agent's letter, suggesting that Errington had at least played some part in its recovery, gave him a good deal

of pleasure. The severance of their friendship had troubled him, and Errington's complete silence since his removal to Chia-ling Fu had inflicted a deep wound. To him, looking back upon it, the cause of the quarrel appeared too trumpery to justify a permanent breach; but knowing his old friend's temper, he had hesitated to take the first step towards a reconciliation. And being somewhat stiff-necked himself when he believed that he was in the right, he could not bring himself to apologize for a wrong which he had not done.

Now, however, there seemed to be an opening, and he wrote to Errington the following note:--

"MY DEAR PIDGE,

"I've just heard that I owe the recovery of the old flier to you. Many thanks. I'm burning to know more about it, and would run up if I weren't too busy just now. When I can find time I shall come, and give you a call. I hope you like your new quarters.

"Yours ever, "THE MOLE."

Errington read the note with a curling lip.

"He thinks I've forgotten, does he?" he thought.

And he tore the note across, and threw it petulantly into the waste-paper basket.

CHAPTER IX

SU FING'S PRISONER

Four days after Burroughs dispatched his letter to Errington, when the lapse of time showed pretty plainly that it was not likely to get an answer, he received a visit from Mr. Ting. The merchant, though he had refused Errington's request for help, had not done so out of hard-heartedness or stinginess, but from a wish that the boy should learn a severe lesson, that would leave an enduring stamp. But when he had gone a few days' journey down the river his heart smote him. He was young enough himself to understand the racking anxiety which his old friend's son was suffering; and his knowledge of the desperate expedients to which harassed young fellows sometimes resorted, made him decide to return to Chia-ling Fu, so that he might be at hand to rescue Errington from the worst consequences of his folly.

He had called at Sui-Fu on his way up a few days before, intending to find out from Burroughs more precise details of Errington's circumstances; for as yet he had not heard of the split between the two friends. But Burroughs chanced to be absent up country, and they did not meet. On this second occasion, however, Burroughs was in his office when the Chinaman called.

"How d'you do, Mr. Ting?" he said; "sorry I wasn't in the other day. All well at Shanghai?"

"Yes, when I left. That is now some days ago. You are doing well, your father says."

"Rubbing along, you know. These disturbances up the river aren't good for business."

"That is true. And your friend Pidge--I have his school name, you see--will know that even better than you. I saw him a few days ago."

Burroughs did not reply, and Mr. Ting's observant eyes detected an air of constraint in his manner.

"You do not see him so often now, of course," the Chinaman went on. "That is a pity, when you are such good friends. It is a pity, too, that he is so far away. He did not look well: do you know what troubles him?"

"He hasn't said anything to me," said Burroughs, looking still more uncomfortable.

"He has not sent you a letter lately?"

"No," said Burroughs, adding hastily: "but I wrote to him a few days ago."

"And you have heard of no trouble he is in?" Mr. Ting persisted.

Burroughs hesitated: it was his way to think before he spoke. He had heard only gossip about the card-playing that went on at Chia-ling Fu, and it seemed hardly fair to Errington to discuss his personal matters merely on hearsay. Mr. Ting, of course, was his friend; all the more reason, thought Burroughs, for not telling what Errington himself had evidently not told. But Mr. Ting seemed to divine what was passing in the boy's mind.

"I think you had better tell me all about it," he said quietly. "I have a good reason for asking: we are both his friends. Trouble neglected becomes still more troublesome, as we say. Tell me, then."

"The truth is," said Burroughs, won over by the Chinaman's evident sincerity, "Pidge and I have had a row. A ridiculous cause. He thought I doubted his honour; I lost my wool----"

"Your wool! I do not understand: is it not cotton?"

"My temper, I mean," said Burroughs, with a smile. "A silly thing to do, because you always say more than you mean."

"Ah yes! Anger is a little fire: if it is not checked, it burns down a lofty pile. Well?"

"We parted on bad terms, and haven't spoken since. He said he wouldn't have anything to do with me till I apologized."

"And the apology? You sent it in your letter?"

"No, I'm sorry to say I didn't. Idiotic pride on my part, for of course I never really doubted him; only after you've had a row it's jolly hard to say so--to a fellow like me, at any rate."

"Then you come with me, and you shall be friends again. The yielding tongue endures: the stubborn teeth perish. Now you have had confidence in me, I will be open too. Pidge has been gambling."

"I know," said Burroughs gloomily.

"And he owes a thousand dollars or more. We must save him from the men who have led him away, and turn him from gambling. I asked him to promise not to gamble again: he would not; plaps for you he will."

"I don't know," said Burroughs. "He is so touchy, you know; can't bear to be advised. We shall have to go very carefully to work. But there's a hope in what has happened lately. He can't really bear me a serious grudge, because he took the trouble to recover my flying boat and send it back to me."

"Hai! How was that?"

Burroughs told of the theft of the vessel, and of what had happened since. Mr. Ting listened attentively, and then related a curious story.

On his way up the river he had met the captain of a junk whom he occasionally employed, and in conversation with him learnt of a strange experience that had befallen him not far above Sui-Fu. He had been sailing down in his junk, and called at a riverside village to take on some goods. Having stowed his cargo, and wishing that the junk should reach Sui-Fu before night, for fear of the river pirates, he sent her on under charge of his mate, while he remained to negotiate a certain business transaction with an up-country merchant whose arrival at the village had been delayed.

On the completion of his business, just before sunset, he started in a sampan manned by two men, expecting to overtake the junk before she anchored for the night. Much to his alarm, when only three or four miles above the port, he discovered that a boat was dogging him. He did not know whether the crew were pirates or police: it was now too dark to distinguish; but as a matter of precaution he ordered his men to pull into the bank, and wait until the boat passed.

When he got within the shadow of some trees overhanging the stream, he was more alarmed than ever: the pursuers were also making for the bank. He was quaking in his shoes; but the boat, instead of coming directly

towards him, passed by at a distance of some thirty yards, and disappeared.

He waited until it had had time to get out of earshot, and resumed his journey. But he had hardly gone a quarter-mile down stream, when he heard a low hail, and then the sound of several voices. Steering again into the bank, he looked down the river, upon which a crescent moon was throwing a pale light. And then he saw the boat re-appear, towing what looked like a launch into mid-stream. At the same moment he heard the throbbing of a motor vessel, and from round a bend in the river there came a large launch, which hove to as it reached the boat.

In a few minutes the motor launch was again under way, and as it passed rapidly up stream, the captain of the junk, being well acquainted with all the motor vessels on the river, recognized it at once as that belonging to Reinhardt. But it was not alone. It had in tow the smaller craft which had been drawn out from the bank. This smaller vessel would perhaps not have attracted the captain's attention had it not been somewhat curious in shape, owing, as he supposed, to a full cargo which was concealed under matting.

"There's not much doubt it was my boat," said Burroughs, when Mr. Ting had ended his story. His face had gone pale, and there was a twitching of his nostrils; but his tone of voice was perhaps even more equable than usual. Mr. Ting noted how he differed from Errington in that respect.

"It looks as if Mr. Reinhardt wanted to pick a quarrel," he added.

"Velly culious," said Mr. Ting, reflectively. "What you call a plactical joke, plaps."

"A kind of joke I don't appreciate," said Burroughs shortly. "I think Pidge must have understood that. He's thick with Reinhardt, who probably told him of the trick, and learnt that he had gone a trifle too far. Are you going up to Chia-ling Fu to-day, sir?"

"If you will come with me. A word of advice, if I may. Say nothing to Leinhadt about the matter until you know. One egg is better than ten cackles."

Burroughs discussed a few business matters with his comprador; his boy Chin Tai meanwhile packed his bag; and in an hour he was ready to accompany the merchant to his launch. They had crossed the gang-way, and were waiting for the skipper to cast off, when they saw an old steam launch coming swiftly down from the direction of Chia-ling Fu.

"Do you mind holding on a few minutes?" said Burroughs. "She may have a letter from Pidge on board."

"Velly well," said Mr. Ting, putting on his spectacles. "Lot of passengers, you see: velly culious."

The deck of the launch did, indeed, present an unusual appearance. Instead of the one or two white passengers who might have been expected at this hour--for the vessel must have left Chia-ling Fu very early in the morning--there was a considerable crowd of men, women and children. Every inch of standing room appeared to be occupied. And as the launch drew nearer, it was plain that the passengers were of all nationalities--German, English and Japanese traders with their families, English and French missionaries conspicuous among the rest by their Chinese garments.

"Looks like a general exodus," said Burroughs, his eyes narrowing. "Something is wrong."

"Yes," said Mr. Ting: "velly much long."

He recrossed the gangway to the quay. Burroughs, shading his eyes against the sunlight, remained on the boat, searching the crowd for the familiar tall form of Errington.

The launch drew in, and the merchants on board, recognizing Mr. Ting, began to shout to him; but all speaking together in their respective languages, it was impossible to make out what any of them said. As soon as they had landed, however, Burroughs, who had now returned to the quay, was singled out by his agent, and told of the exciting events which had happened at Chia-ling Fu.

For several days the European community had been in a state of nervous tension owing to reports of the successes of the rebels further north. Despite all the efforts of the ill-armed, ill-disciplined rabble that so frequently

masquerades as an army in the interior of China, the insurgents had made great headway. They had captured Cheng Tu, and an attempt to retake the place had been defeated, with considerable loss to the so-called regular troops. The success of the rebels had brought, as is always the case, large accessions to their numbers. All the restless and turbulent elements of the province for two hundred miles round had flocked to the captured city. There were no Europeans there except a few French missionaries who were reported to be held prisoners, but to have suffered no ill-usage.

This news put every one at Chia-ling Fu on the alert. Arrangements were made to move down river at short notice. The Europeans recognized that, whatever might be the treatment of the missionary prisoners, the lives of any white men captured by the insurgents must always be in jeopardy. Even where their leaders desired, from policy, to protect their prisoners, the blood-thirstiness and anti-foreign prejudices of their ignorant following were always likely to force their hand.

It had been expected at Chia-ling Fu, however, that news of any southward movement of the rebels would be reported by native spies in time to enable the Europeans to make their escape. But just before dawn on this morning, they had been wakened by the sound of shots and a great hubbub. They sprang up, pulled on their clothes hurriedly, seized their arms, and sallied out to see what was afoot. They found the city already in the hands of the insurgents. Making a wide circuit by night, an immense force had crept upon the place from the landward side, and at the same time a large fleet of vessels of all descriptions, including two or three steamers captured at Cheng Tu, had come down the river and anchored at some little distance above the city. The sleepy sentinels at all the gates had been surprised and overpowered, the rabble poured in, and the place fell without striking a blow.

All these details were not known until afterwards: the confusion at dawn had been so great that the Europeans knew nothing except the bare fact that the city was captured, and that they were prisoners. To their great surprise, in a few hours they were all released, told to collect their belongings, and conveyed to the steamer which had just brought them down the river. Clearly the leaders of the insurgents intended to show that the rising was a purely domestic one; they did not wish to provoke action by the foreign Powers.

All the time that Burroughs was listening to the story told him by his agent, he kept his eyes on the gangway, hoping to see Errington step off. He recognized several acquaintances among the passengers, but his old friend did not appear.

"Where's Mr. Errington?" he asked his agent.

"Upon my word, Mr. Burroughs, I don't know. I never thought of him. I suppose----"

"Mr. Stevens, was Errington on the boat?" asked Burroughs, stepping towards the gangway and taking the merchant by the sleeve.

"Errington! Of course he was. That is, I suppose so. We are all here; but such a crowd of us that we were very much mixed up. Hamilton, did you see Errington?"

"Surely: but no, now I come to think of it, I didn't. Isn't he here?"

Answers of the same kind came from all the passengers who were interrogated. In the confusion and excitement, in their preoccupation with themselves and their families, they hardly knew who had been among them, and who not. It was very soon certain, however, that Errington was not among those who left the vessel.

"What can have happened to him?" Burroughs said to Mr. Ting anxiously. "He's such a hot-headed chap that it would be just like him to show fight."

Mr. Ting looked more troubled than Burroughs had ever before seen him.

"I hope he is safe," he said. "Plaps he escaped in a sampan, and will come by and by. We must wait and see."

But though several vessels came down in the course of the day, bringing native merchants who had fled from the city, Errington was not in any of them, nor did his boy appear. Mr. Ting's journey up-stream was necessarily

abandoned. With the rebels in possession of the river no one would be safe. It was with very anxious hearts that Burroughs and the Chinaman awaited the dawn of another day.

CHAPTER X

LO SAN'S PILGRIMAGE

Startled from sleep by the mingled din of shots and yells, Errington sprang from his bed, and seizing his revolver, rushed to the door of his little bungalow and unlocked it. It was thrown back in his face, and before he could recover himself, the weapon was knocked from his hand, and he found himself on the floor, with a dozen villainous-looking, ragged and dirty Chinamen on top of him, screeching at the pitch of their voices. He understood not a word of what they said; none of them could speak even pidgin-English: had he known Chinese he would have learnt that the "foreign devil" was destined to be carried to the arch-leader of the insurrection. Su Fing had an old grudge to pay off against him. The brigand had taken particular trouble to ascertain the dwelling of the young Englishman to whom he owed a deep scar on his learned brow, and a period of imprisonment which, though short, had left a rankling sore in his aspiring soul.

Errington made his captors understand by signs that he preferred not to face the world in his pyjamas, and was allowed to dress himself in their presence, amid a battery of remarks more or less offensive, but luckily incomprehensible to him. His hands were then tied behind him, and he was hurried down to the quay, placed on board a gunboat, and carried up the river.

His captors, squatting about him with their spears held upright in their hands, may perhaps have been surprised at the smile upon the young Englishman's face. Errington was, in fact, amused at his situation--rather relieved than dismayed. This was the very day on which he had promised to pay his debt to Reinhardt--the end of the week of grace. He had gone to bed feeling that next day he would be ruined and shamed; to find himself the prisoner of Chinese rebels, who were carrying him he knew not where, but certainly out of Reinhardt's reach, struck him as a comical trick of fate. At that moment he felt almost affectionate towards the ugly ruffians who were squinting at him.

Meanwhile some of the rebel band were making themselves very free with his belongings. They ransacked his wardrobe, appropriated his rifle, his silver cups and other trophies of athletic prowess, tossed about his papers and a pack of cards they discovered in a drawer, and gathered up into bundles all that they deemed worth looting. One of them, passing into the out-buildings at the back, caught Lo San by the pigtail, and soundly thrashed him for being so evil-disposed as to serve a European master. The cook and the other domestics had already seen the error of their ways and left without notice.

It would perhaps have surprised any one who had seen Lo San only on the occasion of the adventure in the swamp, to find that he alone of Errington's household had not fled at this climax of his master's misfortunes. But Lo San was made of good stuff. He might tremble before a pirate, but his soul was staunch to the master who had been kind to him and paid him well. The devotion of his native servant is a gift which many an Englishman in the East has learnt to prize.

Lo San hung about the house, having received his thrashing meekly, until the looters had stripped it bare. When they had gone away, he wandered disconsolately through the disordered rooms; nothing of value was left, but he collected the scattered papers and the pack of cards: "Massa velly muchee likee he," he murmured.

Then he sat down to think. He was very sore, in body and mind; and very poor, for his castigator had snatched

away the little bag, hung at his waist, in which he kept his store of cash. "Massa Ellington" was gone, and it seemed to Lo San that he would know no peace of mind until he at least discovered his master's fate. "Supposey he come back sometime," he thought, "and look-see my belongey 'nother massa! My no catchee plopa pidgin[#] that time, galaw!" And after an hour's solemn meditation he got up, groaning as the movement reminded him of his stripes, and went out into the town.

[#] That won't be good business.

Outside a mean little eating-house he saw a group of insurgents eating a breakfast (for which they had not paid) of fat pork, rice and beans, washed down with tea. He looked at them hard; none of the looters of his master's bungalow were among them; and it occurred to him that, as he had probably a long journey before him, it was sound sense to fortify himself with a meal. But he had no money; and though he guessed, by the lugubrious countenance of the eating-house keeper in the background, that the eaters had none either, or at any rate would not part with any, he was shy of joining himself to them uninvited. All at once a happy thought struck him. He put on an engaging air of cheerful humility, and addressing the group in the terms of flowery compliment that come natural to a Chinaman, he offered to show them a little magic in return for food. Being as comfortable and content as men may be who have fed well at another's expense, they gave a glad assent, and Lo San, squatting before them, produced the pack of cards. He was a very watchful and observant person, and, silent and unnoticed in his master's room, had looked on sometimes when Errington amused his company with those tricks that seem to the uninitiated such marvels of thought-reading. He had picked up the secrets of one or two, and now for a good hour he amazed and mystified the rebels with simple tricks which he had to repeat over and over again.

Thus establishing himself in their good graces, he accepted with unctuous gratitude the food which they dealt out to him--somewhat meagrely, as a sea-beach audience rewards its entertainers; and then, praising their valour, generously buttering them, he led them on to talk of the doings of the day. It was not long before he had heard more than enough about the exceeding greatness of Su Fing, their august chief, whose Chinese virtues shone with the lustre of the sun; and with quick wit he jumped to the conclusion that his master had been captured by emissaries of Su Fing, who to be sure had reason to remember his only meeting with the Englishman. The prisoner had without doubt been carried to the rebel chief's headquarters at Meichow, higher up the river; and Lo San made up his mind that it was his plain duty to journey to Meichow and discover what his master's fate was to be.

Putting up the cards very carefully, for they had a new value for him, he kow-towed to his illustrious benefactors, as he called the sorry ruffians, and took his way to the riverside. The river was crowded with various craft of the insurgents, and some distance down stream the launch on which the Europeans had been placed was puffing towards Sui-Fu. Lo San, primed with information gleaned from his late hosts, found it now an easy matter to pass himself off as a rebel, especially as he contrived to get possession of a spear which had been incautiously laid down by its owner. Swaggering with a truculent air among the crowd, he soon discovered from their talk that the Europeans had been released, and supposed that his master was among them. But just as he was considering which of the sampans lying at the shore he should appropriate for a night journey to Sui-Fu, he was unlucky enough to catch the eye of a seller of wood, whom he had kicked from the house a day or two before for asking an absurd price. This man also had armed himself with a spear, and letting out a fierce "Hai yah!" he sprang towards Lo San to avenge himself for his kicking, at the same time acquainting people at large with the fact that the wretch was the impudent wind-inflated hireling of a foreign devil. The unhappy consequence was that Lo San was set upon by a dozen others besides the wood-seller, and soundly thrashed a second time for the same offence, an injustice that

wounded his soul even more poignantly than the spear-butts his body.

But there was compensation even in this, for while his persecutors were belabouring him, they let their tongues wag freely with abuse and objurgation, and the wood-seller taunted him with the loss of his master, who would soon, he said, be "sliced" for the amusement of the august Su Fing. Lo San, when left to himself, reflected that but for this second beating he might have gone down uselessly to Sui-Fu, when his master had been carried in a quite contrary direction. "Even in the blackest thunderstorm there is a flash of lightning," he said to himself, resolving to journey up-stream as soon as he ached less.

His misfortunes, however, made him wary. If he purloined a sampan and paddled up the river, he would certainly meet many rebels; and with his self-confidence shaken he could not face the risk of another thrashing. So he resolved to perform the journey to Meichow on foot. He found a secluded nook where he might rest a while; then, still sore, and beginning to feel hungry again, he set off on his long tramp.

It is not necessary to describe his journey at length. There was no beaten road; he had to find his way over fields of mustard and beans, through woods, and across streams lined with bamboos. He passed the night, cold and hungry, perched in the lower branches of an oak, and started again as soon as it was light. When he came to a village, he procured food by exhibiting his magical skill with the cards; but he avoided the more populous places, and walked for hours together without seeing a human being. It was a very weary, tattered, woebegone object that at length stole into Meichow.

Here again he put the cards to profitable use at an eating-house. He learnt that Su Fing was absent, having gone westward with a large force to deal with the regular troops that were said to be marching from Tibet. Everybody knew that an English prisoner had been brought in the day before, and was now incarcerated in the yamen of the prefect, who had fled when Su Fing raided the town. It was a commodious mansion, standing in excellently laid-out grounds, with a large piece of ornamental water on which the prefect had been wont to paddle his pagoda-boat of an evening, feeding his swans. In Su Fing's absence, the place was occupied by his personal retainers.

Footsore and exceedingly depressed, Lo San dragged himself to the yamen, and stood like a humble mendicant at the gate, watching the stream of people that went in and out. If only he had had his bag of cash, he might have been able to convey a message to the prisoner within; door-keepers, and more important officials, in China will do much for money. But he had no money; even his pack of cards was useless now, and Lo San limped sorrowfully away.

Once more giving himself to meditation, his thoughts turned to "Massa Bullows." He knew of the rift between the friends; he knew its cause; there is little concerning his master that a Chinese "boy" does not know. He liked Burroughs; the only thing in his disfavour was that he employed a wretched creature named Chin Tai. It occurred to Lo San that "Massa Bullows" ought at least to know of "Massa Ellington's" whereabouts. So it happened that under cover of night the Chinaman loosed a sampan from its moorings, steered it into the river, and allowed himself to be carried down by the stream towards Chia-ling Fu and Sui-Fu beyond. There was not the same risk in going down the river as there would have been in coming up, and Lo San, paddling as soon as he was out of earshot, was soon speeding along at a rapid rate towards Sui-Fu.

CHAPTER XI

REINHARDT SHOWS HIS COLOURS

Early next morning, Burroughs, lying awake, thinking about getting up, and worrying about Errington, heard sounds

of a violent altercation in the compound outside his windows. He recognized the voice of his boy Chin Tai, raised to an indignant squeal, mingled with tones less shrill indeed, but quite as angry. The disputants were raging at each other in Chinese, the words following one upon another like the magnified twittering of birds, or, as Burroughs thought with mild amusement, like the click of typewriters.

Knowing no Chinese, he was unable to follow the furious dialogue, and listened drowsily, expecting that the noise would soon subside. But presently he heard the sound of blows; the war of words had led to active hostilities. Springing out of bed, he went to the window, and saw Chin Tai wrestling with a Chinaman of most disreputable appearance--some beggar, perhaps, who had proved too importunate.

A moment afterwards Chin Tai flung his opponent to the ground, knelt upon him, and clasping his hands about the man's throat was proceeding to knock his head against the ground, when Burroughs called sharply from the window.

"Get up!" he said. "What for you makee all this bobbely?"

Chin Tai rose at once, trembling with rage, and for the moment unable to express himself. Released from his clutches, the other man staggered to his feet as soon as he had regained his breath; and Burroughs recognized him, with a start of amazement, as Lo San, Errington's boy.

"He come this side makee bobbely, sah," shouted Chin Tai. "He hab catchee plenty muck, no plopa come look-see massa so-fashion."

"Get out of it," cried Burroughs. "Where did you come from, Lo San? Where's Mr. Errington?"

"Massa Ellington he Meichow side, sah. He belongey plison Su Fing. My come this side tellum massa; Chin Tai he belongey too-muchee sassy[#]; he say no can see massa; my come long long wailo nightey-time, velly sick inside. What time my stlong, my smash Chin Tai he ugly facee."

[#] Saucy.

"That'll do. I'll be down in a minute. Stay where you are."

Burroughs made a hasty toilet, ran down into the compound, and eagerly questioned the man, who he could see was half dead with fatigue and hunger. He shouted a peremptory order to Chin Tai to bring some food, which the boy obeyed with a very bad grace. Lo San told his story, and produced the pack of cards, now bent, torn and indescribably dirty.

His news gave Burroughs a great shock. He had half convinced himself that Errington had escaped from Chia-ling Fu at the first alarm, and probably made his way down stream with the idea of taking refuge on Reinhardt's launch, which had been seen off Pa-tang. There was just a chance that he had shown fight, and been overpowered; but the fact that the other Europeans had suffered no ill-treatment reassured Burroughs as to Errington's ultimate safety. The knowledge that he had been deliberately captured by Su Fing's orders and carried to the rebel's headquarters was alarming. It seemed that Su Fing's personal grudge against the Englishman had prevailed over his wish to avoid any act that would call for intervention by a European Power.

Burroughs at once sent for his comprador, Sing Wen. He wished that he could have consulted Mr. Ting, but the merchant had gone down-stream to urge on preparations for an expedition to recapture Chia-ling Fu. A few hundred soldiers had come into Sui-Fu on the previous day, and a small Chinese gunboat was expected to arrive shortly; but it was generally known that two or three weeks must elapse before it was possible to bring up a force large enough to cope with the insurgents. Meanwhile what was to become of Errington? Lo San had reported the wood-seller's boast that Su Fing would "slice" his prisoner; and though it was incredible to Burroughs that the rebel chief should

dare to commit so monstrous a crime, he felt very uneasy: there were many indignities short of actual torture or death that his old friend might suffer by Chinese ingenuity. It was important, if anything was to be done for Errington, that it should be done at once.

Having put all this to his comprador, Burroughs asked for his advice. Sing Wen was a solid, hard-headed man of forty, who had many connections of a business kind up the river. But he had to confess that in this emergency he was at a loss. Burroughs suggested the bribing of the guards at Su Fing's yamen before Su Fing himself returned; but Sing Wen, while admitting that money would work wonders sometimes, pointed out that the present case was exceptional. The rebel chief's underlings would scarcely be persuaded to connive at the prisoner's escape, knowing that on Su Fing's return they would certainly be put to the torture. Sing Wen quoted the maxim of the famous bandit Ah Lum

"Virtue is best: hold Knavery in dread;
A Thief gains nothing if he lose his Head."

Still, it would be something to open up communications with the insurgents; and Sing Wen in the last resort mentioned his brother's brother-in-law, the keeper of the opium den at Pa-tang, who had an extensive acquaintance among Chinamen of doubtful reputation, and could learn, better than any other man he knew, what were the possibilities of bringing influence to bear at Meichow.

Pa-tang was not quite half-way between Sui-Fu and Chia-ling Fu. It was likely to escape annoyance by the rebels because it contained the only well-equipped opium establishment in the district, and would be visited indifferently by insurgents and Government troops as neutral ground. Burroughs decided to run up there with the comprador in his hydroplane. Sing Wen pointed out that caution would be necessary, because the river between Pa-tang and Chia-ling Fu would certainly be well patrolled by the rebels, and there was some risk of being snapped up if the vessel were discovered out of bounds, so to speak. Burroughs, however, made light of this. His machine was in perfect order, and he was confident of being able to escape danger from anything less than a shot from a gunboat.

They started before noon, and ran into the little harbour of Pa-tang without attracting much attention. Burroughs remained on the boat while Sing Wen visited his brother's brother-in-law. The comprador returned in the course of an hour, and reported that, as he had expected, his brother's brother-in-law knew one of Su Fing's most trusted retainers. He was ready to go up river himself and see what could be done to arrange the escape of the prisoner.

Sing Wen, however, looked so downcast that Burroughs asked him what was the inside matter.

"My no likee pidgin so-fashion," replied the man. "My velly 'spectable fella, catchee bad namee supposey fellas see my walkee inside smokee houso."

Burroughs agreed, but pointed out that an Englishman's life was at least as valuable as a Chinaman's good name. Since, however, he wished to see the brother's brother-in-law himself, it was arranged that the three should meet at a little inn at the head of a creek below the town, into which the hydroplane could be run.

Thither the comprador brought his relative, a man of perfectly respectable appearance. Burroughs told him to offer five hundred dollars down to his friend at Pa-tang, and promise a further two thousand, to be paid in Shanghai, if the prisoner was permitted to escape. For his work as honest broker the opium-house keeper should receive five hundred dollars. This arrangement having been made, Burroughs returned to Sui-Fu, promising to run up to the inn from time to time to meet the man on his return, the date of which would depend on circumstances.

Burroughs found it difficult to control his impatience. During the next three days he ran to Pa-tang and back

several times--more often than his comprador thought wise. On the afternoon of the fourth day the negotiator returned, only to report failure. The man he had hoped to bribe was, if not too faithful, at least too fearful to undertake the job: Su Fing had shown himself swift and terrible in his punishments. Endeavours to open up negotiations in other directions had almost ended in discovery, and the emissary had received from his friend a hint that he was in imminent danger. He flatly refused to venture a second time within the lion's jaws.

While they were speaking at the door of the inn, they heard the sound of a launch coming down the river. The inn stood on a slight eminence, from which the river could be seen for some distance in each direction. Sing Wen closely scanned the approaching vessel, and in a few moments recognized it as Reinhardt's launch. It drew to the side and entered the harbour. A European was seen to land.

"That massa Leinhadt," said the brother's brother-in-law. "My savvy he come my shop. He velly good customer. My belongey go chop-chop, no can keep he waitin'. He no likee pipe got leady 'nother fella. Velly solly, sah; no good this time."

He went away, and Burroughs was left to digest the loss of five hundred dollars, and to face the problem over again. It seemed quite hopeless. If two thousand dollars would not tempt the rebel, nothing would. To most Chinamen up-country, such a sum represented affluence beyond their wildest dreams. But Burroughs was one of those men who never let go. At school he had been a plodder; all his successes had been won by dogged perseverance; and he returned to Sui-Fu determined to find some means or other of securing the safety of his friend.

An idea occurred to him later in the day. Reinhardt had been coming down the river, from the direction of Chia-ling Fu. That fact suggested that he was at any rate on good terms with the rebels; indeed, it reawakened Burroughs' suspicion that, behind the scenes, the German was taking some part in the insurrection. He wondered whether Reinhardt knew of Errington's capture and imprisonment, and decided that it was impossible, for the German, if he had any influence with the rebels, would certainly have taken immediate steps to liberate a servant of his own firm, and one who had been so closely associated with himself. Burroughs caught at the idea that Reinhardt, as soon as he knew of Errington's plight, would at once communicate with the rebels on his behalf.

Reinhardt was at Pa-tang. Burroughs considered whether he should go there and call upon him. But reflecting that he would find him at the opium-shop, he came to the conclusion that it would be imprudent and possibly useless to open the matter to him there. He was thinking of sending him a note when, from his window, he saw the motor launch coming down-stream, and steering towards the town. Reinhardt must have paid only a passing call at Pa-tang, he thought.

He sent Chin Tai down to the harbour to discover if the German landed from the vessel. In twenty minutes the man returned with the news that Reinhardt had gone to his own bungalow. Instantly putting on his hat, Burroughs hurried to see the German.

"Ah, Mr. Burroughs, zis is an honour," said Reinhardt, as his visitor was shown in. "It is ze first time you visit my little house; I hope it will not be ze last."

"Thanks, I'm sure," said Burroughs. "I've come on a private matter of importance, Mr. Reinhardt. You've heard about Errington?"

"What! Has he apsconded?"

"Absconded! What on earth do you mean? He's shut up in Su Fing's yamen at Meichow."

"Indeed! Zat surprise me. Zat is a little awkward for your friend."

"Your friend too, Mr. Reinhardt," said Burroughs bluntly. "I am glad you didn't know it. I came to ask if you would use your influence with Su Fing to get the poor chap released."

"My influence! Wiz Su Fing! Himmel, do you not know zat Su Fing is ze leader, ze motor spirit, of zis insurrection? Zat he violates law and order? And you speak of me, a German, having influence wiz him? My dear

boy," he went on, laying his hand on Burroughs' arm, "you are young, wiz not much experience; zerefore I forgive ze insult."

Burroughs drew his arm away, and was on the point of blurting out the common talk of the place; but his habit of self-restraint came to his aid.

"I didn't intend any insult," he said. "If you take it so, I apologize. But anyhow, Mr. Reinhardt, don't you think that strong representations on your part, on behalf of Ehrlich Söhne, might prove very effectual? Even Su Fing has a wholesome respect for the Kaiser, you may be sure."

"Wizout doubt, but zat enters not into ze business. It is not a matter zat concerns Ehrlich Söhne: your friend no longer is in zeir employ."

"What?"

"I am sorry," said the German, with a shrug; "but it must be. He was so very irregular, you know; let ze business go all to pieces; piled up debts--I beg your pardon?"

In his honest indignation Burroughs had let fall a word, but pulled himself up in time: it was not his cue at present to quarrel with the German.

"Ze firm could not stand no more," Reinhardt went on, "so zey have dismissed him: I have ze cheque for his zree munce salary."

"It's an unfortunate affair," said Burroughs, as calmly as he could. "Still, even though he is no longer a servant of your firm, you have yourself been so thick with him that I'm sure you will do all you can, as a merely personal matter."

"So zick! Yes; and what is ze consequence? He is in my debt; he bleed me, sir: he owe me five hundred dollars and more. He promised to pay me wizin a week; ze week is past: he did not pay; and now he is a prisoner: I never see my money. You say, do somezink for him; what has he done for me? You ask me to spend my money, risk my life, for a young fool wiz no principle, no backbone, as you say--for a fellow zat sponge on me, and zen cheat me---"

The German was working up to a fine heat of spurious indignation; but he was suddenly checked by an abrupt movement on Burroughs' part. White with anger the young Englishman had clenched his fist and raised his arm to strike. But he curbed himself as Reinhardt shrank back.

"This is your house," he said, in a fierce low tone, "and for the moment I am your guest. You may think yourself lucky. If I hear of your repeating any of the lies you have just uttered, I swear I'll thrash you within an inch of your life--you mean hound!"

He could not help catching the man by the collar and shaking him. Then, flinging him off, he hurried out of the house.

CHAPTER XII

THE PRICE OF A MOUSTACHE

A man in a rage cannot think clearly; and Burroughs was in such a heat of indignation with Reinhardt that it was some time before he was able to devote himself calmly to the still unsolved problem. The solution came to him presently in a flash: he must save Errington himself. He could not leave his friend to an unknown fate; something must be done; he alone could do it. His flying boat was the fastest craft on the river. He must fly up to Meichow, get Errington out of the yamen by hook or crook, and bring him back. If he were discovered and pursued, his speed,

whether on the water or in the air, would give him at least a good chance of escape.

He sent for his comprador.

"I'm going up to Meichow, Sing Wen," he said. "You'll be in charge during my absence. If any one inquires for me, tell nothing."

"Hai galaw! No can do!" cried the astonished Chinaman. "Fly boatee velly good: no can get inside plison; China fellas look-see Yinkelis[#] man; makee plenty bobbely, catchee all-same."

[#] English.

"Could you make me look like a Chinaman?"

"Plaps can do," said the comprador, doubtfully. "Yinkelis man no can talkee Chinee all-same; he no smart inside."

"That's true. I wish I could talk Chinese like Reinhardt. But look here: why shouldn't I go as a German? Mr. Errington's firm is German; and if there is any hanky-panky between the Germans and the rebels I shall be all right in Meichow; at any rate I can bluff it out."

"My no aglee all same."

"I don't want you to agree; you've nothing to do with it."

"Supposey you catchee touble, what my tellum boss Shanghai side? He say my no do plopa pidgin let you go wailo."

"I'll leave a note saying that I went against your advice, so that in case anything happens to me my father won't hold you responsible. You needn't say any more: it's fixed. You must make me look as much like a German as you can; darken my eyebrows, crop my hair. I can't grow a moustache, worse luck."

Feeling that an awkward situation might arise if he made any change in his appearance at Sui-Fu, he decided to run up to the creek below Pa-tang, and do on board the boat what little was possible to disguise himself. He set off when the Europeans were taking their midday meal, accompanied by Sing Wen, who would leave him at Pa-tang, and by Chin Tai and Lo San, the latter because he had already visited Meichow, and knew something of the conditions there.

Very reluctantly the comprador proceeded to carry out his master's instructions. An hour's work with burnt cork and scissors changed the Englishman's appearance passably to that of a young German.

While Sing Wen was putting the finishing touches to his work, Burroughs saw Reinhardt's launch pass the mouth of the creek in the direction of Pa-tang.

"Not after me?" he said. "He's probably going for his smoke; don't you think so?"

"Yes, sah: Massa Leinhadt velly fond smokee."

"Well, I only wish I had his moustache. I'd give a hundred dollars down for one like it."

He felt that all that was wanted to complete his transformation was a thick moustache like the one that Reinhardt brushed and tended with such affectionate care.

"It's a pity he has come, though," he went on. "I mustn't start before dark, in case he sees the boat, or hears it. And I ought to keep that opium fellow's mouth shut. Sing Wen, you'd better go and tell your disreputable relative that it'll pay him to say nothing about me."

"Velly good, sah," said the comprador. "Hai! My fo'get one ting. No hab got no chow-chow.[#]"

[#] Food.

"Well, bring some back with you. Make your brother's brother-in-law understand clearly."

The comprador went ashore. He was absent much longer than Burroughs anticipated. When he at length returned, his usually inexpressive face wore a look of smug satisfaction hardly to be accounted for by his purchases of food.

"What a time you have been!" said Burroughs. "Have you made it all right with your brother's brother-in-law?"

"Yes, sah, allo lightee," replied the man, with a gleam of suppressed amusement.

He laid his bundles in the boat, then approached his master, fumbled in the little bag he wore at his waist, and drew from it a small packet done up in rice paper, which he handed to Burroughs.

"Allo lightee, sah," he repeated.

Burroughs opened the packet with a mild curiosity, and started. There lay a thick brown moustache, brushed up and waxed at each end, and neatly attached to a strip of light flexible gauze.

"Where on earth did you get this?" he asked, fingering the stiff hair.

"Pa-tang, sah. My catchee he fo' hunded dolla."

"I hadn't any idea you could buy such things here. Where did you buy it?"

The comprador smiled an enigmatical smile.

"My makee allo plopa Toitsche,[#]" he said, and, taking from his pouch a small bottle of gum, he proceeded to fix the moustache upon his master's upper lip. When this was done to his satisfaction, he produced a small cracked mirror which he had obtained in the town, and held it before Burroughs' face.

[#] German.

"By George! It's almost exactly like Reinhardt's," he said; "a shade darker, perhaps. It's the very thing, Sing Wen; you shall have the money when I get back. I could almost venture to start now, but I suppose I had better wait until night."

There being three or four hours to spare, he decided to employ part of the time in thoroughly overhauling the engine. His Chinese engineer was supposed to have seen that everything was in order, but Burroughs always examined things for himself, and had only omitted to do so in the hurry of starting. The engineer had been left behind as an unnecessary encumbrance. All the parts had been well cleaned; there was plenty of petrol; but Burroughs saw to his annoyance that the lubricating oil was low. Luckily there was still time to supply the deficiency. He sent Chin Tai into the town to buy some castor oil, warning him not to talk, and to be very careful not to bring any one upon his track.

It was nearly dark before the man returned. Then he ran up in great excitement.

"My hab catchee plenty muchee fun, sah," he said breathlessly. "My go longside opium houso. Hai! boss he come outside chop-chop; bang! Knock my velly hard, makee my spill plenty oil. Whitey man he come bust 'long after boss, catchee he, catchee pigtail, whack, whack, velly hard. He say all time: 'What fo' you steal my moustachee? What fo' you piecee devil steal my moustachee?' Boss he makee plenty bobbely; he call p'liceman; two piecee p'liceman he come, catchee boss, catchee whitey man all same, makee he belongey chop-chop inside yamen. My belongey inside too--What fo' you pinch my?" he cried, suddenly turning on the comprador, who had sidled up to him.



REINHARDT AVENGES HIS LOSS

REINHARDT AVENGES HIS LOSS

"You talkee plenty too muchee all same," said Sing Wen, indignantly. "Massa no wantchee listen foolo talkee."

"Let him alone," said Burroughs. "Go on, Chin Tai."

"My go inside yamen," the boy continued, while the comprador sidled away, gained the gangway unobserved, and presently slipped ashore. "Plenty men inside. White man he say he go sleep inside houso little time, wake up, no can find moustachee. He velly angly; he say mandalin makee opium boss smart. Mandalin say boss muss find moustachee. Boss say no can do. He say: 'Hon'ble fan-kwei[#] he belongey plenty big moustachee what time he come inside houso; no belongey what time he go wailo. Two piecee man inside all same; he look-see fan-kwei sleep; my look-see other side; hai! he shave moustachee, fan-kwei no savvy all same. My no savvy nuffin."

"Mandalin he say, 'You plenty bad fella: you pay hundled dolla.' Boss he cly he velly poor man; mandalin say he catchee plenty big stick: boss he pay all same. Massa Leinhardt----"

"Sing Wen!" called Burroughs.

But the comprador had disappeared.

Burroughs was at once amused and concerned at the story. He could hardly return the moustache; he guessed that Reinhardt would hardly be pleased if he did. The trick was one of which he would not have believed his staid comprador capable; but he could only admire the dexterity with which the stolen moustache had been mounted by some ingenious Chinese barber. He felt rather sorry for the brother's brother-in-law, who had had to disgorge the hundred dollars he had earned at the expense of Reinhardt's future patronage. Considering the matter seriously, he felt that he had better use the ornament that so materially improved his disguise. Perhaps he might regard it as a set-off against the loan of the hydroplane. And Reinhardt could not expect much sympathy after his callous refusal to aid the man whom he had helped to ruin.

The rage into which Reinhardt had been thrown by the loss of his cherished moustache made it the more necessary not to start up the river until late. Burroughs filled the interval by carefully coaching the two servants in the parts they were to play. The story he concocted did some credit to his ingenuity. He was the younger brother of Reinhardt, and had just come from Kiauchou to find his brother, and hand over to him the hydroplane and a sum of money, to be placed at the service of Su Fing, of course secretly. Having missed his brother somewhere on the river, he had pushed on rather than wait and delay the gifts of his government. In order to relieve the German authorities from the suspicion of acting in concert with the rebels, Burroughs would suggest that these latter should arrest him, and place him in the same prison as the Englishman whom they had already captured. By meting out the same treatment to a supposed German, they would certainly avert suspicion. Naturally the imprisonment would be only a pretence: he must be allowed freedom to come and go; but the pretence must be kept up with a reasonable show of determination.

Such was the story with which Burroughs primed Chin Tai and Lo San. He warned them that difficulties might arise; he could not foresee events at Meichow; but they must employ all their wits to support the fiction, and above all things they were to remember that he was Lieutenant Eitel Reinhardt of the German gunboat *Kaiser Wilhelm*, which, as Burroughs was aware, was then in Chinese waters.

"And there's one thing more," he said sternly in conclusion. "If you two boys squabble, I shall first knock your heads together, and then put you ashore and leave you. Mr. Errington's life may depend on us; when we know that he is safe you can black each other's eyes if you like, so long as you don't make a row."

The Chinamen both protested that they loved each other like brothers, scowling all the time.

Having purchased the silence of the inn-keeper, Burroughs borrowed a sampan from him; and as soon as darkness fell over the river, the two servants towed the hydroplane down the creek and for some distance up stream. Reinhardt's launch still lay off the town: the German was apparently spending the night on board. Burroughs guessed that he would shrink from facing his friends in Sui-Fu and the ordeal of their interrogations. But of course the story of the moustache would be all over the district in a day or two, and Burroughs was somewhat anxious lest it should penetrate to Meichow, and give rise to suspicion.

The hydroplane was thus towed up until the port had been left some distance behind. Then, when there was no danger of the throb of the engine being heard and provoking awkward inquiries, the sampan was hoisted on board, the engine was started, and the light craft skimmed up the river at the rate of twenty-five knots against the current.

CHAPTER XIII

RECONCILIATION

It was midnight when the hydroplane came in sight of Chia-ling Fu. The river was thronged with junks and other vessels moored for the night, and as many of these no doubt had their crews sleeping on board, Burroughs thought it desirable again to tow the hydroplane. It was necessary that no alarm should be given which might have the effect of causing uneasiness at Meichow. He wished that Su Fing had selected a smaller and less busy place than Meichow for his head-quarters; the larger the population, the greater the risk that the hydroplane would be recognized; for it was quite on the cards that some of the river boatmen had seen it skimming or flying on the lower reaches of the Yang-tse. But it was probably known that the vessel had once been stolen from its rightful owner at Sui-Fu, in which case any suspicious person might perhaps be persuaded that the theft had been repeated, with more success.

They got safely past Chia-ling Fu, and then Burroughs moored the hydroplane for a time, so that he might not arrive at Meichow before morning. As he waited, he pondered deeply on the knotty problem that would face him next day. The silence of a cold winter night does not conduce to over-confidence, and Burroughs was at no time one who saw things in too rosy a light. His story was plausible enough, if he had not made an egregious mistake in supposing that Reinhardt was more or less in league with the rebels. But the bubble would be pricked if Reinhardt were to follow him speedily up the river. Much depended also on whether Su Fing was still absent, for the rebel chief was no fool, and the slightest slip might land him in a quagmire from which there would be no escape. As he sat leaning his arms on the gunwale, and watching the dark water swirling by, Burroughs was conscious of many qualms; but in the background of his mind there was always the image of his old-time friend eating his heart out in captivity, and for the sake of his friend he was ready to dare all, to risk all, disregarding the consequences to himself.

He had made up his mind what to do on reaching Meichow; beyond that moment all must be left to the course of circumstances. When, in the early dawn, he came in sight of the town, he ordered Chin Tai to hail the landing-stage as soon as he was near enough, and command a rope to be thrown. His only safety lay in boldness. The rope having been thrown, Chin Tai was to say that his master had come on a visit to Su Fing, and demand a guide.

Just before arriving at the landing-stage, they passed a river gunboat lying off the town. The sight of this craft somewhat surprised him, until he learnt later that it had been employed by the Chinese Government in policing the upper reaches of the Yang-tse-kiang, and fallen a prey to the rebels.

There was no sign of the morning bustle that was usually to be seen at a riverside town. The seizure of the place by Su Fing had put a stop to trade for the time being. The man on the landing-stage responded somewhat sleepily to Chin Tai's order; but the boy, being jealous of Lo San's enterprise in previously visiting the town, was determined to show that he also was a man of mettle, and hurled such a torrent of abuse at the sluggard as caused him to hurry. The hydroplane was moored; Burroughs stepped on to the landing-stage, assuming a mien as like Reinhardt's as he could muster; and Chin Tai, with the self-importance natural to the servant of an august personage, demanded that his honourable master should be instantly led to the chief. The man said something in reply.

"He say hon'ble Su Fing no belongey Meichow this time," Chin Tai reported.

"Ask him who is in charge."

"He say hon'ble Fen Ti," said Chin Tai, after questioning the man; "all same Fen Ti gone wailo; he takee tousand fightee men help Su Fing Cheng Tu side."

"Tell him not to waste time; who is in charge now?"

It was at length explained that the man at present in command was one Chung Pi.

"He no muchee big fella," said Chin Tai scornfully; "one time he mafoo[#]; he belongey good fightee man; this time he tinkee numpa one topside fella."

[#] Horse-boy.

"Does he live in the yamen?"

The reply was that Chung Pi was not a big enough man to occupy the yamen, but was living in a small house hard by.

"Then I'll go and see Chung Pi," said Burroughs.

A guide was called up, and Burroughs was led through an extraordinary succession of narrow lanes and by-ways to a small house a few yards from the gate of the yamen. Chin Tai accompanied his master, Lo San remaining on the boat, with strict orders to sound the siren if he saw any vessel of importance approaching.

On arriving at the house, Chin Tai learnt from the door-keeper that his honourable master was still in bed. Burroughs was in ordinary circumstances courtesy itself; but he felt that he would lose a point now if he allowed himself to be kept waiting. Accordingly, with a curtness that went much against the grain, he bade Chin Tai tell the man that his honourable master must be immediately roused. His manner impressed the servant; the servant evidently conveyed the impression to his master; for in a few minutes there appeared at the door, kow-towing in the manner of an inferior humbly inviting an august visitor to enter his unworthy dwelling, a stout jolly-looking Chinaman, whose appearance strangely reminded Burroughs of a well-fed lord mayor's coachman. The horse-boy had grown in girth; his prowess as a fighting man might have won for him his present position; but at bottom he was a horse-boy still, with all the cheerfulness and ready good-humour of his kind.

Burroughs felt so much attracted to the man that he had some compunction about deceiving him; but he hoped that he could serve his friend without doing Chung Pi any harm. Accepting his invitation to enter his insignificant abode, Burroughs made a few complimentary remarks, which he ordered Chin Tai to translate scrupulously, and then plunged into his story, wishing that he could tell it himself in Chinese. But Chin Tai evidently did not diminish his master's importance; Chung Pi looked more and more impressed; and to do honour to his guest he ordered in breakfast, and regaled him with melon seeds, pea-nuts, fat pork boiled with rice, and weak tea.

Burroughs ventured to ask him whether he knew his brother.

"No," replied the man, "but I have seen him. He has a moustache like your honourable excellency's. Our fighting men envy that moustache. Not one of them has a moustache like your excellency's honourable brother. Theirs are long and silky, like mine; but, as you perceive, they turn downwards. Yours and your honourable brother's are firm and stiff like your noble hearts; they turn up, surely a sign of greatness and majesty."

This was very comforting to Burroughs. He had not before imagined that so much virtue could reside in a moustache.

It was now time to make the suggestion that he should be arrested and imprisoned with the Englishman. At this his host looked troubled.

"I am a poor unworthy captain," he said, trying to draw in his waist. "It is not for me to meddle with the arrangements made in the yamen of my august master Su Fing. Nobody but Su Fing himself, or his honourable lieutenant, Fen Ti, could do that."

Burroughs felt bound to put on an air of extreme indignation.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that you will endanger the success of your master's mighty enterprise, lose

the support of the greatest nation in the world, and compel me to return with the swift boat and the thousand dollars I carry? Of a truth, when your august chief returns he will think that the honourable captain he left to fill his place ought to have shown more discretion. Do you not see that if it is known I am supporting your master it may lead to war between Germany and England? My country, of course, has no fear of failure in such a war, but it suits our purpose at present to avoid it. It must be told in the ports up-river that your chief is arresting Germans as well as Englishmen."

Chung Pi, being no politician, was properly impressed by the possible momentous consequences of his refusal to have greatness thrust upon him. After some further talk, he came round to the view that it was his duty to serve Germans and English alike, and he went off to the yamen to make the necessary arrangements. On his return he explained that the room in which the Englishman was confined was at his honourable guest's service, and it would give him great pleasure to shut the two foreign devils up together. At this Burroughs feared that he had perhaps pressed the point too far: to be strictly confined would not suit him at all, So he carefully explained that the prison was a detail of no importance: all that was necessary was that it should be given out that a German had been arrested. The rumour would be carried down the river, and come to the ears of the English; whereupon the German emperor and the English king would be so much occupied in disputing which should have his man out first, that Su Fing would have plenty of time to overrun the whole province and make good his position with the aid of German gold.

Before he left Chung Pi's house for the yamen, he asked that the boat should be carefully guarded during his absence, promising to give the Chinaman a trip in the vessel before it was formally handed over to his chief. The transfer could not properly be made except to Su Fing himself, but he felt that his government would warmly approve of his handing a hundred dollars to so trusty a lieutenant as Chung Pi. He passed the notes to the gratified captain with a flowery compliment which Chin Tai took pains to embellish; and Chung Pi, well satisfied with himself and his guest, sent for his chair and an escort, put a rope round Burroughs' neck for form's sake, and was carried to the yamen, his prisoner following among the escort.

Burroughs did not much like the look of the rebel soldiers. They were the ugliest set of ruffians he had ever set eyes on. Their uniforms were as dirty as they were gaudy: cummerbunds about their waists, enormous turbans of yellow and scarlet on their heads. Some had spears, some rifles or muskets; all had immense knives thrust through their sashes.

He was surprised, however, agreeably in one respect, disagreeably in another, at the appearance of the yamen. It stood within a large enclosure, surrounded by a wall ten feet high and five thick. The gate opened upon a courtyard, beyond which stood a palatial mansion, consisting of several lofty halls rising one behind another, their walls of brick, their tiled roofs supported on massive wooden pillars. The grounds were laid out in groves and terraced gardens, and Burroughs caught a glimpse between the trees of the large ornamental water or fish-pond of which Lo San had spoken. It was surrounded by a stone quay, and crossed by a zigzag bridge of quaintly carved stone. Excellently picturesque as a residence, the yamen was, however, not pleasant to contemplate as a prison, for every gate was guarded by sentries as ruffianly as the captain's escort, and when the gates were closed, it would be an almost impossible feat to climb the stout walls.

Chung Pi descended from his chair at the entrance of the yamen, and speaking in a hectoring tone that consorted ill with his jolly friendly countenance, ordered his escort to conduct the prisoner to the inner room in which the Englishman was confined. He himself brought up the rear. Burroughs protested violently against the indignity a German suffered in being shut up with an Englishman; and Chung Pi, obviously relishing the joke, declared with a chuckle that brown pigs and black often occupied the same sty. The door of the room was opened, Burroughs was thrust in, and the door having been shut and locked, Chung Pi walked away rolling his bulky form

with enjoyment.

Errington, sitting on a small stool, looking disconsolately out through a barred window upon the pleasant garden, was suddenly startled from a reverie by the sound of a voice which, muffled as it came through the door, seemed to him to be that of the Mole. He turned about eagerly, then felt a keen pang of disappointment when he saw enter the tall straight figure of a moustachioed German. But the German was smiling at him; and puzzled as he was at the fiercely aggressive moustache, he could not mistake the steady honest eyes of his old chum. He sprang up, and rushed forward with outstretched hand--then drew back suddenly, muttering with a cloudy face---

"I was forgetting."

"It's the apology, is it?" cried Burroughs. "Well then, I apologize--you old fathead!"

They shook hands--and when English boys shake hands the action has a meaning beyond the conventional. The past was buried: they were chums again.

"You've come to get me out; it's jolly good of you," said Errington. "But why are you got up like this? Where did you get your moustache? You look a regular German."

"Like Reinhardt, eh?"

"Don't mention the fellow. What a fool I've been! But I mustn't say anything against him: I owe him five hundred dollars; and to tell you the truth, I was in so much of a funk that I was actually glad the brigands collared me: it staved off the evil day."

"We'll settle with Reinhardt by and by. This moustache is his: it cost me a hundred dollars--cheap at the price."

He told the story of his comprador's enterprise, and Errington was much tickled at the opium-house keeper's having to disgorge as a fine the sum he had received for shaving off the moustache. Burroughs checked his laughter; the guards at the door must not suspect that the Englishman and the supposed German were fraternizing. He then related how Lo San had trudged the weary miles to find his master, and explained why he had come disguised as a German, and the means by which he had gained admittance to Errington's room. Errington was troubled.

"I didn't suspect that," he said. "You're running a fearful risk. If that fellow Su Fing catches you here, we shall both be in the same cart: he owes you the same grudge as me."

"Let's hope he won't come back in a hurry. He sent for more of his ruffians, which looks as if he's got his hands full. We'll get away together, old man. Chung Pi is such a genial ass that we shall be able to get over him. You haven't tried to bolt?"

"No. Not much chance with the window barred and four blackguards at the door--not to speak of a ten-foot wall, and absolute ignorance of the lie of the land. You had better leave it to the consul, hadn't you?"

"Not I. Everything has worked out well so far, and with a little luck we'll dish Su Fing."

"Look here, old Mole, there's a thing I must say. Since I've been here I've had plenty of time to think things over, and I see now what a thundering ass and ungrateful beast I've----"

"Shut up!"

"No, I've got to get it out. I chucked away my money on those cards, got into debt all round, went to the Chinky moneylenders like a fool, and cut up rough when you and Ting tried to put the brake on----"

"Oh, chuck it! Wasn't I juggins enough to wonder if you'd done me over that deal with Feng Wai? We'll cry quits, old man."

"Ting asked me to promise not to gamble again, and I let out at him. But if you'll take the promise I'll be glad. If we get out of this I'll never play for money again."

CHAPTER XIV

'MY BROTHER!'

The two friends sat for a long time discussing their situation. The problem of escape was a thorny one. The yamen was at some distance from the landing-stage, and the labyrinth of narrow ways by which Burroughs had come to it would puzzle anybody but a Chinaman acquainted with the town. Even if they contrived to elude the sentinels they might easily lose their way, especially in darkness--and they had already come to the conclusion that only by night could they hope to reach the river safely. The appearance of two Europeans in a town where there were no European residents would at once attract a curious crowd, and detection must be inevitable. And the first step of all, the escape from the room in which they were, was itself at present utterly baffling. Time was of the utmost importance. Su Fing might return any day; it was scarcely possible that a man whose mental powers were attested by the passing of so many examinations would be imposed on as the simple Chung Pi had been; and there was no knowing what summary methods he might use in dealing with the two Englishmen to whom he owed a grudge.

Burroughs examined the bars of the window. They were so deeply imbedded in the masonry that to loosen them within a reasonable time seemed a hopeless undertaking. The chances of succeeding in a rush through the doorway, when the door was opened, seemed slight. Burroughs had his revolver; Errington was unarmed; and though Chin Tai, who was waiting without to act as interpreter between Chung Pi and his German visitor, had his knife, it was not very likely that Burroughs and he could overpower the four sentinels on guard at the door. Even if they were taken by surprise, the sound of the scuffle would quickly bring up others from the gates and courtyards between the room and the outer wall. The more they thought of the problem, the more thoroughly were they convinced that violent measures were doomed to failure; they must have recourse to stratagem. But puzzle as they might, neither had the glimmering of a notion what the first move in the game must be.

They were so deeply immersed in talk that they did not notice the flight of time, and both were surprised when the door was opened, and a Chinese cook brought in their breakfast.

"Rice and beans again, I suppose!" said Errington, with a groan. "I've had nothing else."

An idea occurred to Burroughs.

"Take care not to seem friendly with me," he said, twirling his moustache--Reinhardt's moustache!--and turning his back on Errington with true Germanic disdain. "Hai! Chin Tai, tell these fellows that I demand to see the captain at once."

He had some doubt whether his demand would be acceded to, but Chung Pi had apparently anticipated something of the sort, for one of the sentinels called up a man from the courtyard, and sent him with the message to the captain.

When Chung Pi appeared, it was evident that he was much amused. He laughed as he spoke to Chin Tai.

"He say massa hab catchee too plenty muchee plison," said Chin Tai.

"It's all very well," said Burroughs, frowning haughtily. "I asked you to arrest me, for form's sake, but I didn't say I'd agree to be starved. Is this the fare to put before a German? It is good enough for the Englishman, but it won't do for me."

He glanced scornfully at Errington, who, taking the cue, assumed an air of dejection and humility.

"I am sorry," said Chung Pi contritely. "It was a mere oversight on my part. The cook naturally provided for the second prisoner as for the first. He did not know of the understanding between your honourable excellency and my unworthy self. I will at once have a dinner prepared worthy of your august eminence."

"That is well," said Burroughs. "When I have finished my meal, I shall give myself the pleasure of showing to

you the boat which lies at the landing-stage."

"I must sleep a little first," said Chung Pi. "I have eaten so many melon seeds that my belt is exceedingly tight."

"At any time your excellency pleases," said Burroughs, with a bow.

The captain retired, after giving orders to the cook. Presently the servant returned, bringing a right royal feast--pickled duck's eggs, bean curd, pork patties, chopped cucumber, millet cakes soaked in treacle, fried cabbage--all very tastily dressed, together with water melons and tea.

As soon as the door was shut, the two prisoners fell to with a will.

"You'll want something better than rice and beans if we're to have any bother," said Burroughs. "This is very good; I only wish they didn't use quite so much garlic and oil."

When they had finished their dinner, Burroughs knocked at the door, and ordered Chin Tai, who meanwhile had had to satisfy himself with rice, to let the captain know that he was ready. It was some time before Chung Pi appeared, cracking and eating melon seeds. What explanation he gave to the sentinels of his indulgence to the second prisoner, or whether he condescended to give any explanation at all, Burroughs never knew. He accompanied Chung Pi to the outer gate, where chairs were waiting, and when they had entered these antiquated vehicles, each was lifted by four chai-jen or yamen runners, and carried through crooked and unsavoury streets, too narrow to admit of more than one passing at a time, down to the landing-stage. Two chai-jen went in advance, clearing a way with their sticks through the crowd. Chin Tai followed.

Lo San's face beamed at the sight of "Massa Bullows." He had begun to fear that some mishap had befallen him, and saw another beating in prospect.

Burroughs invited the captain to step into the hydroplane, but Chung Pi excused himself with many apologies, regretting that the present state of his health--by which Burroughs understood a surfeit of melon seeds--rendered it inadvisable for him to undergo any excitement. Leaving Chin Tai on the landing-stage, as a guarantee of good faith, Burroughs accordingly embarked alone, and for the space of a quarter of an hour or so exhibited the qualities of the vessel as a hydroplane, skimming up and down the river at full speed. Its flying powers, however, he refrained from showing.

Chung Pi was so much impressed and delighted with the marvellous vessel that he overcame his squeamishness, and consented to try a short trip up-stream. A few miles above the town, Burroughs caught sight of a small launch coming down swiftly on the current, and ran up to meet it, intending to turn and race it, with the object of still further impressing the captain. But in a few moments Lo San, interpreting a sentence of his passenger, informed him that the launch was one of Su Fing's dispatch boats, and was probably bringing a message from the chief to Chung Pi.

Feeling somewhat alarmed, Burroughs slowed down, and ran the hydroplane alongside the launch. A sashed and turbaned officer on deck shouted a greeting to Chung Pi, and told him that Su Fing was now on his way down the river with the bulk of his force, and might be expected to arrive before sunset.

"He say you velly happy this time," Lo San interpreted. "Su Fing he come look-see boat, say he velly good, numpa one boat."

Burroughs was anything but happy. He forced a smile, but felt most unphilosophically irritated when the ends of Reinhardt's moustache tickled his cheeks. He listened unheeding to the monotonous voice of Lo San translating the encomiums passed by Chung Pi on the admirable vessel, and steered mechanically down-stream towards Meichow, whither the captain said they must return at once in order to make preparations for Su Fing's fitting reception. Sufficiently alive to the necessity of sparing petrol, he did not drive the vessel at full speed, much to the disappointment of Chung Pi, who was looking forward to a dashing reappearance before the eyes of the thousands of admiring spectators now, beyond doubt, congregated at the riverside.

The imminent return of Su Fing threatened to put a bar to any plan that might be evolved for releasing Errington. As yet, think as hard as he might, Burroughs had been quite unable to form any likely scheme. On the way down the river he bent his brains exclusively on the problem, blind to the probability that Chung Pi might become suspicious of his lack of exhilaration at the prospect of a speedy meeting with the chief. The more he puzzled, the more hopeless the situation appeared. He knew that the coming of Su Fing would draw the whole population into the narrow contorted alley-ways that served as streets, so that, even if he got Errington out of the yamen, the chances of gaining the landing-stage undetected were naught. He tried to think of some means of persuading Chung Pi to bring Errington to the hydroplane; indeed, he ventured to hint that it would be a fine thing to meet the chief far up the river, and offer the prisoner to him as a sort of slave to grace his triumph. But Chung Pi would not hear of it. He objected that the orders he had received were strict: the Englishman was to be closely guarded; and it was as much as his rank was worth to disobey commands so explicit. Burroughs would not excite suspicion by pressing the point; and, indeed, he liked the fat simpleton so well as to wish to avoid getting him into hot water.

Thus uneasy, depressed, more nervous than he had ever been in his life before, he was running towards the landing-stage, not giving a glance beyond, when an exclamation from Lo San caused him to lift his eyes. Then he saw something that shot a cold shiver through him. This was the last straw. A quarter of a mile beyond the landing-stage, coming round a bend in the river, was the nose of a launch which he instantly recognized as Reinhardt's. It would reach the stage about the same time as his own vessel. The game was up! Reinhardt was certainly on board; the launch had never been seen on the river without him. He would certainly betray the pseudo-German. There had never been any love lost between them. They had parted in anger. And with a man of Reinhardt's temperament the "rape of the lock," the explanation of which would flash upon him the moment he caught sight of it adorning Burroughs' lip, would supply the fiercest motive for revenge.

Burroughs turned his head away from Chung Pi; he could no longer keep up the forced smile, which he felt must have become an awful grimace. Always a little slow of thought, he did not remember, for a moment or two, that in his story to Chung Pi he had unwittingly provided himself with an avenue of safety. All at once the recollection flashed upon him: he was Lieutenant Eitel Reinhardt, of the gunboat *Kaiser Wilhelm*. The moustacheless German was his brother!

"My brother! my brother!" he shouted excitedly.

Lo San looked at him in amazement. Was his master mad? Then he, too, remembered.

"My honourable master's brother," he exclaimed to Chung Pi.

The captain's broad face gleamed with interest and satisfaction. This new arrival was the very man who had arranged the gifts for Su Fing, whom his brother had so unfortunately missed, of whose money he himself had a hundred dollars safely tucked into his pouch.

"Brothers are as double cherries," he said. "The coming of your august relative is as the shining of the morning sun on the closed petals of a rose."

Burroughs bowed as Lo San translated, feeling that another word would make him shout with maniacal laughter. With a turn of the wrist he ran the boat alongside the landing-stage, just a second or two before the launch came up at the farther end. With Chung Pi he stepped off, observing that Reinhardt was standing at his gangway, waiting for his heavier and more cumbersome vessel to be brought alongside. And almost wishing that the planks might part, and plunge him into the water and oblivion, he walked forward to meet his fate.

CHAPTER XV

REINHARDT IN THE TOILS

Burroughs and the smiling captain were still some few yards away from Reinhardt's gangway; Reinhardt was staring with puzzled curiosity at the tall German with the moustache so like his own lost treasure; when Burroughs whispered to Lo San--

"Say to the captain: 'That is the launch, but where is my brother? My brother wears a moustache like mine. Do not the English shave the lip? Ask him who he is.'"

Chung Pi was a horse-boy turned captain; like many great men sprung from humble origin, he was apt to stand upon his dignity. Advancing towards the stranger as he stepped on to the landing-stage, he introduced himself with a grave pomposity, and asked Reinhardt to what Meichow owed the honour of his visit.

The German's eyes were fixed in a puzzled stare on Burroughs, who had taken off his cap as in respectful salutation. The close-cropped hair, the pencilled eyebrows, the stiff perpendicularity of his waxed moustache-ends, had so much altered his appearance that Reinhardt, though he felt that he had seen him somewhere before, did not recognize him. Germanic though his aspect was, there was a nameless something about him that put Reinhardt on his guard. Turning to Chung Pi, he replied courteously, in Chinese, that he was a German employed by his government to keep in touch with the august Su Fing, and that his honourable questioner without doubt knew the name of Reinhardt as a friend and ally of his chief.

Lo San was quick-witted. He saw that there was no time to translate the conversation to Burroughs, and for the moment held his peace. Burroughs could only stand in a commanding attitude with folded arms, accusation in his frown. He bethought himself of his moustache, and gave it a cautious twirl. And all the time he wished with desperate anxiety that he could understand what Reinhardt was saying.

Chung Pi looked at the German with fatuous indecision. Burroughs felt that another moment might seal his fate. He was beating his brains for a possible move if his stratagem failed, when Lo San interrupted Reinhardt as he was asking whether Su Fing had returned to the town.

"You see, honourable captain," he said, "that this man who calls himself a German has no moustache!"

And now the pen of the narrator fails: only a gramophone and a cinematograph could faithfully record the scene. Imagine the three men: the magnified horse-boy, bewildered between a furious German, shouting in Chinese, and a calm but quaking Englishman, standing like a judge about to condemn; with a shrill-voiced China boy at his side, screaming into Chung Pi's very ear; the men on the landing-stage gaping; the motley crowd at the shoreward end watching keenly, like the spectators at a boxing-match. Chung Pi, Reinhardt, Lo San, were all talking at once. Reinhardt, incoherent with rage, yelled "I am a German." Chung Pi asked him not to shout. Lo San, determined to make himself heard, screamed "He is an Englishman. As your excellency knows, the friend of Su Fing wears a moustache; it is the custom in his country; look at my august master."

Chung Pi, a peasant beneath his uniform, was slow, tenacious and pig-headed. He had seen Reinhardt once or twice, and carried away an impression of a moustache and little more. If this was Reinhardt, where was the moustache? He felt that he was being played with--he, the lieutenant of Su Fing, was bemocked by a man whose upper lip was even cleaner than that of the Englishman in the yamen. And when Burroughs, taking advantage of Reinhardt's vociferous abuse, whispered to Lo San to suggest that the man should be put with the other Englishman, and Lo San yelled the suggestion into the captain's ear, Chung Pi's simple mind was made up. Beckoning to some of his ruffians who stood expectantly by, he ordered them to seize the pig of an Englishman and carry him to the yamen. The chief should deal with him.

For a few seconds a whirling mass gyrated at the edge of the landing-stage. The centre of it was Conrad Reinhardt; the circumference was formed by a dozen Chinese legs. Yells of rage and derision arose from the variegated crowd of spectators as they watched the supposed Englishman--as much as they could see of him--struggling in the grasp of the spearmen. The scuffle ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Reinhardt appeared to bethink himself of his dignity. He made no further resistance, but allowed the insurgents to lead him away.

That procession is probably a cherished memory in Meichow to this day. It was led by the lictors--if the ragged ruffians may be dignified with that name for the nonce--who thrust back the shouting people that flocked from every alley to see the sight. Then came the prisoner amid the spearmen. A few paces behind marched the two sets of chairmen, carrying Burroughs and Chung Pi, with Chin Tai stepping beside. More spearmen brought up the rear. Lo San had returned to the hydroplane.

At the gate of the yamen Burroughs got out of his chair and approached that of the captain, beckoning Chin Tai forward to interpret.

"Your honourable presence," he said, "has no doubt great preparations to make for the reception of the august Su Fing. I feel that it would ill beseem me to take up more of your time. For myself, I think I ought to follow the prisoner. Who knows what conspiracy he may not hatch with the other if I am not there to keep an eye on them!"

"But you may be in danger from their violence," said Chung Pi. "You saw how the Englishman fought and kicked."

"Yes, he behaved very badly," replied Burroughs; "but with four of your brave warriors outside the door, the prisoners would not dare to molest me."

And with ceremonious salutations they parted.

Meanwhile Reinhardt had been marched through the courtyards, and taken to the room where Errington was wondering anxiously what had happened to his friend. The door was thrown open, and the German thrust inside. The spearmen reported by and by to their captain that on entering the room, the new prisoner advanced towards the other, holding out his hand, and saying some few words of greeting. The first prisoner neither took his hand nor replied to him. Chung Pi had sufficient intelligence to explain this incident satisfactorily to himself. The new-comer was undoubtedly English. He had recognized the prisoner, who, however, was more prudent, and pretended not to know him. Chung Pi plumed himself on his sagacity, and basked in the anticipated light of Su Fing's countenance when he should return and find two birds in his cage.

Reinhardt had made up his mind, while walking up to the yamen, to accept with as good a grace as possible the temporary inconvenience which he owed to the loss of his moustache--also temporary: he felt his upper lip, and discovered proofs of a new crop. By keeping his temper under control he would give himself the best chance of dealing with circumstances as they arose. Of course, when Su Fing returned all would be set right; and he promised himself that the ass of a captain who had so stupidly mistaken him should have cause to regret his imbecility. But he was a good deal puzzled. Who was this man, ostensibly a German, who had stood by indifferent while a compatriot of his own was being shamed? And who was the Chinaman who had uttered such abominable things about him? He was something like Lo San, Errington's boy. And then a light flashed upon him: it was Lo San; Errington, he knew, had been captured; no doubt he was the "other Englishman" who had been mentioned; and the whole affair was a plot on Lo San's part to bring his master and Reinhardt together, in the hope that the German might be persuaded to plead for him with the chief.

This thought comforted Reinhardt. Lo San was evidently a clever fellow; and as Errington's career was of course ended, his boy would probably be quite willing to enter the service of a new master. The German was therefore prepared, when he was pushed forward into the room, to find Errington waiting with open arms to receive him.

He was surprised when Errington refused to speak to him.

"Come, my friend," he said, "zis is not kind. Here am I, come at great cost to serve you, and you cut me! Zere is some big mistake; ze fool of a captain supposes me to be English, and makes me a prisoner. We are two prisoners togezer. Zis is not ze time for coldness between friends. Wizout you, I should not be here at zis moment." Reinhardt was unaware how truly he had spoken. "You owe me much. But you are young, and like many young men, you do not know your best friends."

Errington, on his part, was thoroughly amazed when he saw Reinhardt enter the room. Hearing footsteps outside the door, he had expected to see Burroughs again. The entrance of a man whom, after his recent interview with Burroughs, he distrusted and despised gave him a shock. Instinctively he refused him his hand. But now, at the German's explanation, strange as it was, he began to wonder whether he had not done him a double injustice. Perhaps the man had repented of his refusal of Burroughs' appeal, and after all had come up the river to his assistance.

He was wavering, on the point of asking Reinhardt whether he had seen Burroughs, when the German began to speak again.

"Yes, when your own countrymen do nozink for you, behold me, a German, putting my head into ze lion's mouse on your behalf. I ask you, why should I do so? You owe me five hundred dollars: bah! I zink nozink of zat. You are to me nozink but a friend----

"And a servant of your firm," Errington blurted out, resenting the reference to his debt, and desperately uneasy now that it was clear that Burroughs and the German had not met.

"Not so," said Reinhardt complacently. "Zere is no reason why I should come to help you--nozink but friendship. You are no longer employed by my firm."

This took Errington's breath away. He listened in stony silence as Reinhardt proceeded.

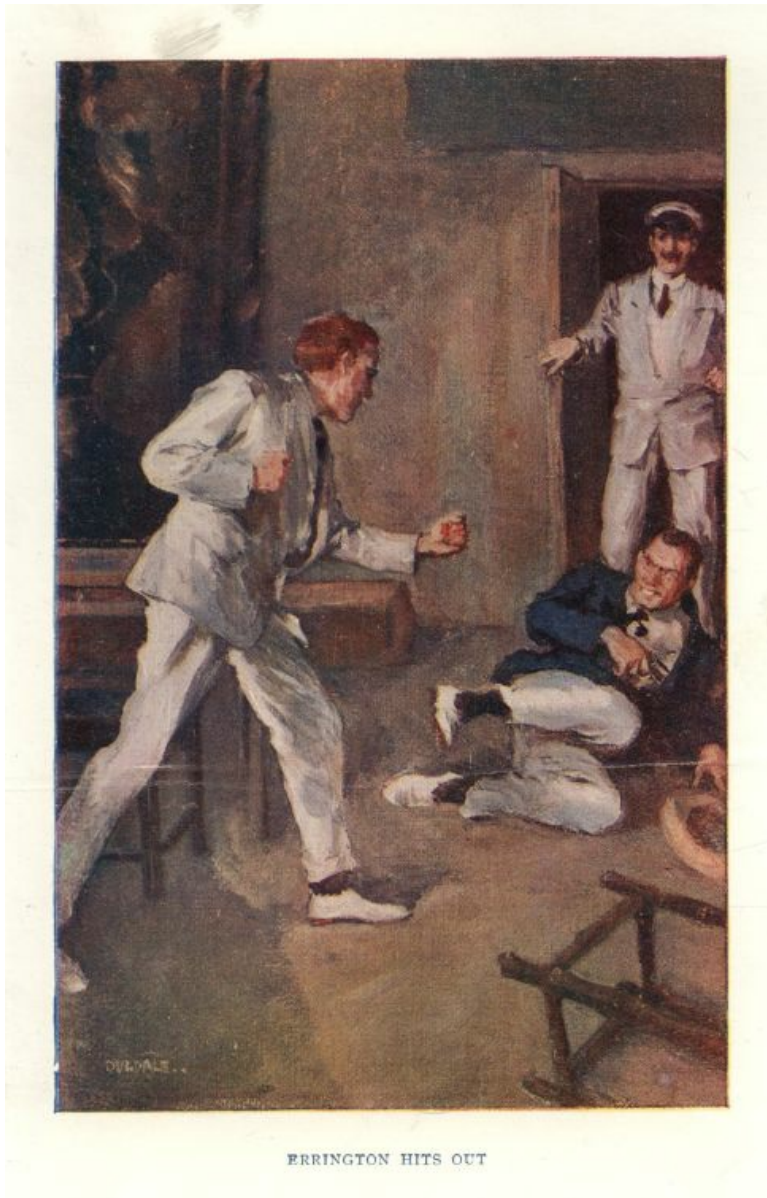
"Zey pay you zree munce salary instead of notice. I have ze cheque in my pocket. Now you see what a friend I am, when you are no longer wiz me in business, and owe me five hundred dollars. Which is ze friend, Conrad Reinhardt, or Burroughs, ze man what preach, ze man who is what you call a smug, who eats and drinks merry when his old friend is----

Errington could stand no more. Springing to his feet, he hit out a swinging blow that sent the German spinning across the room.

Reinhardt's hand flew to his breast pocket. He whipped out a revolver, and was taking a snapshot at Errington when his arm was struck up from behind; the weapon exploded harmlessly, and next moment was wrenched from his grasp and flung across the room. Unseen, unheard, Burroughs had quietly entered the room and taken in the situation at a glance.

No word had been spoken. While a man might count three there was a dead silence in the room. Then Burroughs, stepping to the still open door, confronted the sentinels and Chin Tai, who were pressing forward, alarmed by the shot.

"Bind that man!" cried Burroughs, pointing to the German, now slowly rising to his feet.



ERRINGTON HITS OUT

There was no hesitation among the men. They understood by this time that the supposed detention of Burroughs was only a move in their chief's policy. They did not understand it, but it was no affair of theirs. There were no ropes at hand, but they stripped off their cummerbunds; and in a few minutes Reinhardt, glowering from Burroughs to Errington, and from Errington to Burroughs, lay on the floor, trussed with bonds of yellow and red.

CHAPTER XVI

A LITTLE LUNCHEON PARTY

"What's the row, Pidge?" asked Burroughs, when the sentinels and Chin Tai had been dismissed, and the door closed behind them.

"Oh, he'd been telling a heap of lies, and when he started abusing you, I knocked him down."

Reinhardt started when he heard Burroughs speak in his natural voice. The disguise as it were fell off: his vague misgiving was justified; the cropped hair, the thickened eyebrows, the upturned moustache, no longer imposed upon him, and he writhed in his bonds.

Burroughs gave him a contemptuous stare.

"I don't care, personally," he said very quietly, "what lies you tell about me. There never has been any love lost between us. All I regret is that, among Chinamen, I should have had to treat a European--even such a European as you are--with such indignity. But you've brought it on yourself. You're a dangerous man. You're in league with these rebels; I know it, you needn't protest; in spite of that, in spite of my appeal to you, you wouldn't move a finger in Errington's behalf. I must treat you as an enemy--a secret enemy, and take the precautions that fit the case. Errington and I have matters to discuss, and owing to the action of your friends the rebels, we have to discuss them here. Your company has been forced upon us, so I'll take the liberty of relieving you from the necessity of overhearing our conversation."

"I protest," the German began, blusteringly. "I don't want to hear your conversation. Speak in ze corner; whisper."

Burroughs paid him no attention, but opened the door and called to Chin Tai.

"Stuff up Mr. Reinhardt's ears," he said.

Chin Tai produced a dirty rag from the pouch at his waist.

"No, not that," said Errington impulsively. "Haven't you a handkerchief, Ted?"

Burroughs gave his handkerchief to the Chinaman, who tore it in strips, and rolled up two wads which he placed in the German's ears.

"Wait outside, and let me know if the captain comes."

As soon as the door was shut, Burroughs took Errington to the window.

"The position's this, old man," he said. "Su Fing is coming down river. It's all up with us if he finds us here. Reinhardt won't stick at a trifle. We must get away somehow or other before evening. How it's to be done beats me."

"Where did you go when you left me?"

"I showed off the boat to Chung Pi. He'd eaten so many melon seeds that he wouldn't venture on board at first; but I got him on after a bit. I only did it to heighten my importance. It was when we were going up-stream that we met a launch of Su Fing's, and heard that the chief would be here to-night."

"You didn't fly?"

"No. Chung Pi is sure to have heard of the flying boat, and he'd have smelt a rat. Why?"

"I've just had an idea," said Errington eagerly.

"Gently, old chap. I'm not at all sure that Reinhardt can't hear if you raise your voice. What is it?"

In a low tone, but with great animation, Errington explained the plan which had suddenly suggested itself. For some time the two discussed it together. It was a strange conversation, conducted under the eyes of the German, glaring at them as he lay fierce and helpless on the floor.

They were interrupted by the entrance of the cook man bringing the midday meal. It was a generous repast; the cook had taken a hint from what happened at breakfast-time, and provided food in even greater variety than before. Burroughs and Errington took their chop-sticks and sat on the floor in front of the pots and pans. Errington glanced at Reinhardt.

"We can't feed while he goes hungry," he said.

"Speak for yourself," said Burroughs. "I've not the slightest objection."

"But they've brought grub for him. He'd better have his share."

"Just like you! All right; but he'll be a sort of skeleton at the feast."

"A substantial skeleton! He won't depress me. But it's a rummy go, when you come to think of it."

Burroughs went to the German and released him.

"Some of this food is for you," he said, speaking close to Reinhardt's ear. "Errington suggests that you should join us."

He went back to his place beside Errington. For some seconds Reinhardt made no movement beyond sitting up and stretching himself, with a sullen stare at Burroughs. Then either the matter-of-fact consideration that he was hungry, or something in the humour of the situation, caused him to banish his sulks. He crossed the room, and squatted heavily opposite the Englishmen.

"Whatever happens to any of us, this is certainly the last time we three are likely to have a meal together," said Errington.

The situation was certainly novel. Men have sat down at table with murder in their hearts; quarrels have arisen at the board; but it is not common for two men to eat with a third whom one has just knocked down, and whose moustache the other is wearing.

There was naturally a constraint upon the party--upon Errington more particularly, for he could not forget that he had once been Reinhardt's friend, nor that he owed him money. He might suspect that the German had cheated him, but a debt is a debt. Yet to eat in silence was impossible, and presently Burroughs broke the ice.

"Have some of this," he said to Reinhardt, looking into one of the pans.

"I beg pardon," said Reinhardt. "I am a little hard of hearing."

The Englishmen glanced at each other.

"Better go the whole hog and do it decently while we are about it," said Errington.

"Perhaps you can do something to cure yourself," said Burroughs in a loud tone to the German.

Reinhardt removed the wads from his ears, and looking at them doubtfully for a moment, laid them down on the floor beside him.

"Zanks," he said. "Now I am all attention."

"Not at all," said Burroughs. "Have some of this--I don't know what it is."

He ladled a sort of stew on to Reinhardt's plate. For a few moments there was silence as they plied their chopsticks. Then Reinhardt, glancing up under his eyebrows, said gravely--

"I zink it is chow--puppy-dog, you know."

The others held their chopsticks suspended.

"I'll try something else," said Burroughs, looking suspiciously into another pan.

"In China one must not inquire too much," the German went on. "One must have faith. Once I was at an inn, deep in ze country. I demand dinner; zey say zere is none. Naturally I must have dinner, and I command ze innkeeper very loud. Zat is effective. Soon he bring me a ragout--excellent; I eat it wiz gusto. Afterwards I discover it is rats."

The Englishmen's faces expressed their disgust, and again there was silence.

"China is a great country for rats," said Errington lamely.

"Zat is true; zere are rats all up ze Yang-tse."

"Water-rats," suggested Burroughs.

"So; four legs--and two," said the German.

"Tails--and pigtails," said Burroughs.

"I make a study of zem all."

"My boy says that rats' whiskers are lucky," said Errington after a pause.

"White rats!" added Burroughs.

Reinhardt's eyelids flickered. He seemed to avert his gaze with an effort from Burroughs' moustache.

"I zink he is perhaps mistaken," he said.

Then he appeared to feel that he was skating on thin ice, towards a danger-mark. An observant onlooker might have discovered a resemblance between these three men, talking so quietly over their meal, and fencers, warily feeling for each other, but careful not to engage. Each was trying to "make" conversation, and found, almost in spite of himself, that it trended towards the personal. Reinhardt, the keenest and most experienced of the three, was the first to feel the tendency, and to attempt to divert it.

"Ze Chinese," he went on, "zey are very superstitious. Zey believe in spells and charms, zings which Europe dismissed hundred years ago, and more. Zey talk always of luck."

"Don't you see that men make their own luck," said Burroughs.

"Perhaps, but not at cards," said Reinhardt. "Zat is skill." He pulled himself up suddenly. "Ze Chinese are indeed extremely skilful. As you English say, zey will catch a weasel asleep."

"And skin him!" said Errington artlessly.

"I have heard of that too," said Burroughs, catching Reinhardt's eyes again fixed on his moustache.

"Is zere any more cabbage?" asked the German, bending forward over the pan.

"No, but there is some parsley," replied Burroughs, in best phrase-book style; and a minute or two afterwards the meal and the difficult conversation came to an end together.

During the pauses each of the party had been busily thinking: Burroughs and Errington of the scheme which they had partially discussed, Reinhardt of the extraordinary circumstances in which he found himself. For once, at any rate, the German felt that he had no trumps. He saw through Burroughs' imposture; and he was pretty sure that the moustache which had fascinated his eyes during the meal was his own. Inwardly boiling with indignation and outraged vanity, he was sportsman enough to enter into the spirit of the situation so far as speech was concerned; his brain was cogitating an exemplary vengeance, and he hugged himself with the thought that the hour of revenge was at hand. The apparent coolness of the Englishmen amazed him. With Su Fing already on his way down the river, their heads were as good as gone. Yet nobody watching them, or listening to their talk, could ever have imagined that their lives hung on a thread.

At the conclusion of the meal, Burroughs said politely--

"I regret the necessity of tying you up again."

"And I," said the German, with equal courtesy, though his eyes were blazing, "I regret to be ze cause of so much trouble."

Burroughs called in his servant and the sentinels, and by their hands Reinhardt was again bound. Chin Tai caught sight of the ear-wads lying beside the German's plate.

"He wantchee he 'nother time all-same?" he asked his master.

"Your conversation--is it not finished?" the German interposed. "One is incomplete wizout ears."

"I'm afraid you must remain incomplete for a while," said Burroughs. "Put them in, Chin Tai; then tell those fellows they can clear away the food and eat what's left. I want you."

As soon as the door was closed behind the guard, Burroughs took Errington and Chin Tai to the window, and the three remained for some minutes in earnest conversation.

"Now," said Burroughs at last to the servant, "you know what you have to do. First of all, cut off to the captain;

he has finished his luncheon by this time--and say that I request the honour of waiting upon him on a matter of great urgency."

"Allo lightee, sah; my talkee he allo plopa."

And he went with an air of much self-importance to fulfil his errand, reflecting with a chuckle that Lo San was out of this.

CHAPTER XVII THE DASH FROM THE YAMEN

Chin Tai returned in about twenty minutes.

"Captain he say hon'ble genelum come this time; he velly glad look-see."

"Good luck," said Errington as Burroughs got up. "If there's any hitch, don't mind about me."

Burroughs mumbled something and went out with his servant. The chair was awaiting him at the outer gate. Ordering two of the guards there to accompany him for appearance' sake, he had himself carried to the captain's quarters hard by. On the way he noticed, without any appearance of concern, a large number of wild-looking warriors assembling to form, as he guessed, a guard of honour for the chief on his return. Many of the men scowled at him as he passed. They did not distinguish one "foreign devil" from another. To many of the lower orders of Chinamen, all foreigners are poison.

Chung Pi had evidently been indulging freely in the pleasures of the table. He was breathing rather hard; melon seeds are very "filling"; and the number of thimblefuls of hot sam-shu, a fiery drink made of millet, which he had consumed had reddened his face and put him on very good terms with himself.

"Honourable stranger," he said, when Burroughs entered, "your honourable face is like the sun at noon-day. You have fed well?"

"Excellently, noble captain."

"You cracked many melon seeds?"

"Not a great number."

"Then you will never be fat. Will you take a little sam-shu?"

"Thank you, not now. Better reserve that until your august chief returns. There has been no further message from him?"

"No; but I have made preparations for greeting him. The bannermen and gong-beaters will go down to the river in due time, and we shall issue forth to greet the illustrious Su Fing with bands of music."

"Would it not be fitting, noble captain, a deed worthy of your high renown, to meet your chief on the marvellous vessel of whose speed you have already made trial? Su Fing returns victorious; he would feel himself duly honoured if his trusty lieutenant met him while still a great way from the town, offering for his acceptance this matchless gift from a great nation."

"You speak well, illustrious stranger. The gift is indeed a noble one. But I fear that I cannot dispense with my afternoon nap. Sleep after meat is a gift of the gods."

"I would not deprive you of it for worlds. I must go down to the boat, to see that all is in order for the journey we propose to make. I will do that while you sleep."

"Not so. The boat pleases me, and drowsy though I am, I am disposed to accompany you. Perhaps Su Fing may give the vessel into my charge; it will be well, then, that I understand something of its qualities. I shall thereby be

superior to any other officer of my chief's, and the way of promotion will be open to me."

"By all means, noble captain."

"Yes. To be well fed is vain without true understanding. But tell me, what of the Englishmen? It was told me that one of them was so daring and wicked as to fire a shot at the other. The guards ought to have searched him; I have given orders that when the rejoicings are over they shall be soundly beaten with the leather."

"The man who attempted the crime is bound hand and foot. He can do no more mischief."

"It is well. I am fortunate in having another Englishman for Su Fing. He hates all Englishmen, because they do not approve of his warlike deeds. Furthermore, he was wounded by an Englishman, and taken captive, and he suffered stripes and the cage. His heart will laugh when he knows that another of the hated race lies bound in his yamen. Now let us go."

He summoned his chairmen and armed escort, and was carried along with Burroughs down to the landing-stage, and on to the vessel. There he watched curiously as the Englishman overhauled the engine, and filled his petrol tank. When this was done, Burroughs took from the end of his watch-chain an Indian charm which had been given him by his mother, and made a few meaningless passes with it over the throttle.

"Why do you do that?" Chung Pi asked.

"To ward off evil spirits," replied Burroughs. "We must have a lucky voyage."

"You do well. I myself, as you perceive, have a thread of red silk braided in my queue for the same purpose; and I wear a charm attached to a red string within my shirt. So we shall be doubly secure."

Burroughs, having satisfied himself that everything was in working order, was at leisure to answer the innumerable questions about the hydroplane with which the Chinaman plied him. They were such futile questions as a simple ignorant peasant might put. Burroughs felt that he was answering a fool according to his folly, and again had compunctions about making this guileless ignoramus his accomplice. It was clear that Chung Pi's vanity was flattered by the idea of showing a new importance before the populace. The machine had become an obsession with him, and as he grew more and more wonder-struck at what Burroughs told him, the approaching arrival of his chief became of less interest to him than the prospect of making an impression on the home-coming warriors.

Time slipped away. Burroughs felt restless and impatient. Chung Pi had told him that the approach of the chief's launch would be signalled by a man stationed on the roof of the yamen, which rose high above the surrounding country, and from which another signal station could be seen many miles distant. Burroughs dared not start until the signal was given; yet he felt that time was being wasted.

At last, turning to Chung Pi, he said that he had one great surprise in store for him. He had in fact two, but the second was to be revealed at the proper time.

"You have seen, noble captain," he said, "with what marvellous speed this vessel skims the water, but you have yet to see that it can also fly--even as a duck, which swims ordinarily on the surface, can at need raise itself upon its wings and take the air. But a duck cannot fly so well as this vessel."

"What end is there to the marvels you tell me!" exclaimed the captain. "In truth I have heard of a flying boat, belonging to an Englishman at Sui-Fu; but I mocked at the tale, for men are liars."

"It is true. This boat is even as that of the Englishman; it flies quite as well."

"But how can a boat fly without wings?"

"I will show you."

Burroughs unfolded and spread out the canvas planes at the sides of the boat.

"Wonderful!" said the Chinaman. "It is very like a butterfly."

"How fine a thing it would be to fly to meet Su Fing, noble captain! That would indeed show at once the matchless qualities of this vessel, and the courage of the illustrious officer who so well fills the place of the chief

here."

Chung Pi's simple face expressed the longing and the terror which a child shows when he is invited for the first time to taste some new experience--the first ride on an elephant, or on a hobby-horse at the village fair.

"If you would show me first," he said.

He stepped on to the landing-stage, and stood fascinated as the vessel, skimming the surface until it attained its lifting speed, rose into the air, circled, and returning, alighted gently at the very spot whence it had started. Beyond measure delighted, Chung Pi hesitated no longer. Making sure that the red string sustaining his charm was securely about his neck, he entered the boat, and uttered childish exclamations of wonderment and pleasure as the vessel once more performed the same flight. On landing, he bore himself with a vainglorious swagger before the crowd of excited onlookers. He insisted on taking Burroughs back to his own house for a few melon seeds and cups of tea, and talked incessantly of the sensation he would make when he flew to meet Su Fing.

While they were at tea, with Chin Tai in attendance as interpreter, Lo San, enjoying a certain prestige as the servant of the kind German who had brought so precious a gift, was entertained by the captain's escort. They were exchanging notes with him when the long-expected message was signalled: the watchman on the roof of the yamen had seen a signal on a hill two miles away; the signaller there had received the message from another, and he from another. Su Fing was little more than an hour's journey distant. At once there was a ringing of bells and beating of gongs. Chung Pi, trembling with eagerness, came forth with Burroughs; a procession was formed, and with an armed escort before and behind the chairmen carried their burdens down to the river.

At the landing-stage Lo San approached Burroughs, and said in an undertone--

"Su Fing he no lick all-same. Fellas he say Su Fing hab catchee numpa one beatin' Cheng Tu side. He belongey velly bad temper."

Rumour, flying swiftly through the country, had brought news that the chief, so far from being victorious, had been driven headlong from Cheng Tu by regular forces summoned from Tibet, and was now falling back on Meichow to recoup his losses. There was no doubt that Chung Pi had heard the news; but Burroughs guessed that it was as much as his place was worth to greet his master otherwise than as a conqueror.

This information, strange as it may appear, rendered Burroughs the more anxious to set off on his trip up-river. Chung Pi was equally eager, for a different reason. They entered the boat, followed by Chin Tai and Lo San. The ropes were cast off; Burroughs started the engine, and amid loud shouts from the assembled soldiery drawn up on the shore and about the landing-stage in anticipation of the chief's arrival, and from the rag-tag populace swarming on every patch of open space, the vessel ran a few yards up the river, planed as it gathered speed, and finally soared smoothly into the air.

Burroughs flew low, so that the trees that edged the river might prevent the spectators at the harbour from following too closely the direction of his flight. Chung Pi was as happy as a lark. He sat, beaming a bland smile, in the seat which Errington had so often occupied. What visions of greatness shone before his soaring soul! He wished that the honourable stranger would rise higher, so that he might descend upon his chief like a celestial benediction. But the honourable stranger's mood seemed to have changed since he left the town. There, he was affable, condescending, communicative; he had a pleasant smile; now he was silent, his lips were pressed together, his moustache appeared stern and forbidding. Chung Pi reflected that he naturally felt his responsibility.

For some two miles Burroughs headed straight up the river. Then, well clear of the town, he suddenly altered his course, leaving the river, flying inland, rising as he did so, in order to clear the tree-tops and to get a complete view of the city. The flying boat was describing a circle; presently it was heading on a straight course for Su Fing's yamen, that stood, bright and picturesque, a conspicuous object on its elevated site.

"But what is this?" said Chung Pi anxiously. "We are going back!"

Burroughs did not turn his head or open his lips. But Chin Tai, squatting a little in the rear of the captain, remembered the instructions which his master had impressed upon him in that quiet talk by the window of the prisoner's room.

"Be not alarmed, noble captain," he said with obsequious reverence. "My august master has forgotten the little charm which he carries to keep off the evil spirits of the air. It would be terrible to start on so important a journey without this necessary talisman."

"But we have already started," Chung Pi objected. "And have I not the red silk in my queue, and my own charm about my neck? Will they not suffice, O foolish one?"

"Heaven-born excellency," replied Chin Tai in still more submissive tones, "you perceive that we have started to return to the yamen. We shall begin our real journey from there."

"But your illustrious master has the charm. He showed it me long ago."

For a moment Chin Tai was staggered; but ready wit coming to his aid, he said--

"This is another charm, noble captain--a better one. My august master must have left it in the yamen. Even the great are at times foolish."

"That is true," said Chung Pi, thinking of Su Fing. "Your illustrious master does well to be quite safe, but we waste much time."

"Very little, illustrious captain. Are we not flying swift as any bird? Your excellency will be amazed to see how fast we can go, before our flight is finished."

Chung Pi was pacified. Indeed, he began to revel in his sensations. How smoothly the vessel flew! How delightful was the scene below--the tree-tops never beheld yet except by the birds of the air, the rolling river, the woods and vales beyond; the city, so rapidly approaching, in its new aspect no longer a labyrinth of mean streets, but a picturesque pattern of masonry! Su Fing, with all his examinations, had never learnt these secrets of the air; Chung Pi began to wonder whether so ignorant a man was fitted to be chief.

Burroughs steered straight for the yamen. It was a severe test of his airmanship to alight on the narrow piece of ornamental water that graced the gardens, and to avoid the bridge that zigzagged across it from shore to shore. He shaved it almost by a hair-breadth, and came safely down upon the lake's unruffled surface. Then he ran the vessel to the end nearest the yamen, and brought it up against the stone parapet of a terrace on which Su Fing was wont to walk of an evening, watching the graceful movements of his swans, and meditating his projects against tyranny.

And now Burroughs found his tongue. Speaking with a curt brevity that somewhat offended the captain's sense of what was due to his new-born dignity, he ordered--for it was more an order than a request--Chung Pi to remain in the boat with Lo San; he himself with his servant would proceed to the yamen and fetch the charm. Lo San was nervous. He had made up his mind to throttle the captain if any harm befell "Massa Bullows," or if he attempted in any way to interfere. But looking at the big man, his muscular limbs, his sword and dagger, he felt that the task might prove to be beyond his powers.

"Massa Bullows" had ordered him to turn the vessel round, so that its head pointed towards the river, and to be ready to throw the engine into first speed as soon as he gave the word on his return. Having brought the boat again alongside the parapet, he sat waiting, with his eyes fixed on Chung Pi's half-sullen face.

Burroughs, meanwhile, had hurried with Chin Tai through the garden, crossed the rising terraces, and come round to the entrance of the yamen. The guards stood aside to let him pass. Without any appearance of haste he entered, and reached the door of the room in which Errington and Reinhardt were still confined. The sentinels were clustered about a window at one end of the passage, gazing with curiosity at the boat in which their captain sat. Chin Tai hailed them, and pointing to Chung Pi, ordered the men to enter the room, release the bound prisoner, and march him down to the vessel. Burroughs watched them nervously, asking himself whether his scheme would succeed. It

was at this point that it threatened to break down. He had calculated that all four men would flock into the room together, but only three did so, the fourth remaining outside.

"Watch this man," said Burroughs to Chin Tai, following the three men into the room.

They were stooping over the German, fumbling with the knots which they had themselves tied, when Errington, who had moved unconcernedly towards the door, suddenly darted out. At the same moment Burroughs stepped back into the passage, pulled the door after him, and shot the bolt; and Chin Tai sprang at the bewildered sentinel, caught him by the throat, and held on until he was half strangled. Then Burroughs drew from his pocket some cords and a piece of canvas he had brought from the boat, and with Errington's assistance gagged and bound the man.

Before this was done, the sentinels bolted in the room had begun to yell, hammering on the door with the butts of their spears. The sounds attracted two or three servants of the yamen, who had nothing to do until their master returned. They came running into the passage from the outer courtyard, just in time to see the two foreigners, and the Chinaman, leap from the window on to the walk beneath. Instead of opening the door of the prisoner's room, the servants ran yelling towards the outer gate, to inform the guards that the English prisoner had escaped, and was being pursued by the German and his boy. The guards rushed up to the walk beneath the window, from which they could see Errington spring like a deer from terrace to terrace, with the two others close behind as if chasing him.

Burroughs had calculated that, even if Chung Pi should catch sight of them the moment they left the house, he would scarcely be able to grasp and grapple with the situation during the few seconds in which they were sprinting across the eighty yards of terraces that separated the yamen from the lakeside. They expected that his first movement would be to spring ashore, and Lo San had been ordered to lay the boat at the steps leading up to the parapet so as to give him an opportunity of doing so. But they had not reckoned with the effect of their startling actions upon the captain's wits, or with the clamour that had sprung up behind them. The whole population of the yamen was streaming out into the grounds, yelling at the top of their voices, many of them without knowing why. Su Fing's wife and children were drawn from their secluded quarters; cooks, scullions, hair-dressers, nurses, gardeners, all the personnel of the chief's establishment were out of doors.

Chung Pi, who had been sitting in impatient dudgeon in the boat, rose to his feet at this extraordinary hullabaloo, and gazed in consternation up towards the yamen, missing the three men, who were nearer to him, but partially hidden by the shrubbery of the terraces. When they pulled themselves up sharply at the stone parapet, leapt down the stairs, and stepped gingerly, as became the light framework of the craft, into the canvas boat, he sank, utterly unstrung, on to one of the thwarts.

This unhappy consequence of a surfeit of melon seeds and sam-shu very much simplified the matter for Burroughs and Errington. They had discussed in the room in the yamen what they should do if the genial warrior showed fight, and had come reluctantly to the conclusion that it might be necessary to tumble him into the lake. It was shallow, and there was no danger of so buoyant a man drowning. The fugitives were much relieved to find that it was unnecessary to adopt a violent course with him. It went against the grain to discommode physically so friendly a simpleton, to say nothing of the unwisdom of engaging in a tussle when a score or two pursuers were within a few yards of them.

At the moment of reaching the lakeside Burroughs signed to Lo San to put the engine at full speed. Then dashing past the bewildered captain, he seized the steering-wheel as the vessel moved out. For a few yards the boat planed, but by the time it had gathered way, and Burroughs adjusted the elevator and switched the engine on to the air tractor, the bridge was perilously near. But for the zigzag construction of the bridge, the boat could hardly have been prevented from dashing into it. But a slight movement of the rudder caused it to clear the bridge where it dropped down towards the approach on the lakeside, and it soared over the stonework with the narrowest of margins. From that point the grounds of the yamen were open for the space of more than a hundred yards, except for

some clumps of shrubbery which were easily avoided. Free now to employ the elevating planes, Burroughs sent the vessel aloft, cleared the outer walls, dodged the trees beyond, and set his course straight for the river.

By this time Chung Pi had partially regained his composure. Not a word had been spoken; everything had happened in the space of a minute or two. The captain's dominating feeling was annoyance that the stranger had dared to bring the prisoner from the yamen without consulting him; indeed, in defiance of the contrary wish he had expressed earlier in the day. But he put it down to an ambitious desire to cut a figure before the chief; and since he, Chung Pi, would share in the glory of the feat, he decided to overlook the presumption and content himself by and by with a reprimand.

His feeling changed, however, to amazement, suspicion and foreboding, when he saw that the flying boat, instead of turning up-river, skimmed over the tops of the houses in the contrary direction. He heard the shouts of the crowds below, the ringing of bells, the beating of gongs, and glancing to the right he saw with dismay the smoke of the chief's launch high up the river.

"We are going the wrong way!" he cried in desperation. "Su Fing is at hand!"

"Be at ease, noble captain," said Lo San pleasantly. "We shall soon be at Sui-Fu!"

He flattered himself that the shock of this announcement would give Chung Pi "pins and needles inside," as he said afterwards; little foreseeing that he himself was to have a succession of very unpleasant shocks before night.

CHAPTER XVIII

WINGED

For the first time in twenty-four hours Burroughs felt at ease; Errington was with him, Meichow was already far behind, and there was little more to fear from the enemy. Su Fing's launch was an old steamer, incapable of effective pursuit. The only vessel of any speed at Meichow was Reinhardt's motor launch, though even in the water that could not vie with the flying boat. No doubt by this time the door of Errington's room in the yamen had been opened, and Reinhardt might have convinced the sentinel that a trick had been played upon their captain, and that he, not the insolent stranger, was the true German. But it was unlikely that he would be wholly liberated until the chief's arrival, and then it would be too late even to attempt pursuit.

But all depended on the possibility of keeping the machine in good running order, and Burroughs soon began to be anxious on this score. When flying, it consumed a great deal more petrol than when used as a hydroplane, and the trial trips and the false start had depleted his supply.

"I doubt whether we've got enough to carry us to Sui-Fu," he said to Errington at his side.

"Chia-ling Fu is still in the hands of the rebels?"

"It was yesterday. We shan't be safe until we reach Sui-Fu."

"You had better drop, then, and run in the water. We've come too far already for them to overtake us."

This seemed good advice, and Burroughs shut off the tractor and let the vessel drop gently into the water. Assisted by the current, and with the engine at little more than half speed, it skimmed along at the rate of at least twenty-five knots.

"I think I had better go and have a word with Chung Pi," said Burroughs to Errington. "He's in a terrible stew by the look of him."

"He's done for with Su Fing, beyond doubt. Go and smooth him down as well as you can, old man."

Burroughs left Errington to navigate the boat, and sat down at Chung Pi's feet, calling Chin Tai to interpret.

"Have the evil spirits taken possession of the thing?" asked the unhappy captain. "But no; I see that you are not perturbed in mind, honourable stranger. What is the meaning of this? Did you not see the chief's launch? Why do you not give him the boat, and the thousand dollars that your august mandarins sent to support him?"

"I owe you a humble apology, noble captain," replied Burroughs. "I will confess all to you, and when you have heard me, I hope you will pardon me. The prisoner there is my friend."

"But you are a German!" Chung Pi interrupted.

"No. I am an Englishman." Chung Pi groaned. "My friend, as you know, had the ill-fortune to interfere with your chief in a little fight down-stream, and your chief very naturally got even with him as soon as he could. Since he could be released in no other way, I came up on this vessel to see what I could do. Imagine, then, my dismay when, on returning with you from our little trip, I saw the launch of a man, a German, who had been a bad friend to my friend there, and had refused to help him, though I begged him to do so, knowing his relations with your chief."

"Ah! It is ill to catch a fish, and throw away the net," said Chung Pi sententiously. "But you say he is a German. Where, then, is his moustache?"

"Here!" said Burroughs solemnly, pointing to his upper lip.

The Chinaman gasped. Bending forward, he examined the moustache closely.

"Such a thing I never heard of," he cried. "Are you speaking the truth? You have deceived me once and twice."

"I know--I'm sorry I had to do it. The moustache was shaved from the German in an opium house, and a skilful countryman of yours fitted it to my own hairless lip."

The Chinaman smiled; then he appeared to reflect.

"It was well done," he said presently. "Will you tell me where I can find that man?"

"My comprador can tell you," Burroughs replied. "Are you thinking of employing him?"

"I should like my moustache to grow up instead of down," said Chung Pi simply. "Yours is so much more becoming to a warrior."

"If it didn't tickle so! But, noble captain, we must consider your position."

Chung Pi's look of anxiety returned; in his preoccupation with this wonderful matter of the moustache he had forgotten that he too was a fugitive.

"Su Fing has a very hasty temper, by all accounts," Burroughs went on. "The loss of his prisoner, and your treatment of his German friend, will make him very angry with you; he will believe, no doubt, that you are a party to the whole scheme, and I'm very much afraid that it won't be safe for you to show your face at Meichow again."

"Su Fing would chop off my head," said the captain ruefully.

"And that would be an irreparable loss," said Burroughs. ("Not like the loss of a moustache," added Chin Tai in translating.) "We are going to Sui-Fu. Will you come with us, or shall we put you down somewhere near Chia-ling Fu, and leave you to make your peace with the chief?"

"Not that," said Chung Pi decisively. "A fish may sport in the kettle, but his life will not be long. I will go with you to Sui-Fu. And then----"

He fell into a train of deep reflection. Burroughs waited, expecting him to reveal something of what was passing in his mind; but after some minutes' silence, he said--

"I feel that I have treated you very shabbily, noble captain; but perhaps if you consider what you yourself would have done in the same circumstances----"

"Say no more, illustrious stranger," Chung Pi interrupted, with a smile which Burroughs at the time was at a loss to understand. "I feel that I am hanging on the tail of a beautiful horse."

"What does he mean?" asked Burroughs of Chin Tai, who grinned as he translated the captain's remark.

"Hai! He say he catchee tailo numpa one hoss," said the man; "that tell he tink he belongey some time topside

fella."

"Get a rise in the world? I don't quite see it."

"Massa no unastand this time; some time massa savvy pidgin all same," said Chin Tai.

The explanation was as obscure as the original statement; but Burroughs did not press the matter; he had caught sight of Chia-ling Fu in the distance.

His intention was to run past the town at full speed. It was in the occupation of the rebels: the river was no doubt crowded with their sampans and other small craft; but the speed of the hydroplane was so great that it ought to be easy to slip past almost before the rebels were aware of their approach. When once they had run by, there was nothing in the harbour that could catch them. Then, with evening closing upon them, the remainder of the journey down to Sui-Fu would be free from peril.

The Englishmen were, however, much startled when, on drawing nearer to the town, they saw, apparently anchored in mid-stream, one of the gunboats which had been lying early that morning in the river above Mei-chow. Burroughs remembered now that when he had accompanied Chung Pi down to the landing-stage the vessel had left its moorings. He had supposed that it had gone up-stream to meet the chief; but it seemed probable that it had been sent downstream to announce at Chia-ling Fu the victory which Su Fing wished his supporters to believe that he had won.

"This is rather awkward," said Errington. "That's the very boat that took me to Mei-chow. If they see me here they'll smell a rat."

"You can duck down: then they won't see you. Besides, if they see Chung Pi they'll never dream there's anything wrong."

"There's something in that; but it looks to me as if they are waiting for us. If they are they may fire before we are near enough for them to see Chung Pi."

They knew the vessel well. She had been employed for some time in patrolling the river, before she was captured by the pirates. She carried a ten-pounder and a couple of machine guns. Su Fing, on arriving at his headquarters and learning what had happened, had at once telegraphed to Chia-ling Fu, ordering the gunboat to intercept the hydroplane.

Almost as soon as Errington had spoken, there was a spurt of flame from the bows of the vessel, and a heavy splash in the water only twenty or thirty yards behind them. No further proof was needed that the gunboat had been lying in wait for them, and that the gunners had got the range to a nicety. Only the great speed of the hydroplane had saved it.

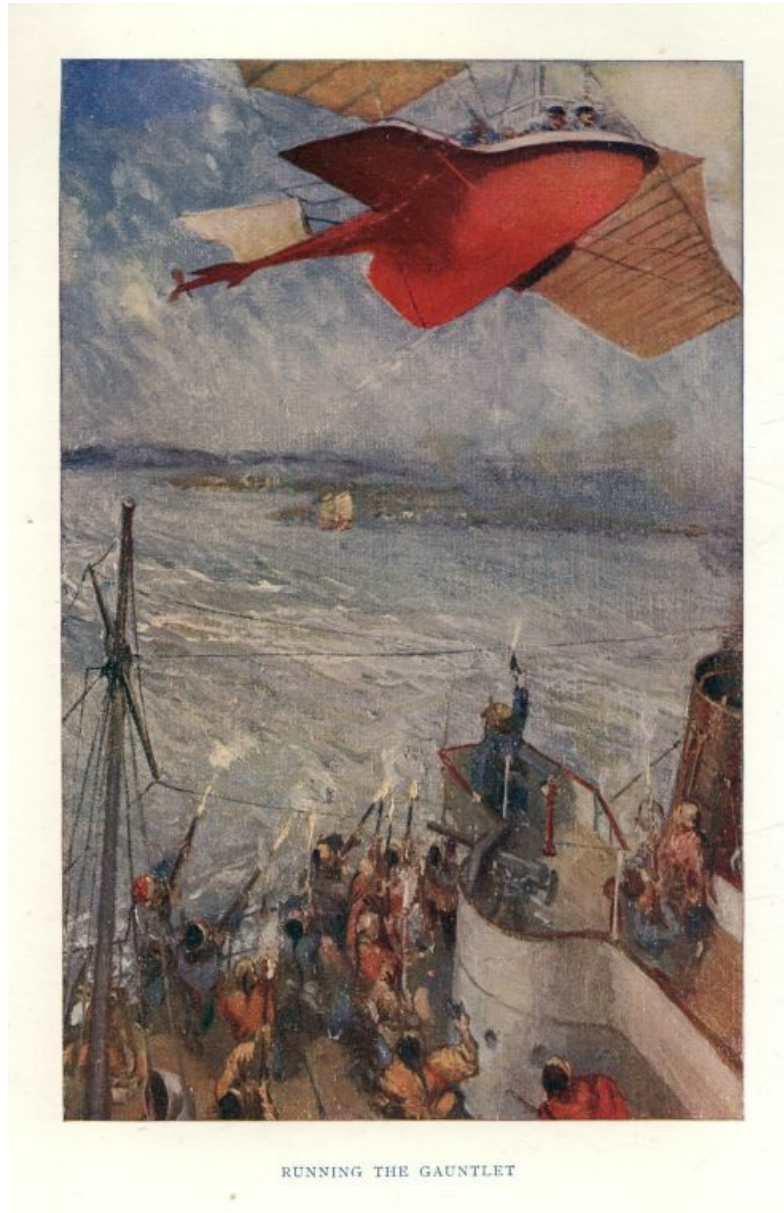
Burroughs did not lose a moment in meeting this emergency. Throwing the differential gearing into action, he set the air tractor in motion, and managed to lift the vessel above the surface just as a second shot dashed up a shower of spray beneath him. He glanced at the banks right and left: the country was too open to give any shelter from the enemy's fire, and no matter in which direction he steered, he could hardly be safe against the gun for several minutes, when he should have succeeded in rising to an altitude at which only high-angle fire could be effective. And to make matters worse, the machine guns were brought into action, and a stream of bullets rattled and hissed around him.

Chung Pi and the other Chinamen had at the first shot thrown themselves face downwards in the bottom of the boat.

"Straight forward, Ted; right over their heads," cried Errington, "it's the only chance. They can't use their guns then, and I'll give odds against their doing any damage with rifles."

Clearly this was the best thing to be done. The next few moments were tense with excitement. The vessel rose, but it seemed to Burroughs that she had never answered so slowly to the elevating lever. Above the hum of the

tractor could be heard the zip of bullets as they tore their way through the canvas of the planes and the sides of the boat. Burroughs felt a nervous dread lest a shot should reach the petrol tank or the cylinders. But the boat still rose; it was drawing rapidly nearer to the enemy, and the Englishmen held their breath with suspense.



RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

There fell a sudden silence. Burroughs' intention had been seen by the gunners, and as they could not lift their pieces high enough to take aim at the vessel now that it was rising, and the range altering every moment, the gunboat was slewing round as if to head down-stream. It was broadside against the stream when the flying boat flashed by at

a height of sixty feet. The occupants heard the reports of several rifles; but they were now travelling at the rate of fifty or sixty miles an hour, and nothing but a shower of bullets from the machine guns had any likelihood of striking them.

"All right now," said Errington, with a gasp of relief, when the flying boat was a good two hundred yards down-stream, and the gunboat was still turning.

"I hope so," replied Burroughs.

He glanced from right to left, undecided whether it would not be advisable to strike inland and return to the river lower down; for the channel was pretty straight for a long distance, and the vessel, if it flew directly forward, would still be in danger from the guns. In a few moments, however, he decided that there was even more risk in leaving the river if any mischance should happen to the boat. For one thing, the longer he flew, the more petrol he consumed; for another, if the engine failed, and he was forced to descend, on land he would be at the mercy of any wandering predatory band, whereas on the water he could always drift on the current, with some chance of safety if he did not happen to be observed. Accordingly he flew straight ahead, intending to sink upon the surface as soon as a bend in the river hid the vessel from view.

In another half-minute the machine guns recommenced firing. The aim of the gunners appeared to be even wilder than before. Chung Pi and the servants had recovered courage enough to rise to their knees and peer over the edge of the canvas side at the gunboat far behind. The captain laughed as he heard the report of the guns, and made a jocular remark about the paltry skill of Su Fing's gunners. There was no longer the whistle of bullets flying around, nor the slight ripping sound of the shots passing through the planes. It seemed that all danger was over.

The flying boat was now skirting the edge of the swamp in which it had been concealed by the river pirates, and Errington remembered that Burroughs had never heard the full story of that strange episode. He had been tempted to refer to the matter during the lunch with Reinhardt, but the German was in a sense their guest; and since Burroughs did not mention it, Errington said nothing. After all it was Burroughs' affair. The story would keep until they reached Sui-Fu.

They were now about three-quarters of a mile from the gunboat, and Burroughs, with his eye on a bend in the course a short distance ahead, just where the painted rocks gave warning that the water-way was not clear, was congratulating himself that at that point he might safely descend. Suddenly the firing behind redoubled in fury; it seemed that the gunners had realized that in a few seconds their chance would be gone. Bullets sang around; the Chinamen again ducked their heads below the gunwale; and once or twice there were the ominous sounds of bullets tearing through the planes, or flattening themselves against the metal parts of the framework.

They were within a hundred yards of safety when a double catastrophe happened. Almost at the same instant the engine ceased to work and one of the stays was cut clean through. In the excitement and anxiety of the moment Burroughs was unaware that he was wounded, and a cry uttered by Chung Pi passed quite unnoticed. The vessel tilted; for a terrible second it seemed that it must turn completely over; but Burroughs by a dexterous movement succeeded in partially righting it, at the same time shifting the rudder so as to steer to the right over the swamp. He had at once recognized that to fall into the river would have thrown the whole party into the hands of the rebels. Flight and hydroplaning were equally impossible; and the only chance of evading capture was to steer over the swamp. He had seen at a glance that the intricate network of channels, overgrown with weeds, might furnish a temporary refuge until the vessel's injuries had been examined and if possible repaired.

The momentum of the boat carried it perhaps a quarter of a mile after the accident happened. Burroughs was able to bring it safely to the surface of one of the channels.

"Here's a pretty look-out!" he said to Errington. "They'll see what has happened, run down at full speed, and be up with us in ten minutes at the most. Luckily the gunboat can't follow us into this swamp; they'll have to lower

boats to find us; we've got a few minutes to discover a hiding-place."

"That's all right, old man," said Errington cheerfully. "I know this swamp. We'll give them a chase at any rate."

CHAPTER XIX

HIDE AND SEEK

At this point Errington assumed the direction of affairs--much to the contentment of Burroughs, who had now learnt by the pain in his shoulder that he had not run the gauntlet unscathed. But Errington was by no means happy. It was one thing to enter the swamp by the broad channel from the river, and quite another to come down into it from the air. He had at once thought of seeking out the deep reed-screened recess where he had discovered the flying boat. The huts, of course, might be occupied; in that case some other hiding-place must be found; but the fact that they had been empty on the occasion of his first visit seemed to show that they were inhabited only occasionally, and by good fortune they might be deserted now. It was scarcely probable that the crew of the gunboat were the same men who had been engaged in Reinhardt's little act of piracy, so that only by the most extraordinary coincidence would they spontaneously make for the same hiding-place. If he could only discover it, Errington hoped that the boat might remain concealed while the necessary repairs were made.

But it was nearly dark. In such a labyrinth of waterways one might go hither and thither perhaps for hours without coming into the channel leading to the clear pool. Still the attempt must be made; and there was a chance that even if the former hiding-place were not discovered, some other secluded spot might be found that would serve equally well. The danger was that two or three boats would be employed in searching for them, one or another of which might be lucky.

There was no time to be lost. The first thing was to fold back the planes, which were an encumbrance to the vessel at all times on the water, and especially among the reed-beds. The next thing was to get out the punting poles with which the boat was provided, and propel it up the channel; the farther they got from the river the better.

The Chinese servants plied the poles, while Errington steered, and Burroughs sat near Chung Pi, condoling with him on his misfortune in being wounded at the eleventh hour.

"It is a mark of honour for the captain to be wounded when the private escapes," said Chung Pi; but as it was difficult for either Lo San or Chin Tai to interpret while attending to their task, the two wounded men relapsed into silence, regarding each other with mutual sympathy.

An altercation sprang up between the two punters. Each declared that the other was a fool, and would wreck the boat. Lo San, presuming on his acquaintance with the swamp, let fall slighting remarks on Chin Tai's ignorance, which exasperated his fellow-servant. But mindful of Errington's threats on a former occasion, they subdued their voices; and since they spoke in Chinese, the Englishmen never knew what insults they hurled at each other.

Errington thought his best course was to steer straight up the channel into which the boat had fallen, rather than diverge to right or left into the cross channels to which he came at frequent intervals. The sky was growing darker and darker; it would soon be impossible to proceed, and the prospect of spending the night in comparatively open water, with the chance of being stumbled upon by the pursuers, or spied in the morning, was exceedingly damping to the spirits. A very few minutes after the vessel had been got under way, the throb of the gunboat's engine was distinctly heard; and Errington, ordering the men to keep silent, shortly afterwards caught the sound of voices and then the thud of oars from the direction of the river. There was little doubt that two, if not three, boats had been lowered from the gunboat, and were already coming at a good pace into the swamp. This was, however, so broad

that the fugitives were fairly safe for the present. The pursuers might, indeed, by some unlucky chance, know of the hiding-place which Errington was seeking; but they could not have any reason to guess that Errington knew of it, unless they had among them some of the men from whom he had escaped before; and in any case the growing darkness would render it as difficult for them as for Errington to make their way there.

For some time the vessel was punted slowly along; the sounds of pursuit drew nearer; and Errington almost despaired of succeeding in his quest when Lo San gave a low exclamation, and signed eagerly to his master to steer to the right. In another minute the boat emerged into the pool. To cross it was the work of only a few seconds, and Errington recognized with great relief the opening of the narrow, tortuous passage through which the boat had been towed. Leaving the steering wheel, he got over the side into the water, and went to the nose of the boat, so that he might the more easily prevent it from sticking in the reed-beds. Thus, wading and punting, they forced the vessel through the passage until they came within a few yards of the patch of dry land.

Here they stopped for a few minutes, while Errington stole forward and reconnoitred. There were the huts, just distinguishable in the darkness. All was quiet. The same few broken sampans were drawn up on the shore. In the midst of the open space was the cooking-stove at which the old Chinawoman had been broiling fish. Errington, with many a cautious look around, stepped on to the shore and walked rapidly but stealthily up to the huts. He paused at each, listening. No voices, no snores, came from within them. The place was deserted.

Returning to the boat, he brought it from out its shelter among the reeds, and soon had it drawn up for a few feet on the muddy shore. Every one of the party breathed more freely. They sat on the sampans to rest. For some little time no one spoke; they all listened intently: would the pursuers come to the same spot? They could hear voices, faint in the distance; but the sounds seemed to be receding. It appeared certain that, whether they knew of it or not, the pursuers were not at present rowing in the direction of the hiding-place. Presently absolute silence reigned; and Errington reckoned that they were lucky in having approached so late in the evening, when the wild fowl had settled themselves; otherwise they might have been betrayed by the birds' flight.

"We can't see what's wrong with the machine in the darkness," said Burroughs at length, in a whisper; "and we daren't strike a light."

"No; the only thing we can do is to wait for morning," replied Errington. "We shall pass a wretched night, old man."

"It might be worse. I only wish I hadn't got this whack in the shoulder; it stings horribly."

"I can bathe it and tie it up; hope it's not serious; but if we can get the machine mended we shan't be long running down to Sui-Fu in the morning, and then we'll soon put you to rights."

Errington took a dipper down to the water, filled it, and returned to bathe Burroughs' wound. Lo San met him.

"Captin he glumble velly much," he said. "He say wantchee chow-chow; long time he hab catchee nuffin to eat."

Burroughs had brought a little food from Sui-Fu--enough to provide himself and the two Chinamen with meals for a day. A portion of these provisions still remained; but knowing Chung Pi's appetite, he doubted whether the captain would be satisfied if the food were divided.

"Tell him he can have a crust of bread, a sausage end, and a mug of beer," he said. "We haven't got any melon seeds or sam-shu."

Chung Pi gobbled the food with great celerity, but drank the beer in slow sips, having been assured that he could have no more. He still grumbled very much, and it struck Burroughs suddenly that cold and hunger might so work on the captain that he might be tempted to betray them. Henceforth he would be a marked man so far as the rebels were concerned; and the chance to reinstate himself in the favour of his chief, Su Fing, might prevail over the prospect of advancement at which he had mysteriously hinted.

"You two men keep your eye on Chung Pi," said Burroughs to the servants. "He's not to stir from the sampan he's on. Show him a knife if he objects, but don't use it."

Burroughs need not have been alarmed. Chung Pi slept through the greater part of the night; and in the intervals of wakefulness he comforted himself for the cold and hunger he felt by blissful imaginings of plenty of sam-shu and melon seeds in a not distant future.

It was a wearisome, comfortless night for the two Englishmen. The cold was intense, and the want of food rendered them the less able to bear it. Burroughs' shoulder, too, gave him much pain, and became very stiff. During that long darkness the friends talked of many things--of old times, of recent experiences, of the future. Errington related the full story of his recovery of the flying boat; Burroughs in return told at greater length than he had done in the yamen the pilgrimage which Lo San had undertaken for his master. Errington said nothing to Lo San at the time; but he resolved to requite his servant's devotion substantially if they got safe home.

They discussed one matter about which Errington was troubled. His dismissal from the service of Ehrlich Söhne was in one sense a relief; he wished to have nothing more to do with Reinhardt, and remembering that the German held a cheque for three months' salary, he was glad to think that here was a means of liquidating his debt. But he felt much depressed about the future. His late firm was of good standing, and to be dismissed by them for what Reinhardt called "irregularities" made him fear that other employers would hesitate to take him into their service.

"That's absolute rot," said Burroughs, when Errington spoke of his fears. "Nobody will think any the worse of you in the end. Making an ass of yourself----"

"Rub it in!" interrupted Errington gloomily.

"Well, we all do it some time or other; and making an ass of yourself isn't a crime, or the prisons would be pretty full. There are plenty of firms as good as Ehrlich; if I didn't know how touchy you are I'd suggest your joining us; the pater----"

"Dry up! D'you think I'll ask your governor for a crib when I'm a rank failure, a regular rotter? A pretty fine thing that 'ud be, in return for all his kindness!"

"There you are! I knew that's how you'd take it. A failure! Why, you're no end better at business than I am. Everybody knows it. Look here, just shut down on those idiotic notions of yours. Chuck 'em away. A fellow that never made a mistake never made anything, somebody said. It's jolly well true. Of course, if a fellow goes on making mistakes, can't learn, hasn't got the sense or the will-power to pull up, he is a rotter, and there's no good disguising it. But many a juggins has turned out a jolly fine chap; in a year or two you'll laugh at yourself, and----"

"And thank my stars I had such a pal as the Mole, even if he does lecture a bit. Why didn't you say all that and other things before?"

"Well, you know--I--well, I suppose I was a juggins too, but you'd have shied a brick at my head if I had, wouldn't you?"

What more they said need not be told. That talk in the dead of night, under the silent stars, knit them closer together in a friendship which neither time nor circumstance will ever break asunder.

As soon as there was a glimmer of light they inspected the vessel. The damage was greater than they supposed. The petrol pipe union had been snapped; one of the stays of the starboard plane was broken in two; and a bullet had pierced a hole near the bottom of one of the petrol cans, the contents of which had almost entirely trickled away. They had only another half can of the spirit left. This was a very disturbing discovery, but it suggested at the same time what a lucky escape they had had. They might well have expected that the heat caused by the impact of the

bullet would set the petrol on fire.

"Rather a long job before us," said Errington; "that is, if we try to mend the stay."

"The pipe won't take long," said Burroughs. "There's a bit of rubber tubing in the locker. We can stick the broken ends of the pipe into that. The stay is a different matter."

"Couldn't we leave that alone, and trust to our speed on the water?" Errington suggested.

"Rather risky. Unless the blackguards have got sick of waiting all night and sheered off, they'll spot us as soon as we take the river, and another shot might do for us altogether. No; we must mend the stay somehow, and then fly inland until we're out of harm's way--until the petrol gives out."

"But the stay must be welded; and we can't do that without hammering. If the gunboat's crew are anywhere about they are sure to hear the row, and find us out in no time."

"We'll have to chance that," said Burroughs. "A worse thing is the want of proper tools. There's a hammer in the locker, but we haven't got a forge. We can make a fire in that old stove there; but we've no bellows, and we can never get heat enough without."

"Never say die. Where there's a stove there ought to be bellows. I'm going to look round. But work before breakfast, and no supper the night before, doesn't make you feel amiable, does it?"

"While you are looking for the bellows I'll stroll along the shore and find out what sort of a place we're on. It's just as well to know something about our whereabouts."

Burroughs walked past the sampan where Chung Pi had passed the night. A thick white mist lay over the swamp, through which nothing was visible beyond two or three yards. Chung Pi was sitting in the sampan with his arms tightly folded. He seemed to have shrunk; Lo San and Chin Tai also were blue with hunger and cold. Burroughs felt sorry for them all.

"I regret having been compelled to inflict these inconveniences on you, noble captain," he said; "it is a pity our charms have not availed."

"Ah! If you had not gone back for the second talisman we should have been safe," said Chung Pi mournfully.

Burroughs had heard nothing about the second talisman, but he did not ask for an explanation, merely promising that Chung Pi should enjoy a substantial feast as soon as they reached Sui-Fu.

Proceeding along the shore, picking his way carefully because of the mist, he had walked for about a quarter of a mile when he came suddenly upon a sampan, and halted, fearing that it might belong to the enemy. But as he stood there surrounded by the clinging fog, he heard Errington's voice apparently only a few yards away. The explanation flashed upon him at once. They were on a small island, encompassed by a continuous screen of reeds. This was in a measure reassuring, for it diminished the risk of being discovered.

He moved forward. Errington saw a figure looming through the mist, and instantly challenged.

"It's all right, Pidge. I've made a tour of the place; it's an island. Any luck?"

"Yes, I've found a cranky pair of bellows, very Chinese, in one of the huts. We can start our forge at once.... Hullo!"

The exclamation was provoked by the sound of a shot in the distance.

"What's that mean, I wonder?" said Burroughs.

"Don't know. Shooting a duck for breakfast, perhaps. It's pretty clear that the beggars haven't given us up. When we start hammering they'll hear us and are sure to find us out."

"Better carry the stove into one of the huts and shut yourself up there. The sound will be deadened then. I wish now I'd brought my engineer; he'd have made a better job of it than you and Lo San; I can't help, I'm sorry to say; my wretched arm is as stiff as a poker."

"I've taken off the broken stay; half-an-hour's work ought to finish the job as soon as we get the fire going. This

mist is a godsend; they can't see our smoke."

"Well, you take the two boys to lend a hand in the hut, while I keep an eye on Chung Pi and listen for the enemy."

The servants carried the stove and the broken stay into the largest of the huts. One of the others furnished plenty of wood for the fire, and in a few minutes they had a good blaze, and began the work of welding the stay. Burroughs was disconcerted to find that although the hut was shut up as closely as the ramshackle timbers allowed, the sound of hammering was distinctly audible outside. He sat on the sampan beside the dejected figure of Chung Pi, peering through the mist, and listening intently.

By and by he fancied he heard voices from the direction of the channel, and a few minutes afterwards the muffled splash of paddles struck his ear. He waited until he was no longer in doubt that the sounds were approaching; then, taking Chung Pi by the sleeve, he hurried him up to the hut where the work was going on.

"They're coming this way, Pidge," he said. "Better knock off until we know what's happening."

"I'll take Lo San down to the shore," said Errington. "Let us hope they'll miss the place."

At the shore Errington and the Chinaman stood listening in silence. The sound of paddles was now distinctly audible, growing louder every moment. Presently there were mingled with it the high-toned voices of Chinamen.

"Can you hear what they say?" Errington whispered.

Lo San bent forward.

"He say 'Come this side,'" he whispered. "He savvy this place all same."

"How many boats?"

"My tinkee two piecee sampan. Hai! He say: 'This side bobbely; muss belongey place where tings belongey pilates.'"

Such fragments as these were alarming. The boats could not be more than thirty yards away, and it seemed as though one of the men knew of the pirates' lair, and having suspected that the hammering had proceeded thence, was trying to guide the party towards it. But gradually the sounds receded. Lo San heard one man suggest that they should go back to the ship. Apparently they had failed to find their way in the mist. A more distant voice seemed to acquiesce in the suggestion, and the sounds died away until there was again complete silence.

Then Errington returned to the hut and resumed work on the stay, while Burroughs, this time leaving Chung Pi behind, went down to the shore to keep watch. The mist was gradually lifting; the screen of reeds facing the island first became visible, then a short stretch of the waterway that cut it in two. Little by little the whole prospect became clear; from behind came the dull hammering.

It was perhaps half-an-hour after Errington had recommenced work when Burroughs again caught the distant splash of oars. He instantly ran up to the hut and gave the word to cease work; then returned with Errington and Lo San to the shore. Nearer and nearer drew the sounds. There was no doubt that the pursuers were making in the direction of the island.

The watchers dropped down behind one of the stranded sampans and peered anxiously over the edge. If the approaching boat or boats came within sight of the island, to escape discovery was impossible. The Englishmen thought dismally of their chances if it came to a fight. They had a couple of revolvers; the Chinamen had their knives; but the pursuers, besides being more numerous, were without doubt completely armed. There could be only one end to the struggle, and there was no means of avoiding it. The stay was not completely repaired; it had to be refitted to the plane; and if the pursuers' boat held on its present course, as indicated by the growing sound, it must come within sight of the island long before the hydroplane could be got ready.

The voices of the approaching men now sounded so near that the watchers expected every moment their boat to glide into view on the waterway. They heard even the swishing of the rushes as the craft pushed its way among

them. Suddenly there was a change. The sounds appeared to take a slightly different direction.

"He say, 'Muss belongey this side,'" whispered Lo San.

A few moments passed, during which the sounds grew somewhat fainter. Then they ceased abruptly: it was as if the men had suddenly found that which they sought. The silence continued, and Errington became alarmed. What were the pursuers about? He felt that he must know. Whispering his intention to Burroughs, he stepped into the water, waded noiselessly across to the nearest bed of reeds, skirted the outer edge, and disappeared from view.

He had not gone more than a dozen yards when he guessed what had happened. The man who had professed to know the island had lost his way, as was very natural in a passage that had many bewildering turns, with openings here and there among the reeds, which it must be difficult to distinguish one from another. The course which the boat had taken was plainly indicated by the bent and broken reeds among which it had been forced. Wading very cautiously in the same direction, and bending low, so that he was almost completely concealed, Errington in a few seconds saw with great surprise the nose of an empty boat projecting above the reeds, and apparently resting on dry land. The stern of the boat was hidden.

Instantly the explanation flashed upon him. The pursuers had lighted upon another patch of firm land, of which there were many dotted about the swamp, and imagining it to be the island of which they were in search, had gone ashore to explore the place.

Errington wondered how large the patch of dry land might be. If it were no longer than the island on which the hydroplane was beached, the men would soon discover their mistake, return to the boat, and continue their search. It was almost incredible that they should then fail to find the other island, within thirty yards of them. Was it possible in any way to check them?

A sudden idea occurred to him. Retracing his steps through the icy cold water, he came to the shore where Burroughs was anxiously awaiting his return, and waded to the hydroplane. From this he took the boat-hook, a long light pole of bamboo. Then putting his fingers to his lips, he set off again through the water, in nervous dread lest, short as his absence had been, the pursuers had had time to come back to their boat.

To his great relief, when he reached the spot, nobody was in sight. The boat remained as he had left it. Standing concealed among the reeds, he thrust the boat-hook forward, and after a few seconds' groping caught the hidden stern of the boat and drew it gently towards him--slowly and carefully, so as to make the least possible noise. The boat had not been tied up. It slid down the shelving bank inch by inch until it floated. Errington drew it on, through the reeds, which rustled unavoidably as it passed through them; then, turning his back, he towed it as rapidly as he could up the waterway towards his own island.

"Marooned, old chap," he said cheerfully to Burroughs, who started up in amazement. "But the water's deadly cold!"

CHAPTER XX

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

Six men had landed from the boat, convinced that they had come to the island from which the sound of hammering had proceeded. Their guide was somewhat perplexed at the absence of huts, but concluded that he had come to another part of the island, and led his companions through a tangle of shrubs and brushwood, expecting to come upon the huts from the rear. But ten minutes' search over the ground proved him to be mistaken, and the party retraced their steps, intending to proceed farther in their boat.

They stood rooted in consternation when, reaching the spot where they had left the boat, they discovered its disappearance. But it did not occur to them at first that any stealthy hand had been concerned. One reviled another for not having drawn the boat high enough up the shore, supposing that it had slipped down by its own weight. The strange thing was that, there being little or no current, it had so completely disappeared. They ran up and down the banks peering into the rushes, becoming more and more angry and perplexed as the suspicion dawned upon them that the boat had been stolen.

Meanwhile Errington had explained to Burroughs what had happened. They were congratulating themselves on having at least won a respite, during which the repairing of the stay might be finished, when they heard a loud shout from the men who had thus been marooned.

"There were two boats last night," said Errington. "They're calling to the other."

The shout was repeated, several men calling together. And then came a faint call in answer.

"My tinkee 'nother boat come this side chop-chop," said Lo San.

Again the shout was raised, and an answer came, a little less faintly, from somewhere in the distance.

"We shall have the others on us in no time," said Burroughs. "How long will the job take now?"

"Ten minutes to get the fire up again and finish welding, five to fix it," replied Errington.

"There's just a chance then, if you hurry up," said Burroughs. "They may be some time finding the fellows you have marooned. When they do find them, they'll search the whole neighbourhood, and there isn't the ghost of a chance of their not finding us, especially with the hammering going on again."

"I tell you what," said Errington. "D'you think you could manage to lend a hand while Chin Tai finishes the job? He can't do it alone, or Lo San either; but with you to keep an eye on it I think he could."

"I could do that. Why?"

"Because I could then lead the beggars off the scent. Lo San and I can use this boat. My idea is to row out a little way and hide in the reeds until the second boat has come up and taken off the men; then to show ourselves and make them chase us into the main channel. We both know the swamp pretty well, and we could lead them such a dance that you'd have plenty of time to get things finished here. You may be sure that when they see it's their boat they'll be keen enough to overtake us."

"But they know there are more than two of us," Burroughs objected; "and when they hear the hammering again, they will very likely drop you for the bigger game."

"Don't begin the hammering at once. Wait till you hear me coo-ee, which won't be until I've drawn them pretty far away. All we want is a quarter of an hour's grace, and it'll be strange if I can't play them so long."

"And what about us? Are we to fly out and pick you up?"

"Better wait for me. I'll get back here. When the repairs are finished it won't take a minute to get the boat afloat, and as you can't possibly get up enough speed among these rushes to fly, I'd better be here: I know the place, you don't."

"All right, then. And the sooner you start the better; the second boat is coming up pretty fast, judging by the shouts."

Errington got into the boat with Lo San, and pulled off quietly. He was in something of a quandary. He wished the Chinamen to see him as soon as they had taken off their stranded companions, but until then to remain undiscovered by both parties. This was difficult to manage, because the only point from which he would be visible from the shore where he had found the boat was the entrance of the narrow cross passage from the wider waterway leading to the island. If he took up his position there, he would be seen first by the crew of the second boat.

To overcome the difficulty both he and Lo San had to get into the water and lug the boat through a mass of reeds, behind which they could see without being seen. They had hardly concealed themselves when the second boat

came round a bend in the winding waterway, and, guided by the shouts of the marooned crew, swung round to the right. The moment they were out of sight, Errington and Lo San dragged their boat back through the reeds, and lay to, waiting until they should hear that the men had been taken off.

There was a tremendous hubbub of explanations when the two parties of Chinamen met.

"What are they saying?" asked Errington, as he paddled gently towards the entrance of the passage up which the boat had disappeared.

"My no can tell," said Lo San. "He piecee fella makee plenty too muchee bobbely."

At a slight diminution in the uproar Errington guessed that the explanations, whatever they were, were over, and that the men were being taken into the boat. With a stroke of the paddle he brought the nose of his boat to the edge of the reed-bed, where, by stretching forward, he could see what was going on. There were eight men in the boat; two were still on the bank, waiting until room was made for them. Errington smiled: the boat thus overloaded would not be difficult to outdistance.

The last man was stepping into the boat. The moment had come. Whispering to Lo San to make as much noise with his paddle as possible, he gave the word to go. The two paddles struck the water together with a loud splash, and the boat shot ahead in full view of the Chinamen, making directly for the main channel leading to the river. Terrific yells escaped the pursuers when they saw their boat dashing away from them with a white man on board. Errington had little doubt that his stratagem had succeeded.

The passage wound so frequently, and the reeds grew so high, that it was impossible to see whether the Chinamen were actually in pursuit unless he waited for them. He stopped paddling at a spot where about ten yards of the waterway was visible behind. In a minute or two the nose of the pursuing boat emerged from behind the reeds. Instantly Errington started again, and was out of sight in five seconds. The Chinamen broke into fierce yells when they saw him; one of them snapped a rifle, but the shot only disturbed the water-fowl. Errington wondered with a little anxiety whether a third boat was in the swamp ahead of him, or would be lowered from the gunboat at the sound of the shot; but the only course possible at present was to go straight ahead. He had seen by the sluggish movement of the pursuing boat, and its depth in the water, that he would be an easy winner in the race.

Thus the chase went on down the winding channel. Every now and then Errington slackened his pace, so that the pursuers might have a glimpse of him--not long enough to take aim--and be drawn farther and farther from Burroughs. They were so intent on recovering their boat that they had apparently forgotten the hydroplane and the other members of its crew.

At last Errington came out into the pool. He paddled quickly across it, in a direction away from the river, satisfying himself by a rapid glance around that no other boat was in sight. Just as he reached the farther side, the Chinamen's boat shot out from among the reeds. They stopped paddling, looking round for their quarry, and catching sight of him near a reed-bed about three hundred yards away, they opened fire. The bullets passed unpleasantly close, and Errington at once drove the boat into one of the many narrow channels, and was out of sight in a few seconds. Thereupon the Chinamen gave chase again; but when they reached the other side of the pool, and saw that the enemy had disappeared, they apparently recognized that they were outmatched, and stopped to consider what they should do.

At this moment a loud and prolonged coo-ee sounded from the midst of the swamp. Whether they recognized it as a signal or not, it roused them to desperate energy. Concealed by the reeds, Errington listened to a violent altercation among them. They were disputing which of them should enter the water and so lighten the boat. It ended in three of the six who had been marooned slipping over the side and wading slowly towards a small dry patch, where they posted themselves, holding their rifles ready to shoot at the fugitives if they should reappear. The remaining men drove their boat rather more rapidly than before in the direction from which the coo-ee had come.

Errington had not seen what had been done, but hearing the boat approaching, he started again, paddling easily until the pursuers came into view. The fact that they had lightened the boat did not trouble him. His boat was of about the same size, and Lo San and he could easily keep ahead. But he was somewhat anxious lest he should presently find himself in a blind alley. He did not know the part of the swamp to which he had now come, and it was quite possible that, entering a passage that seemed free, he would come upon an impenetrable belt of reeds that would form an effectual barrier. If at such a moment the enemy were in sight, he might well be overhauled before he could get free.

The pursuing boat, although no longer burdened with a double crew, was lower in the water than that in which Errington and Lo San were. It flashed upon Errington that if he could only find a channel where the depth of water was not more than sufficient to allow the passage of his boat, the other might stick in the mud and relieve him of further trouble. He remembered that, when circling the pool with Lo San, he had come to very shallow water at the end farthest from the river, and wondered whether he could find his way there now.

Turning at a venture into a channel at his right hand, comparatively free from reeds, he struck out rapidly, splashing with the paddles in order to lead the enemy on. By great good fortune, the channel led by a tortuous course to the upper end of the pool. A little search discovered the shallow part, and marking it carefully in his mind by the adjacent reed clumps, he backed to the entrance of the channel down which he had just come, ready to dash ahead the moment the pursuers came in sight.

They gave a loud shout when they saw him; the distance between the boats was very little; and as Errington's moved away, the pursuers came on with redoubled energy. He led them straight for the shallows, hoping that they would follow directly in his wake. There was nothing to make them suspicious. They paddled hard, shouting with triumph when they saw that they were gaining. Foot by foot they neared the danger point; Errington held his breath in suspense. Then there came suddenly from the Chinamen a cry of a different kind. The boat, driving into the mud, had thrown them one upon another. One lost his paddle. When they recovered their balance, it was to find their boat stuck hopelessly in a mud-bank, and the other darting obliquely across the pool. Howling with rage, they seized their rifles. At the same moment there came shots from the patch of dry ground beyond the lower end, where the three men had caught sight of the fugitives speeding back to the channel from which they had first come. Their marksmanship at the moving target was bad. The shots from both parties fell harmlessly; and Errington disappeared from view.

"My tinkee topside pidgin, galaw!" cried Lo San gleefully. "One piecee lot this side, 'nother piecee lot that side" (he waved his arm towards the upper and the lower ends of the pool in succession). "No can do anything. Massa Bullows he belongey bust laughin' what time you tellum."

CHAPTER XXI

THE END OF THE CHASE

Ten minutes' paddling brought the boat to the island. Burroughs stood on the shore with Chung Pi and Chin Tai, waiting in great anxiety.

"O.K.," shouted Errington, the moment he saw his friend. "They've divided forces--two parties, nearly three-quarters of a mile apart."

"Good man!" cried Burroughs as Errington stepped ashore. "You can tell me all about it presently. I was uneasy when I heard the shots. We've got everything ready. The welding isn't very good, but I think the stay will last long

enough to get us home. The only difficulty is the petrol. I don't think we've enough for more than thirty miles on the water. Less than twenty, probably, in the air. In any case we shall have to run the gauntlet again."

"Yes, it looks awkward. I must tell you this much. Seven men are at the upper end of the pool, dragging their boat out of the mud; no doubt they've done it by this time. Three more are posted on a dry patch below the lower end. I think they'll not attempt to pursue us again; but the boat will probably run down to the gunboat, and they'll be on the watch for us. If we start the engine the sound will give them notice: the best thing we can do is to tow the hydroplane into the pool, then set her running, get up enough speed to fly, and cut off to the river at an angle, so that we reach it some way lower down. Of course we shall be heard, and it would be a thousand times better if we could fly overland the whole way; but we are at least sixty miles from Sui-Fu, and we simply daren't use up our petrol."

"I can't think of any other plan," said Burroughs. "As it is, we shall have to trust entirely to the current for the last thirty miles or so, and everything depends on how far they venture to pursue us. It's time some government boats came up stream; but it looks as if they are relying entirely on the regiments from Tibet to put down the rising. We must simply take our chance."

The hydroplane was launched, and the tow-rope fastened to the boat, which Lo San and Chin Tai were to paddle to the pool. Chung Pi, much depressed for want of his customary nourishment, inquired anxiously what it was proposed to do, and looked troubled on hearing that it was necessary again to approach the river.

"I am a land fighter," he said mournfully; "in these movements on the water and in the air I am not myself. I should feel happier if I could find some melon garden, and fortify myself against the perils we shall meet."

"Well, we'll drop you into the first melon garden we see, if you like," said Burroughs bluntly.

"No, no, illustrious Englishman; I did but utter a pious wish. I must still hang on to the tail of my horse, though he no longer seems as beautiful as he did."

They set off along the waterway, Errington instructing Lo San to stop at the opening into the pool, and report, before paddling farther, whether he saw any sign of the enemy. On reaching this point, they found neither boat nor men; it was clear that Errington had guessed rightly.

As soon as the hydroplane was well out on the pool, the tow-rope was cast off, the planes were outspread, and Errington started the engine, setting the vessel straight towards the channel leading to the river. When it had gathered speed, a touch on the elevator sent it aloft, and Errington steered to the right, intending to strike the river about half-a-mile lower down than the mouth of the channel. He kept fairly low, so that the flying boat should be concealed from the gunboat by the intervening trees.

They came to the river, and instantly saw with alarm that their precaution was futile. In a recess of the opposite bank, with black smoke pouring from its funnel, lay the gunboat. The small boat was at that moment being taken on board. The rebels had chosen this position to lie in wait, partly to be out of the current, partly to cut off the escape of the hydroplane down the river if it eluded the search parties.

Errington at once steered the machine back towards the land. He dared not risk a straight flight down-stream, within range of the guns; another mishap might put the engine wholly out of action, and in spite of the expenditure of petrol, flying must be kept up for some minutes longer. That he did wisely was immediately proved. A fusillade broke out from the deck of the gunboat, and in another half-minute the machine guns opened fire. Luckily they had been trained hurriedly, and the shots went wide of the mark. Before they could be fired again the flying boat was out of sight behind the trees.

It was some minutes before Errington ventured to direct his course again towards the river. Everybody on board the flying boat expected that the rebels would by this time have come to the conclusion that pursuit was hopeless. The vessel alighted safely on the stream, and bearing in mind the necessity of husbanding the petrol, Errington thought he might now let it drift along on the current.

But he was disabused in a very short time. For some miles the river wound with such frequent curves that only short stretches of it were visible in either direction. Thus it was with a shock of surprise that the occupants of the flying boat discovered, on nearing the end of a straight reach, that the gunboat was coming down at full speed scarcely half-a-mile behind them. Errington at once started the engine; the vessel cut round the curve, and planed along at a rate far exceeding the maximum of which the gunboat was capable.

"We can easily keep ahead as long as the petrol lasts," said Burroughs; "but it seems as if the beggars know by instinct that we're running short. The worst of it is that we've several long straight reaches to navigate a little lower down, and there they can fire at us as they please."

"Wouldn't it be better to go ahead full speed until the petrol gives out?" said Errington. "We could gain at least a dozen miles on the gunboat."

"And still be forty from Sui-Fu, absolutely helpless."

"Why not run up some creek, then, and hide until she has passed or given it up?"

"No good. We've passed one or two sampans already, and the farther we go the more traffic we shall meet; some one would obligingly inform the honourable ruffians of our whereabouts. No: we'd better go as we are going; use our engine for spurts when we are hard pressed, and drift when we are not."

Very soon afterwards they encountered a difficulty which they might have foreseen. The river narrowed to little more than a gorge, through which the water poured in swift swirling volume. A junk was being hauled against the current by a hundred "trackers" on the bank. The channel on one side was obstructed by the tow-ropes; on the other there was not room for the flying boat to pass, because of the rocks that projected into the stream, even though the planes had been folded back. There was nothing for it but to draw into the side, and wait until the vessel had passed.

This wasted five minutes of valuable time. The gunboat would, of course, be delayed in the same way; but the gorge was fairly straight, and if she gained the upper end before the fugitives had escaped at the lower, the flying boat would be at the mercy of her guns.

Almost immediately after the boat had run in to the bank a shot whistled overhead. Luckily the junk had now passed. Its deck was crowded with Chinamen gazing curiously at the flying boat. At the sound of the shot they yelled with fright, and ran for shelter beneath the port gunwale. A second shot from the gunboat struck away one of the junk's yards, many of the trackers dropped their ropes and ran for their lives, and the unwieldy vessel fell away towards mid-stream, forming an effective screen against the guns.

Profiting by this diversion, Errington again put the engine at speed, and the flying boat raced down the river, out of the gorge, into a broad straight reach that extended apparently for miles. Burroughs glanced into the petrol tank: it was almost empty. All that they had remaining was a little in the bottom of the can which had been pierced by the bullet. Lo San poured this into the tank.

Up to this time the Englishmen had retained their confidence; but the accumulated misfortunes of the last few minutes plunged them in desperate anxiety. The drifting of the junk across the stream might be expected to check the gunboat for at least ten minutes, during which they would be safe from gunfire. But as soon as the gunboat got clear, she would have a free field, and unless the flying boat could arrive at the farther end of the long straight reach before the guns could be brought into action, she could hardly escape.

Only one course was possible: to use up all the remaining petrol for a last flight. Then the issue was in the hands of Fate. The planes were thrown back. Running on at full speed, the vessel skimmed the surface, rose into the air, and flew along at the rate of fifty miles an hour. The occupants of various sampans, fishermen casting their nets from the banks, men and women at work in the paddy fields beyond, gazed with amazement at the strange object flying over the middle of the river. Before it came to the end of the straight reach the petrol was all consumed; the vessel sank upon the surface; and behind, the gunboat could be seen steaming after it in full career.

Errington steered round the bend. It was a short one; in five minutes the river again stretched straight in front. He was familiar enough with the neighbourhood to know that Sui-Fu was still nearly thirty miles distant. There was now no engine power to rely on; they could but drift. Once more the idea of running into a creek occurred to them, only to be abandoned, for the sampans in this part of the river were more numerous, and some one would certainly think it worth while to betray their presence.

They were at their wits' end. During their flight they had gained several miles on the gunboat, but the very fact that they had descended would inform the rebels that they could fly no longer. The pursuit would be kept up; they must be overtaken within twenty minutes at the most, unless some unforeseen incident intervened.

The boat drifted on, and came to another bend; the gunboat had not yet hove in sight, but they could distinctly hear the throbbing of its engines. Again the river straightened, and though there were slight curves which would hide them from the pursuers for some few moments at a time, the general course was so direct that for at least five minutes they would afford a target for the guns. Looking anxiously back, Burroughs saw the gunboat come into the straight, perhaps a mile behind. Errington steered near the left bank, in order to gain what cover the occasional slight windings would afford. A minute afterwards they heard a report, but they did not see the shot, nor discover where it fell. Half-a-minute later a shot plunged into the water a yard or two behind; the gunners had the range. A tree-clad bluff hid them for another minute; as soon as the boat again came into the open, a third shot fell some distance ahead, and the gunboat was rapidly overhauling them. Disregarding the risk of striking a submerged rock, Errington hugged the bank, losing time by following the curves, but gaining what was much more precious in this crisis, fitful protection from the guns.

They came to the end of the reach. Turning the corner, they suddenly caught sight of the smoke of a steamer ahead of them, coming up-stream. Their feeling at the moment was that they were caught between two fires, though an instant's reflection showed them the scant probability of the approaching vessel belonging to the rebels. They were tense with excitement, anxiety, hope. The nose of the gunboat behind came into view, only to disappear again as the flying boat rounded a slight curve. The vessel ahead was not as yet visible; merely its smoke could be seen over the right bank. In another minute both vessels came into sight simultaneously, at almost equal intervals from the smaller craft drifting downstream. But the gunboat was with the current; the vessel approaching, which appeared to be a gunboat also, against it. The former opened fire again; shots churned up the water around the flying boat; one carried away the elevator, another shivered the air tractor into a thousand fragments; and all on board expected every moment that the little vessel would be sunk or shattered--when suddenly the firing ceased. The Englishmen looked round eagerly. Their pursuer was swinging round.

"Hai yah! He wailo!" cried Lo San, springing up and clapping his hands frantically.

The chase was over.

Quivering with relief from the strain, Errington steered into the bank, and lay to until the gunboat came up. She carried no colours, but there were several figures in the bows whose aspect and costume marked them out unmistakably as Germans. The vessel hove to, and one of the officers, catching sight of Burroughs, gave a salute and called to him in German. Burroughs grinned.

"I am an Englishman," he said.

"English!" cried the officer; "but you look not so. You very like a compatriot. Vat happen?"

Burroughs in his downright way was about to answer, but Errington caught him by the sleeve, saying--

"Hold hard, old chap."

His quicker mind saw that the Germans would be glad of a pretext for intervention, and though he had no love for the rebels, he loved the Germans and their methods less.

"You have been attack by ze pirates?" the officer continued. "If zat is so, and you give me note demanding

assistance, I go up to Meichow, and land men; zey shall learn----"

"Nothing to speak of, sir," said Errington cheerfully. "They were having a little firing practice, and we got in the way."

"But surely you vill make complaint!" said the German, his face falling.

"Oh, not at all," replied Errington airily. "We're used to that kind of thing. It would get 'em into trouble. They're not a bad lot. I believe this man was one"--with a jerk of the thumb towards Chung Pi--"a jolly sort of chap, you know."

The officer glanced from one to another of the flying boat's crew; Burroughs with inscrutable face, Errington with an easy smile, the fat Chinaman stolid, the two servants unmistakably grinning. He was puzzled, suspicious; was the Englishman fencing with him? Did he dare to play with a German?

"Vell, gentlemen," said the officer, now thoroughly irate, "you vill accompany me to Sui-Fu. I shall report zat my gunboat interrupt to protect you from ze rebels. You will do me ze honour to step up board."

"It's really very kind of you," said Errington, with a charming smile, "but we're in a hurry, thank you, and will go down under our own power!"

He cast off, the vessel came into the current, and politely doffing their hats the Englishmen waved a smiling farewell.

"We're well out of that," said Burroughs.

"Yes," said Errington, "it would hardly do for our little affair to be made the pretext for a German landing in force and all the rest of it. It's the very thing they've been looking for. But I say, *would* you mind taking off that moustache?"

CHAPTER XXII

MR. TING EXPLAINS

The adventures and misadventures of the flying boat are, for the present, ended; but there are certain scenes in the history of the human characters of this little drama which may perhaps have an interest for those who have followed their fortunes hitherto.

On the day after the arrival of Burroughs and Errington in Sui-Fu, very early in the morning, Chin Tai came to his master's bedroom door and knocked with much more vigour than usual.

"What is it?" Burroughs shouted from within.

"Time fo' gettee up, sah," called the man, grinning at the can of shaving water he carried.

"What time is it?"

"No savvy allo plopa; time fo' gettee up all-same."

"It's hardly light, confound you! Didn't I tell you I wanted a long sleep?"

"Plenty muchee solly, sah; time fo' gettee up. One piecee fella outside come look-see Massa Bullows; he say he no can wailo[#] befo' he hab talkee cash pidgin[#] 'long-side Massa Bullows."

[#] Go away.

[#] Money matters.

"Send him to Sing Wen. You know perfectly well I don't do business in bed, you ass. Any more of this foolo pidgin and you'll get the sack."

"Massa no unastan'," cried Chin Tai excitedly. "This piecee man he say he come look-see Sing Wen evely day-lo; Sing Wen say he no can makee anyting fo' he; he muss waitee fo' massa come back."

"Who is the blackguard?"

"He velly 'spectable fella, sah; he belongey opium shop-lo Pa-tang side."

"Oh! That's quite enough. Tell him to get out; I've nothing to do with him or his opium."

"My tellum all that, sah; he say he stop plenty longee time; massa no look-see he, ch'hoy! he cut float on door-step all-same."

Extravagant as this threat might appear, Burroughs knew that it was by no means unheard-of for a Chinaman, smarting under a sense of injustice, to commit suicide on the threshold of the man who had injured him. He was considering whether he had not better get up and prevent the horrid deed, when Errington, who occupied the next room, came in by the communicating door.

"You're in for it, old chap," he said, laughing. "The receiver's as bad as the thief, you know, and there's going to be trouble about that moustache of yours."

He picked up the moustache from the dressing-table, and dangled it before Burroughs' disgusted eyes.

"Hang it all!" cried Burroughs, "I had absolutely nothing to do with it. Sing Wen is the culprit."

"Qui facit per alium----"

"Oh, shut up! He wasn't my agent."

"You'll find it hard to prove that after giving him a hundred dollars. Better see the fellow and save scandal. I'll stand by you, Moley."

Burroughs got out of bed, muttering anathemas, threw on his dressing-gown, and went to the door, followed by Errington. The sight of the grinning China boy waiting there with his shaving-can exasperated him, and Chin Tai shrank against the wall before his master's glare.

They went down-stairs. On the step at the outer door squatted the sleek form of the highly respectable brother-in-law of Sing Wen's brother. He rose and kow-towed humbly.

"Now, what do you want?" said Burroughs sternly.

"My velly solly come this time wakee up hon'ble genelum," said the man. "My catchee plenty smart inside. Sing Wen he pay-lo hantun[#] dolla fo' Toitsche genelum moustachee. Mandalin he makee my pay-lo hantun dolla squeeze.[#] My catchee nuffin, losee my numpa one cutsoma; he no belongey my shop no mo'e. Hai! plenty bad pidgin. Wuss pidgin all-same. My pay-lo barber fella tin[#] dolla fo' fixee moustachee. My losee hantun dolla one time, 'nother time tin dolla; my tinkee hon'ble genelum pay-lo tin dolla, my wailo all plopa inside."

[#] Hundred.

[#] Fine.

[#] Ten.

"That's only fair," said Errington in a laughing undertone to Burroughs. "You don't want the poor chap to be absolutely out of pocket over the business."

"It might be worse," growled Burroughs. "I'll give you a chit[#] to Sing Wen to pay you ten dollars. That'll satisfy you?"

[#] Note.

"My savvy hon'ble genelum numpa one fella," cried the delighted man, bowing to the ground.

"I say, what'll you give me for this?" asked Errington, producing the moustache from behind his back.

The Chinaman stared. His eyes gleamed.

"Hai! My pay-lo fifty dolla," he exclaimed. "Takee wailo tin dolla, forty dolla lef behind." He opened his money pouch and counted out the notes. "My savvy catchee plenty good pidgin, galaw!"

"Don't offer it to Mr. Reinhardt, you know," said Errington, as the man pocketed the moustache.

"My savvy plopa pidgin," said the man with a leer, and shuffled away.

Reinhardt had a very unpleasant quarter of an hour with Su Fing on the chief's arrival at Meichow. Explain, protest as he might, the rebel refused to believe him, and accused him (unkindest cut of all) of voluntarily transferring his moustache to Burroughs for the purpose of deception. But Reinhardt was a German, and therefore personally inviolate. Su Fing sent him ignominiously down the river, expressing with ironic courtesy his ardent wish that his moustache would never grow less.

Reinhardt would gladly have gone into retirement until he could once more show a German face to the world. Unhappily, within a week a peremptory message from his firm summoned him to Shanghai. His appearance in the European quarter was the reverse of triumphant. Some old acquaintances affected not to recognize him; others addressed him in such tones of mournful sympathy that he could hardly control his rage. The story had already got about, and when he entered the Club (for he did not lack courage) the air of kindly commiseration with which he was greeted drove him frantic. The younger members of the club talked among themselves of getting up a subscription for the purchase of a new moustache. In a few days his dressing-table was littered with a great variety of infallible hair-growers. The directors of Ehrlich Söhne said very unpleasant things of the ridicule he was reflecting on the firm. There were bets in the Club that he would stand it for ten days; but nobody grudged paying up when, at the end of a week, it was known that he had taken passage for Hamburg. There was a vast crowd to see him off, and this evidence of his popularity gained him the good-will of the uninformed passengers until the story leaked out on board the liner. His voyage home was not pleasant.

The last that was heard of Conrad Reinhardt was a story from the German Cameroons. He had got into bad odour with the natives, and one day disappeared. Several persons, probably innocent, were punished; but he was soon forgotten.

Lo San and Chin Tai had behaved very well during the time of stress in which their lives and their masters' hung in the balance. But when they returned to the routine of service at Sui-Fu, their daily bickerings were resumed. Chin Tai's animosity was fed by the substantial present with which Errington rewarded Lo San's devotion. Lo San, it must be confessed, was very exasperating. In the midst of a wordy war with his fellow-servant he would twit him with his ignorance and want of enterprise. He took a delight in displaying to the cook and other domestics, in Chin Tai's presence, the card tricks by means of which he had paid his way to Meichow.

On one of these occasions the two came to blows, which in China does not mean fist-play in the approved British style, but includes the use of finger-nails and boots, and very painful handling of the pigtail. The yells of

combatants and spectators in the kitchen reached the ears of the masters in the dining-room.

"We shall really have to sack those fellows," said Burroughs. "It is getting intolerable."

"Let us go and knock their heads together first," said Errington. "I should be sorry to lose Lo San."

"He's not a patch on Chin Tai at looking after one's clothes," said Burroughs, loyal to his man.

"But Lo San's heaps better in serving at table."

"He can't polish boots."

"Chin Tai can't clean a gun."

"Well, hadn't we better have it out ourselves first?" said Burroughs, laughing. "Great Scott! there'll be murder soon. Come on, Pidge."

They hastened to the kitchen. The two boys had each other by the pigtail with one hand, and with the other were drawing streaks on each other's face. Burroughs dragged them apart.

"Hai! You piecee ruffians! What fo' you makee this infernal bobbely?" he said.

"He call me foolo!"

"He say my plenty muchee fathead!"

"He say my no can do card-pidgin!"

"He say my tellum plenty lies, talkee foolo pidgin all time."

"Hold your tongues, both of you!" cried Burroughs. "Chin Tai, if you can't keep the peace, I'll cut off your pigtail and send you home to your grandmother."

"Massa say muss belongey good up outside olo ribber, can do plenty fightee wailo Sui-Fu," Chin Tai protested with an aggrieved air.

"But I said you were to fight quietly, not yell the house down. Now I forbid you to fight at all, do you understand?"

"You too, Lo San," said Errington. "No more of it, or off you go."

"My fightee he inside," said Lo San.

"My callee he plenty bad namee--inside," said Chin Tai.

"Well, what you do inside is nothing to me," said Burroughs, repressing a smile. "Perhaps if you take care to behave outside, you'll be friends inside by and by."

There was no more fighting; the peace of the house was no more disturbed; but while China boys are China boys, Lo San and Chin Tai will never cease to look jealously upon each other as long as they serve two masters whom they equally respect.

Some three weeks after the escape from Su Fing's yamen, a pleasant little party sat at table in the dining-room of Mr. Burroughs' house at Shanghai. Mr. Burroughs and his family were there; the only guests were Pierce Errington and Mr. Ting. They were all very merry. Four of the party heard the full story of the flying boat's adventures for the first time, and as Errington had a pretty art of humorous narrative, there was much laughter at the tale of Reinhardt's moustache and the vicissitudes in the career of Chung Pi.

When Mrs. Burroughs and her daughter--whom Errington looked on very kindly--had left the men to themselves, Mr. Ting put on his spectacles.

"Look out!" Errington whispered to Burroughs. "There's something in the wind when Tingy puts on the goggles."

Mr. Ting glanced benevolently round the table, his eyes resting with peculiar intensity on Errington--the old Pidge whom everybody loved, with not a care upon his clear, fresh countenance. Lighting a cigarette, the Chinaman

said quietly--

"I have something to say. It is a strange story; it concerns Pidge, but he will not mind, I know, if I speak before his friends."

Errington looked a little uneasy.

"Look out!" whispered Burroughs slyly.

"Ten years ago," Mr. Ting went on, "when Pidge was a little boy of nine, my friend and master, Mr. Ellington, called me into his room one day and said to me, 'We have done well over that deal in cotton, Ting. I've made a pretty fine thing out of it. But you know what I am. I am a rich man to-day, but I can't cure myself of this mania for speculation, and as likely as not I'll be a poor man to-morrow. I want you to help me. Here's ten thousand pounds, put it away; never remind me of it; if I ask you for it, don't give it me. I hand it to you in trust for me and my son. If I'm brought to beggary, pay me the interest; if I die, hold it for my boy. Watch over him, bring him out here for a year or two; if then you see that he inherits my fatal weakness, pay over the interest, but never let him touch the principal.'"

He paused. The three men's eyes were fixed on him; a flush had mantled Errington's cheek.

"But if my boy, when he leaves school," Mr. Ting continued, "turns out well, the sort of fellow that can be trusted to make good use of the money, give it him; it will give him a good start.' That is what my friend said to me.

"I have done what he wished. You wondered, Pierce, why I sent you such pretty tiresome letters; you thought Ting a nuisance----"

"Sir!" Errington expostulated, but the Chinaman smiled and raised his hand for silence.

"I was doing what I thought my friend would like. But that is over; the school-days are past. I have kept the trust; the money is well invested, it is nearly twenty thousand now; the time has come for me to give account of it."

"Perhaps you had rather be left alone with Mr. Ting, my lad," said Mr. Burroughs kindly.

"No, sir; please stay. You were my father's friend too, and the Mole-----"

Mr. Ting noted the look that was exchanged between the two--a look in which spoke affection and perfect confidence.

"No one else knows of this," he said. "I only made provision for the devolution of the trust if I should die; I ventured to transfer it to you, Mr. Bullows."

"I appreciate your confidence, Mr. Ting," said Mr. Burroughs warmly.

"But I have made up my mind that it is the proper time to transfer the money to Pidge himself. He has been here more than a year; he has a good head for business, every one says so; and I think his father would approve my action. A little while--may I say it?"--Errington answered with a glance--"a little while I was afraid that I might still have to hold the money, and pay only the interest; but I think--I am light, am I not?----"

"I promised Ted," murmured Errington.

Mr. Ting's spectacles seemed to gleam with satisfaction and benevolence. He took from his pocket a large envelope which he handed to Errington.

"There is your father's trust-deed," he said. "It is from this day cancelled. There is also scrip, value nearly twenty thousand pounds. The best of blessings is a good son."

He took off his spectacles and carefully replaced them in their case. The silence was broken by Mr. Burroughs.

"I congratulate you with all my heart," he said, reaching out his hand to Errington.

"Jolly glad, old chap!" said the Mole.

Errington took the envelope, and shook hands with his friends, in the confusion of utter amazement. He laid the envelope beside his plate, then rose with the impulsive haste so characteristic of him, walked round the table, and clasped the hand of Mr. Ting.

"Forgive me, sir. I don't know what to say. You and the Mole are the best friends any man could have, and--and----"

He could say no more.

Lying wakeful that night, Errington thought over the past, and looked humbly into the future. What was he to do with this fortune which the love of a father and the loyalty of a friend had secured to him? Before he slept he had made up his mind. Mr. Burroughs was a sound, plodding man of business; not wealthy; unable to develop his business for want of capital. What better could he do than invest the money with him, as the price of a partnership? He knew his own capacity; he had never a doubt that the work he could put in would justify itself; and if only Mr. Burroughs would consent, Errington was sure that the future would prove the wisdom of his step.

So it fell out. The style of the firm became Burroughs & Errington. The two younger partners managed jointly the branch at Sui-Fu, and the business grew by leaps and bounds. Their friendship was never clouded by the least shadow, though in course of time Burroughs declared one day in jest that his nose would soon be put out of joint--when Mrs. Errington appeared on the scene. Lo San looked forward to this event with the most ardent approval, for when "Massa Bullows" left the house, he hoped to see the last of Chin Tai.

One day, Chin Tai announced a visitor. "Velly big fat China fella, sah," he said, with a gravity behind which his master detected a sly amusement "inside."

"Show him in," he said.

The door opened to admit Chung Pi, bigger and more prosperous-looking than ever, and--what was this?--actually sporting a mandarin's buttons. He greeted Burroughs with great heartiness, and a touch of the self-importance that beseeemed his new rank. After complimentary salutations, he addressed Burroughs in a speech of some length, not giving Chin Tai time to translate as he went along.

"What's it all about?" asked Burroughs, when he came to an end.

"He say he tank hon'ble genelum velly muchee. No can tink what fo' he belongey flend one time that mislable olo outside fella Su Fing. He velly big glanty[#] fightee man; empelor say he muss wailo catchee Su Fing, fightee bad fella all plopa. Chung Pi he go makee what empelor say, catchee Su Fing Cheng Tu side, killum tousan hantun bad fella, hab catchee topside button allo lightee. He say he hangee on tailo booful hoss--booful!--booful!"

[#] Grand.

* * * * *

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