BROWN OF MOUKDEN

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Brown of Moukden
A Story of the Russo-Japanese War

BY

BROWN OF MOUKDEN
A STORY OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR
BY HERBERT STRANG

Cover art

Herr Schwab under Fire

Herr Schwab under Fire

HERBERT STRANG

AUTHOR OF "KOBO: A STORY OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR"
"TOM BURNABY" "BOYS OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE" ETC.

Illustrated by William Rainey, R.I.

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"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." —*Tennyson's Ulysses.*

My dear Raymond,

Last year I wove a romance about the early incidents of the great war now happily at an end; this year I have chosen its later incidents as the background for my hero's adventures. But while in "Kobo" the struggle was viewed from the Japanese stand-point, in "Brown of Moukden" (which is in no sense a sequel) you will find yourself among the Russians, looking at the other side of the shield. It is not the romancer's business to be a partisan; and we British people were at first, perhaps, a little blind to the fact that the bravery, the endurance, the heroism, have not been all on the one side.

As a boy preparing for the Navy, you would have liked, I dare say, to see Jack Brown in the thick of the great naval battle at Tsushima. But I had three reasons for giving no space to that famous victory. First, Jack could not possibly have seen it. Secondly, sea-fights had a very good turn in "Kobo". Thirdly, I hope some day to give you sea-dogs a whole book to yourselves—but that, as Mr. Kipling somewhere says, will be another story. Meanwhile, if you get half as much fun in reading this book as I have had in writing it, I shall count myself very lucky indeed.

Yours sincerely, *HERBERT STRANG.*

September, 1905.

Contents

Chapter I IVAN IVANOVITCH BROWN

Chapter II MR. WANG AND A CONSTABLE

Chapter III DEPORTED

Chapter IV THE GREAT SIBERIAN RAILWAY

Chapter V A DEAL IN FLOUR

Chapter VI IN FULL CRY

Chapter VII A DAUGHTER OF POLAND

Chapter VIII A CUSTOM OF CATHAY

Chapter IX AH LUM

Chapter X THE HIRED MAN

Chapter XI WAR-LOOK-SEE

Chapter XII THE RETREAT FROM LIAO-YANG

Chapter XIII MR. BROWN'S HOUSE

Chapter XIV A NIGHT WITH SOWINSKI

Chapter XV COSSACK AND CHUNCHUSE

Chapter XVI FIRE PANIC

Chapter XVII THE WAR GAME

Chapter XVIII A FIGHT IN THE HILLS

Chapter XIX CAPTAIN KARGOPOL FINDS THE CHUNCHUSES

Chapter XX THE BATTLE OF MOUKDEN

Chapter XXI AH LUM AT BAY

***Chapter* XXII** CAPTURING A LOCOMOTIVE

***Chapter* XXIII** FROM MAO-SHAN TO IMIEN-PO

***Chapter* XXIV** LIEUTENANT POTUGIN IN PURSUIT

***Chapter* XXV** THE PRESSURE-GAUGE

***Chapter* XXVI** A DOUBLE QUEST

***Chapter* XXVII** SAKHALIN

***Chapter* XXVIII** THE EMPTY HUT

***Chapter* XXIX** THE HEART OF THE HILL

***Chapter* XXX** CROWDED MOMENTS

***Chapter* XXXI** ENTENTE CORDIALE

Glossary

List of Illustrations

***Plate* I** HERR SCHWAB UNDER FIRE . . . . . *Frontispiece*

***Plate* II** A SEARCH PARTY

***Plate* III** JACK SAVES AH FU

***Plate* IV** SOWINSKI'S VISITOR

***Plate* V** AT FULL TILT

***Plate* VI** "RECALL YOUR LAST WORD!"

Maps and Plans

Manchuria and part of Siberia

The Battle of Liao-yang.

The Battle of Moukden.

The Siberian Railway from Mao-shan to Han-ta-ho-tzü

CHAPTER I
Ivan Ivanovitch Brown

Scenes in Moukden—Beyond the Walls—Lieutenant Borisoff—The Cangue—Anton Sowinski—Criminal Procedure—Mr. Brown Senior—Schlagintwert's Representative—The Automatic Principle

The midsummer sun had spent its force, and as it reddened towards its setting Moukden began to breathe again. The gildings on palace, temple, and pagoda shone with a ruddy glow, but the eye was no longer dazzled; garish in full sunlight, the city was now merely brilliant, the reds and greens, blues and yellows, of its house-fronts toned to a rich and charming beauty. The shops—almost every house is a shop—were open, displaying here poultry, dried fish, and articles of common use; there piles of Oriental merchandise: silks and embroideries, parasols and screens, ornaments of silver and copper, priceless porcelain and lacquered ware. Monsters with vermilioned faces grinned from the poles—hung with branches and surmounted by peacocks with spread tail—that bore the signs and legends of the merchants and shopkeepers before whose doors they were erected: all different, yet all alike in gorgeousness of colouring and fantasy of design.

Two main thoroughfares traverse Moukden at right angles. Along these flowed in each direction a full tide of people, gathering up cross currents at every side street and alley. It was a picturesque throng, the light costumes showing in brilliant relief against the darker colours of the houses and the brown dust of the roadway. There were folk of many nations: Manchus, Mongols, Tartars, Greeks and Montenegrins, soldiers Chinese and Russian, here and there a European war-correspondent escaping from the boredom of his inn. Pedestrians and

horsemen jostled vehicles of all descriptions. Workmen staggered along under enormous loads; labourers of both sexes trudged homewards from the fields, their implements on their shoulders. A drove of fat pigs in charge of a blue-coated swineherd scampered and squealed beneath the wheels of a Russian transport wagon. Here was a rickshaw drawn with shrill cries by its human steeds; there a rough springless two-wheeled mule-cart, painted in yellow ochre, hauled by three mules tandem, and jolting over the ruts with its load of passengers, some on the backs of the mules, some on the shafts, some packed beneath the low tilt of blue cotton. Not far behind, a trolley, pushed by perspiring coolies and carrying seven men standing in unstable equilibrium, had halted to make way for a magnificent blue sedan chair, wadded with fur and silk, borne by four stalwart servants. Through the trellised window of the chair the curious might catch a glimpse of a bespectacled mandarin, his mushroom hat decked with the button indicative of his rank. With shouts and blows a detachment of Chinese soldiers, red-jacketed infantry, carrying halberts, javelins, and sickles swathed to poles, forced a passage for his excellency through the crowd.

The heavy air quivered with noise: the mingled cries of street merchants and children, the clatter of hoofs, the din of gongs at the doors of the theatres, weird strains of song accompanied by the twanging of inharmonious guitars, and, dominating all, the insistent strident squeak of a huge wheelbarrow, trundled by a grave old Chinaman, unconscious of the pain his greaseless wheels inflicted on untutored sensibilities. A Russian lady passing in a droshky grimaced and put her fingers to her ears, and a wayfarer near her smiled and addressed a word to the torturer, who looked at him aslant out of his little eyes and went on his way placid and unabashed.

The pedestrian who had spoken was one by himself in all that vast throng. That he was European was shown by his garments; a western observer, however little travelled, would have known him at a glance as an English lad. His garb was light, fitting a slim, tall figure; a broad-brimmed cotton hat was slanted over his nose to keep the glowing rays from his eyes; he walked with the springy tread and free swinging gait never acquired by an Oriental. He wormed his way through the jostling crowd, passed through the bastioned gate of the lofty inner ramparts, crossed the suburbs, where the gardens were in gorgeous bloom, and, leaving the external wall of mud behind him, came into the brown, rough, dusty road, lined on both sides with booths, leading to the railway-station. Rich fields of maize and beans and millet covered the vast plain beyond, and upon the sky-line lay a range of wooded hills.

By and by the walker came to the new street that had sprung up beside the railway-station since the Russian occupation: a settlement tenanted by traders—Greek, Caucasian, and Hebrew—dealing in every product of the two civilizations,

eastern and western, here so incongruously in contact. Nothing that could be sold or bartered came amiss to these polyglot traders; they kept everything from champagne to saké (the rice beer of Japan), from boots to smoked fish. Hurrying through this oven of odours, he passed the line of ugly brick cottages run up for the Russian officials, and arrived at the station. It was quiet at the moment; there was a pause in the stream of traffic which had for some time been steadily flowing southward. Save for the railway servants, the riflemen who guard the line, and a few officers desperately bored in their effort to kill time, the platform was deserted. The Russian lieutenant on duty accosted the new-comer.

"Well, Ivan Ivanovitch, what can we do for you to-day?"

"The same old thing," replied the lad slowly in Russian. "Can you send a wire to Vladivostok for my father?"

"Very sorry; it is impossible to-day as it was yesterday. None but military messages are going through."

"Well, I just came up on the chance."

"When are you leaving? We shall miss you."

"Thanks! In a few days, I hope. Father has just about settled up everything. In fact, that consignment of flour is the only thing left to trouble about now. I hope it will get through safely, but the Japanese appear to be scouting the seas pretty thoroughly. As soon as we hear from our agent at Vladivostok we shall be off."

"Come and have a glass of tea in the buffet. It may be the last time."

Jack Brown—known to his Russian friends as Ivan Ivanovitch, "John the son of John"—accepted the invitation. After a chat and a glass of tea from the large steaming samovar, always a conspicuous object in a Russian buffet, he left the station as the dusk was falling and a haze spread over the ground, covering up the many unlovely evidences of the Russian occupation. For variety's sake he changed his course and took a path to the left that skirted the native graveyard, intending to enter the city by one of the northern gates. A line of heavy native carts, with their long teams of mules and ponies, was slowly wending northwards; women, their hair decorated with flowers, were taking their children for an airing before the sun set and the gates were closed; a beggar stood by the roadside cleverly imitating a bird's cry by blowing through a curled-up leaf. Jack came to the great mandarin road and turned towards the city; such evening scenes were now a matter of course to him. But he was still at some distance from the outer wall when he came upon a sight which, common as it was in Moukden, he never beheld without pity and indignation. A big muscular Chinaman of some thirty to forty years was seated on the ground, his neck locked in the square wooden collar known as the cangue, an oriental variant of the old English pillory. So devised that the head and the upper part of the body

are held rigid, the cangue as an instrument of punishment is worthy of Chinese ingenuity. The victim, as Jack knew, must have sat throughout the long sweltering day tortured by innumerable insects which his fixed hands were powerless to beat off. At nightfall a constable would come and release him, conveying him to the gaol attached to a yamen within the city, where he would be locked up until the morning. Then the cangue would be replaced and the criminal taken back to the same spot on the wayside.

Jack hurried his step as he approached, eager to leave the unpleasant sight behind him. But on drawing nearer he was surprised to find that he knew the man,—surprised, because he was one of the last who could have been expected to fall into such a plight. The recognition was mutual; and as Jack came up, the parched lips of the victim uttered a woeful exclamation of greeting.

"How came you here, Mr. Wang?" asked Jack in Chinese.

The crime was indicated on the upper board of the cangue, but Jack, though he had more than a smattering of colloquial Chinese, knew almost nothing of the written language. The poor wretch could hardly articulate; but with difficulty he at length managed, in the short high-pitched monosyllables of his native tongue, to explain. He had been accused of fraud; the charge was totally without foundation; but at the trial before the magistrates witness after witness had appeared against him: it is easy to suborn evidence in a Chinese court: and he had been condemned to the cangue, a first step in the system of torture by which a prisoner, innocent or guilty, is forced to confess.

To one who knew the Chinese as Jack did, there was nothing surprising in this explanation, except the fact that Wang Shih was the victim. He was a respectable man, the son of an old farmer some fifteen miles east of Moukden, and practically the owner of the farm, his father being past work. Hard-working and honest, he was the last man to be suspected of trickery or base dealing. Mr. Brown had done much business with him, and only recently had had a proof of his good faith. The Chinaman had contracted to supply him with a large quantity of fodder. A few days before the date of delivery he had been visited by a business rival of Mr. Brown's, a Pole, who had come to Moukden some four or five years before, and from small beginnings had worked up a considerable business. Almost from the first he had come into competition with Mr. Brown. The methods of the two men were diametrically opposed,—the Pole relying on bribery, the corruption of the official class with which he had to deal; the Englishman sternly resolute to lend himself to no transaction in Manchuria of which he would be ashamed at home. Anton Sowinski, as the Pole was called, offered Wang Shih the strongest inducements to break his contract with Mr. Brown; but finding his native honesty proof against temptation, he had lost his temper, abused him, and finally struck him with his whip. The Chinaman was a peaceable fellow; but

beneath his stolidity slumbered the fierce temper of his race. Under the Pole's provocation and assault his self-restraint gave way. He seized Sowinski with the grip of a giant, rapped his head soundly against the fence, and then threw him bodily into the road. The contract with Mr. Brown had been duly fulfilled; and it was, to say the least, unlikely that a man who had thus kept faith to his own disadvantage should have descended to vulgar fraud.

"Who was your accuser?" asked Jack.

"Loo Sen."

"He's a neighbour of yours, isn't he?"

"Yes, and has long borne us ill-will. But it was not he really. As I left the yamen where I was tried, a friend whispered me that Loo Sen was in the pay of Sowinski."

"Ah! that throws a light on it. Sowinski is having his revenge. It is a bad business, Mr. Wang."

Jack knew the ways of Moukden magistrates too well to hope that the conviction and sentence could be quashed. On the contrary, if the cangue proved ineffectual in extorting a confession, there were various grades of torture that could be applied in turn. But prisoners often escaped; their friends, it is true, afterwards suffered. Wang Shih was so big and strong that he might easily have overpowered his gaoler some night when the cangue was removed; it was, perhaps, only consideration for his family that had restrained him. Jack questioned him on this point.

"Yes. That is the reason. The constable—wah! I could kill him easily; but what then? I could not remain in Moukden; I am too well known. And my father would not be safe. They would behead him, and rob my family of all they possess."

"Yes, I understand. I wish I could do something for you; but I see no way. My father might have done something at one time—possibly through the Russians, although they are unwilling to mix themselves up in Chinese quarrels; but in any case his influence is gone since the war began."

"You can do one thing for me, sir, if you will; that is, send a message to my father. Tell him to gather all his things together and leave the district. I will never confess to a crime which I did not commit, and there will be time for him, before I am beheaded, to get away."

"I will do that. I would do anything I could to help you, but——"

"Here comes the constable, sir."

Jack looked along the road and saw, slouching up, a typical specimen of the Chinese constable. In China the constable is universally and deservedly detested. Sheltered by the mandarins of the yamen, he preys upon the rich and oppresses the poor. The prisoner in his keeping is starved, beaten, tortured until he yields

his last copper cash; if he escapes, the constable pounces upon his unhappy relatives, and their fate is the same. This man scowled fiercely upon Jack, and the latter, seeing that no good could come of remaining longer, spoke a final word of sympathy to Wang Shih, and went on amid the thinning stream of people to the city.

"Well, Jack," said his father, as the lad entered the neat one-story house which served both as dwelling and office; "any news?"

"None, Father. The wires are still monopolized."

"That's a nuisance. You'll have to pack off to Vladivostok yourself, I'm afraid. Ten chances to one, Captain Fraser will not get through safely; still, one can never tell. I heard a rumour to-day that the Russian fleet has made a raid from Vladivostok; and if it keeps the Japanese employed, Fraser may make a safe run. You've been a long time."

"Yes. I had a chat with Lieutenant Borisoff; but I was detained on the way back. What do you think? Sowinski has got Loo Sen to bring a charge against Wang Shih, and the poor fellow is in the cangue."

"Whew! That's bad. It means decapitation in the end."

"I suppose you can do nothing for him?"

"Nothing, I fear. I'm sorry for the poor chap, especially as I'm afraid it's partly through his holding to his bargain with me. But I've no influence now, and even if I had, it would be useless to interfere in a purely Chinese matter. We could never prove that Sowinski had a hand in it."

Mr. Brown reflected for some moments, Jack studying his features.

"No," he said at last, "there's absolutely nothing we can do. This only proves that I am right in winding things up and cutting sticks. That fellow Sowinski is a blackguard; if I stayed here he'd find some means of doing me an injury next."

"But, Father, the Chinese are good friends of ours, and you've never been on bad terms with the Russians."

"Not till lately, it is true. But this war has brought a new set of men here, and you know perfectly well that I've offended some of them; General Bekovitch, for one, has a grudge against me. They don't understand a man who won't bribe or be bribed; I really think they believe there must be something fishy about him! However, we'll be off as soon as you get back from Vladivostok, and leave the field to Sowinski. I wish the Russians joy of him."

"When shall I go to Vladivostok?"

"The day after to-morrow; that gives Orloff another chance. And I've several little things still to settle up. By the way, here's a queer letter I got just now; it was brought by a Chinese runner from Newchang."

He handed the letter to Jack, who read:

”Respected Sir,—The undersigned does himself the honour to introduce himself to your esteemed notice, as per instructions received per American Cable Company from my principals, Messrs. Schlagintwert Co. of Düsseldorf, namely, ’Apply assistance Brown of Moukden’. I presume from aforesaid cable my Co. may already have had relations with your esteemed Firma. My arrival in Moukden may be expected within a few days of receipt. Believe me, with high esteem and compliments,

”**Your obedient servant**, ”HILDEBRAND SCHWAB.

”*Postscriptum.*—Also representative of the *Illustrirte Vaterland u. Colonien*.”

”Tear it up, Jack. No doubt we shall be away when he comes.”

”Who are Schlagintwert, Father?”

”You remember those automatic couplings we tried on the Harbin section three or four years ago——”

”The ones that took two men to fasten and four to release?” said Jack, laughing.

”Exactly. Well, they were Schlagintwert’s.”

At this moment the clang of a gong, followed by the thud of a drum, sounded through the streets.

”They’re closing the gates,” said Jack. ”I think I’ll go to bed, Father; I’m pretty tired.”

”Good-night, then! I shan’t be long after you. I’ve a little more writing to do. Send Hi Lo in with some lemonade.”

CHAPTER II
Mr. Wang and a Constable

The Flowing Tide—Backsheesh—At the Window—Hu Hang—Quis Custodiet?—Mr. Wang’s Grip

Mr. Brown, like many another active and enterprising Englishman, had left home as a young man and done business in many parts of the globe. He was a struggling merchant in Shanghai when Jack, his elder son, was born. Nine years

later he seized a promising opening in Vladivostok, and removed thither with his family, now increased by another boy and a girl. When Jack was eleven he was sent to school in England, being shortly afterwards followed home by his mother, sister, and brother. Then, at the age of fifteen, he was recalled by his father, who wished for his assistance in a new business he was starting in Moukden. Jack was nothing loth; he had a great admiration for his father, and an adventurous spirit of his own. He had done fairly well at school; never a "swot", still less a "smug", he had carried off a prize or two for modern languages, and counted a prize bat and a silver cup among his trophies. Everybody liked him; he always "played the game".

Mr. Brown had at first prospered exceedingly in Moukden. His business had been originally that of a produce broker; but when the Russians extended their railway and began to develop Port Arthur, he added branch after branch, and soon had many irons in the fire. He supplied the Russian authorities with innumerable things, from corn to building stones; he had large contracts with them in connection with their great engineering feat, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, and in this part of his business Jack had taken a special interest, picking up thus a considerable knowledge of railway plant, locomotives, and other details. Being a man of absolute integrity, respected and trusted by the natives, Mr. Brown before long won the confidence of the officials with whom he came in contact. But he was a shrewd student of affairs as well as a man of business. He had foreseen the outbreak of war, and viewed with amazement the careless assurance of the Russian attitude towards the "yellow monkeys", deemed so insignificant. Making many friends among the Russians, he saw much to admire in them: their kindliness and abounding hospitality, their perseverance in face of obstacles, their vital faith in their country's destiny. With the Japanese his personal relations had not been so intimate; but he had watched their progress from afar with the keenness of a clear-eyed observer, and he knew that when the trial came, the Russians would find the little men of Nippon no mean foes.

Events proved the accuracy of his forecast. The Russian fleet was bottled up, the Yalu crossed, Port Arthur was already beleaguered, and Stackelberg's attempt to relieve it had failed. Mr. Brown talked with some of the wounded who had been sent back from the Yalu to Moukden, and were now in hospital in a Buddhist monastery near the outer wall. They were not downcast: they spoke of being outnumbered and unprepared; when General Kuropatkin's army was complete the tide would turn, and then—— But he got them to talk of their actual experiences in battle. Some of them had been within arm's-length of their enemies in a bayonet charge; and what he learnt of the eager joy, the buoyant audacity, displayed by the Japanese, strengthened his belief that, given equal generalship, equal numbers, equal equipment, such a spirit could scarcely be matched, and

was bound to lead them to victory.

Prudent but not alarmist, Mr. Brown considered how the war would affect him. The Japanese were pressing northward; should Port Arthur fall, the besieging army would be able to strengthen Marshal Oyama's forces in the field. If the Russians were compelled to withdraw from Manchuria, Mr. Brown could hardly hope to save his business, and it behoved him to set his house in order. Another consideration weighed with him. The development of the railway and the imminence of war had brought new men on the scene. The Russian officers whom he knew so well were withdrawn, and replaced by men of another stamp—men who were not all so clean-handed as their predecessors. He soon became aware that he was expected to grease their palms, and his uncompromising resistance to corruption in every shape and form made him disliked. Several contracts were given over his head; he found that in many cases the new-comer, Sowinski, of whose antecedents nothing was known, was favoured at his expense; and it was clear that these circumstances, together with the general Russian distrust of England and all things English, boded ill for his business. He was turned fifty years of age, and had amassed a comfortable fortune. It appeared the part of discretion to wind up his affairs before it was too late, and return to England, where a man of his wealth and energy might find occupation for his maturer years. When he had once made up his mind, Mr. Brown wasted no time. He proceeded to put his design into effect, and now expected in a few days to leave Moukden for home.

It was past midnight before he had finished sorting his papers. That done, he smoked a final cigarette at the door, then shot the bolt, turned out the lamp, and went to bed in the room next to Jack's.

Jack had found it somewhat difficult to get to sleep. He could not put Wang Shih's plight from his thoughts. He had seen something of Chinese methods; there came before his mind the vision of a poor wretch he had once met on his way to execution, emaciated to a skeleton, one of his legs blackened and withered, almost fleshless, and wanting its foot, which had dropped off as the result of his being chained by the ankle to a ring in his prison wall. Such evidence of inhumanity was horrible; it made him shudder to think of Wang Shih, so good a fellow, so fine a specimen of manhood, suffering and dying thus. And he admired the Chinaman's fortitude, his loyalty to his family, his refusal to avail himself of means of escape lest his people should suffer. Could not something even yet be done for him? Jack did not wish to complicate matters; but, after all, they were on the eve of departure, and he knew his father well enough to be sure that he would not refuse to lend a helping hand if required. But puzzle as he might, he could see no way of saving both Wang Shih and his family, and the problem was still unsolved when he at length fell into a troubled sleep.

Suddenly he awoke. The night was very close, and at the first moment he

thought his waking was due to the heat. But then he heard a slight scratching at his left. He raised himself on his elbow to listen; he had never seen or heard mice in the house. The scratching continued; it was very close at hand. Surely at that time of night it could not be anyone scratching at the paper window? He got out of bed; it was too dark to see anything; he put his ear against the thin paper. The noise was certainly caused by the moving of a finger-nail.

"Who is there?" he asked softly in Chinese.

"Wang Shih, sir."

"Mr. Wang! You've escaped, then. All right! I'll come to the door."

On the way he went into his father's room, and touched him on the elbow.

"Hey! Who's that? What's the matter, Jack?"

"Wang Shih is outside, Father."

"By Jove! What does he want?"

"I don't know. He has evidently escaped."

"Send him about his business. I can't be mixed up in this sort of thing."

"You might see him, Father. He wouldn't have come unless he saw some way of getting off without harming anyone."

"Well, well! Light the lamp, and let him in. I'll slip on my dressing-gown and follow you."

Jack went to the door, opened it, and was confronted, not by one big form, as he expected, but by two.

"Who is with you, Mr. Wang?"

"Mr. Hu."

"Who is Mr. Hu? Come inside both of you, and let me lock the door."

The two Chinamen entered, blinking in the light of the little oil lamp Jack had lit.

"Now, Mr. Wang, explain. Who is Mr. Hu?"

"He is Hu Hang, the constable, sir."

"The constable!" exclaimed Jack, now recognizing the low brow and shifty eyes.

"Yes; I had to bring him."

"What's this, what's this?" said Mr. Brown, coming from his bedroom. "What you two piecee man makee this-side?"

Like almost all English merchants, he had found Chinese too much for him, and in his intercourse with the natives made use of pidgin English, the lingua franca of the Chinese coast.

There was a world of humility and apology in Wang Shih's kowtow.

"My lun wailo," he said. "My no wantchee catchee killum. Muchee bobbely yamen-side. Allo piecee fightey-man bimeby look-see Wang Shih; no can wailo outside that-time."

His exceptional size was certainly against him. It was clear that without some disguise the man could not hope to escape from the city.

"Yes, that's all very well," said Mr. Brown reflectively. Then turning suddenly to the second man: "But what this piecee man makee this-side?"

"He Hu Hang; muchee bad policeman, galaw!"

"Policeman! Yes, but what-for policeman he come this-side too?"

"Hu Hang he my policeman. He watchee my. My hittee Hu Hang velly muchee plenty hard, hai-yah! Hu Hang plenty silly top-side; my tinkee lun wailo chop-chop. 'Stoppee, stoppee!' say Hu Hang; 'what-for you makee leavee my this-side?' Ch'hoy! My tinkee Hu Hang belongey muchee leason. Hu Hang lun wailo all-same."

Mr. Brown still looked puzzled.

"Don't you see, Father," broke in Jack, "Mr. Wang couldn't leave the poor wretch to bear the brunt of his escape. They would have cut his head off as sure as a gun."

"Not much loss to his fellow-citizens, by the look of him," said Mr. Brown, glancing critically at the scowling, sullen countenance of the truant constable. "Still, it was uncommonly decent of Mr. Wang. We must really do what we can to get him away. What you tinkee makee, Mr. Wang?"

The man turned to Jack and addressed him in Chinese with much movement of the hands and frequent glances at Hu Hang.

"He says that after I left him," explained Jack, "he heard that the yamen runners were already ill-treating his people. That means, of course, that they'll be stripped of all they have. His only chance was to get away and join the Chunchuses. If he can only join Ah Lum, no mandarin will be rash enough to interfere with them. Even the Viceroy of Moukden is afraid of the brigands. Mr. Wang's only difficulty is to get out of the city."

"A rather serious one. No doubt by this time they're keeping a pretty sharp look-out for him, and"—glancing at the man's huge bulk and muscular development—"he's not the kind of man to pass in a crowd."

The Chinaman, though unable to follow Mr. Brown's English, had gathered the gist of what he said. He spoke again to Jack.

"If only we can lend him a cart, he says, and a new tunic and pantaloons, he hasn't much doubt of being able to get through. We can surely manage that, Father."

"Well, it's risky; but I can't see the man come to grief if it can be helped."

That Wang Shih understood this was clear, for his face beamed, and he kowtowed with every mark of gratitude.

"But what about the constable?" said Mr. Brown to Jack. "Suppose he cuts up rough?" Turning to Wang Shih, he said: "Supposey policeman makee

bobbely; what you do that-time?"

Mr. Wang grinned. He took the constable by the scruff of the neck and held him half-throttled at arm's-length.

"Ch'hoy! My keepee Mr. Hu allo-time long-side: he plenty muchee 'flaid, savvy my belongey plenty stlong, galaw!"

He gave the gasping wretch a final shake. Mr. Brown was satisfied. The demonstration was complete.

CHAPTER III
Deported

Mesalliance—An Outing—Bonbons—"Mr. Blown"—A Northern Frontier—Bandit and Patriot—Hi Lo—Arrested—Monsieur Brin offers Condolences—Old Scores—General Bekovitch—Short Notice—The General loses Patience

"Ah! I disturb you, Mr. Brown. I always disturb somebody. I disturb myself! Therefore I go; another time, another time."

"Not a bit of it, Monsieur. Sit down; I shall be through with these papers in five minutes. What will you drink? We have a fair selection."

"Lemonade, my dear Mr. Brown, nothing but lemonade. It is the cool drink."

"Hi Lo, wailo fetchee lemonade for Monsieur."

"Allo lightee, sah," said a little fellow of some thirteen years, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, a smiling Chinese boy.

Monsieur Anatole Brin, correspondent of the *Soleil*, sat down in a cane chair and wiped his perspiring bald pate with a yellow silk handkerchief. Mr. Brown continued to sort his papers. It was not possible for Monsieur Brin to sit speechless.

"Ah! Mr. Brown, you have things to do. You do not suffer, as we others, from nostalgia—the home-sickness, you understand? I sigh for Paris, for the boulevards, the cafés, the Opera, for anything, anything, but this Moukden. It is five weeks that I am here; I have my paper, my pencils, my authorization; I have presented to the Viceroy my letter of credit, my photograph, as it is ordained. I have the red band on my arm; you see it: the letters B.K., correspondent of war;

also Chinese arabesques, one says they mean 'Him who spies out the military things!' and here I am still in Moukden. I spy out no military things; I broil myself with sun, choke myself with dust; it is not possible to go to the south, where the war is made; no, it is permitted to do anything but what I am sent for; I become meagre with disappointment."

"Cheer up! Yours is a hard lot, no doubt. The modern general has no liking for you correspondents. But you will get your chance, no doubt, in time. The Japanese are coming north. There has been a fight at Wa-fang-ho, I hear."

"What!" cried the Frenchman, starting up. "A battle and I not there! I hear of no battle. Colonel Pestitch hear of none. I ask him just now. Does he tell me lie—prevaricate?"

"He probably knows nothing about it. I knew it through a Chinaman yesterday. The natives outdo the telegraph, Monsieur, especially the telegraph with a censor at one end. But, in fact, I have more than once heard the result of an engagement before even the military authorities."

Monsieur Brin walked up and down the little office impatiently twisting his moustache.

"Ah! It is abominable—but yes, abominable. Of what good that France is the ally of Russia? I might be Japanese, or Englishman, with no alliance at all. Why did I quit Paris? To put on this odious red badge, like a convict. For what? To promenade myself about Moukden, from day to day, from week to week, in prey to hundred Chinese diseases, subject to thousand Chinese odours! Ah, quelle malaise, quel désappointement, quel spleen!"

"You're in low spirits to-day, Monsieur. Why don't you go about the country and see the sights?"

"The sights! I have seen them. I have seen the tombs. They do not equal the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame. Pouah! My throat fills itself with dust, or my feet stick fast in the mud. For the rest, if I go farther I fall into the hands of the Koungouzes, the brigands; they have asperity; I have respect for my skin."

"Look here, Monsieur, this won't do. You'll make yourself ill if you take things so hardly. What do you say to this, now? My boy is going some fifteen miles out to a farm, to see some friends of ours—Chinese, you understand. Why not go with him and see something of the Chinese at home? Our friend Mr. Wang has an interesting family; you'll enjoy it, and get material for one article at least for the *Soleil*."

"Ah! it is an idea. We go—how?"

"On ponies. They will put you up for the night. You can return in the cool to-morrow morning."

"It is an idea. It please me. There is no risk?"

"None, I should think. You can take a revolver, but Jack is pretty well known. Hi Lo, tell Mr. Jack I want him."

In a few seconds Jack entered. He shook hands cordially with Monsieur Brin, whom he had seen once or twice since his arrival with a letter of introduction to Mr. Brown.

"Jack, Monsieur Brin is making himself ill for want of something to do. Take him with you and introduce him to Wang Shih's people. I think he'll like them."

"I'll be glad, I'm sure. Will you come, Monsieur?"

"With pleasure, to pass the time."

"I am starting immediately. Hi Lo, saddle a pony for Monsieur, quick."

The little fellow, son of Mr. Brown's compradore, ran off, and returned in five minutes.

"Pony allo lightee, sah."

"Good boy! Now, Monsieur, shall we start?"

"Hope you'll have a pleasant day, Monsieur," said Mr. Brown. "Look me up in the morning, and tell me how you got on."

"Good-bye! Thanks! I have not disturb you—busy man like you?"

"Not a bit. Good-bye!"

Mounted on neat little ponies, Monsieur Brin and Jack set off through the city. To the Frenchman's surprise, Jack did not choose the main thoroughfare direct to one of the eastern gates, but turned first into one side street, then into another. They were dusty, dirty, crowded with people, pigs, and poultry, and Monsieur Brin held his nose and began to expostulate.

"Wait a little, Monsieur," said Jack. "We are coming to my street. I never miss it when I come in this direction."

They came by and by to a street differing in no wise from the rest, except that in one of the paper-windowed houses a school was held. No sooner had Jack appeared at the end of the street than the sing-song of children at lessons ceased as by magic, and out of the school flocked a score of little ones, who rushed towards him with loud and happy cries of greeting, scattering the fowls and pigs and kicking up clouds of dust as they ran.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Monsieur Brin, reining up his pony to avoid trampling them.

"Don't be alarmed," said Jack, laughing. "They are my little pensioners."

The biggest of the children were already swarming round the pony. Jack put his hand into his pocket. Instantly there was a yell of delight. Then suddenly a shower of sweetmeats fell on the outskirts of the crowd, among the smallest of the children. There was a merry scramble; before the first handful was picked up a second was scattered in the opposite direction, and soon every child was on

all-fours, hunting for treasure in the thick brown dust. Meanwhile every door in the street had become blocked with smiling elders,—toothless old grandames, brawny workmen, women, girls, all enjoying the scene, chattering among themselves, some of them giving pleasant salutation to Jack. His pockets at last were empty; his pony was becoming impatient; and, laughingly threatening to run the youngsters down, he moved on amid high-pitched cries of "Come again soon, Mr. Blown!"

Monsieur Brin was vastly entertained. The children's antics were very droll, and Monsieur was a man of sentiment.

"My word!" he said. "Here is something at last for the readers of the *Soleil*. I have no victories of war to write; I write of a victory of peace; how a young Englishman has won the hearts of all a street of Chinese; how to them he is no longer foreign devil but sweet-stuff saint. Eh? How became you so great a friend?"

"Oh, it is very simple. I took a fancy one day to a little toddler; picked him up out of the way of a boisterous pig, and gave him a sweet to comfort him. Other children were looking on; next time I came this way a group of them stood with their fingers in their mouths and their eyes on my pockets. I flung them a sweet or two; they picked them up and scampered away as though half-scared; but they were on the watch for me after that, and now, as you see, it has become an institution. They have very easy-going schoolmasters here; as soon as my nose is seen at the street end the word is given and out they troop, and the elders know the sounds and come to see the fun. They are all very good friends of mine."

Leaving the narrow streets, they came at length to the outer gate, guarded jointly by several sleepy Chinese soldiers and a Russian sentry. Jack was well known, and the two riders passed through without difficulty.

Having a little business to settle with Mr. Wang senior, Jack had offered, before Wang Shih left Mr. Brown's house in the small hours of that morning, to ride out and inform the family of his escape. A ride of some fifteen miles brought the two within sight of the farm. It was a brick building of one story, like all Manchurian houses, with cow-byres, pig-sties, and poultry-houses clinging to the wall. The farmstead was surrounded by lofty wooden palings, and Monsieur Brin's attention was attracted by two fantastic warlike figures roughly daubed in red and green on either side of the great gate.

"Oh!" said Jack, in reply to his question, "they're supposed to scare away evil spirits."

"Hé! Are not the dogs enough?"

The appearance of the two strangers was hailed by a rush of dogs, large and small, yelping and barking fiercely, but without malice. The noise brought the inmates to the door: an old Chinaman and his wife, and two girls of eighteen

or thereabouts, whose regular features, soft brown eyes, and delicately ruddy complexion made an instant impression upon the Frenchman. He doffed his hat with the most elegant and graceful ease, and was not disconcerted when this unaccustomed mode of salutation set the girls giggling. The mistress led the visitors into the best room, lofty, airy, clean, with paper windows; along one side a broad platform some thirty inches from the floor. This was the k'ang, a hollow structure containing a flue warmed by the smoke and hot air from the kitchen-fire; it served as a table by day and a bed by night. A little graven image occupied a tinselled niche; and, the kitchen-fire not being required in hot weather, a kettle stood on a small brazier, boiling water for the indispensable tea.

The old people were greatly distressed at the disgrace that had befallen their only son; still more at his approaching fate, for to die without a male child to honour one's ashes is the worst of ills to a Chinaman. They were not aware of his escape; but when Jack told them that he was now at large, and had gone to join the great Chunchuse chief Ah Lum, they all, parents and girls, clapped their hands, feeling now secure against ill-treatment by the Chinese officials. The chief would send word from his head-quarters to his agent in Moukden that Wang Shih was under his protection, and the terror in which the brigand was held was so great that the farmer's family would remain unmolested.

Jack asked where was the encampment of the Chunchuse band. It varied, said the old man. To avoid capture by the Russians, the chief frequently shifted his quarters. His band was constantly on the move between Kirin and the Shan-yan-alin mountains, going so swiftly and secretly that no one knew where it would turn up next. One day it would be on the Hun-ho; a detachment of Cossacks would be sent to cut it off, only to find that it had disappeared. Two or three days later it might be heard of several hundred li away, on the Sungari.

"Yes," said the old man. "Ah Lum is a great leader, and a great hater of the Russians; but he hates the Japanese nearly as much. He would drive all foreigners out of the country. I am glad my son is with him, though I fear he will not be able to return home until the war is over."

Jack and Monsieur Brin spent some time in rambling about the farm, the latter smoking innumerable cigarettes, making copious notes, and every now and then breaking forth into enthusiastic praise of the eldest daughter, who he declared reminded him of his fiancée in the boulevard Raspail. He watched with absorbed interest the Chinese way of making tea: the green leaves placed in a broad saucer and covered with boiling water; another saucer inverted over the first, and pushed back a little way after the tea had "drawn", the beverage being sipped through the interstice. The old farmer insisted on his guests going to see his coffin, a very handsome box thoughtfully provided by his son and kept in an outhouse, where Mr. Wang frequently spent an hour in meditation on mortality.

Afterwards Brin was initiated into the complexities of fan-tan—a guessing game that was prolonged far into the night. They slept comfortably on the k'ang, and left about eight next morning very well pleased with their visit.

The sun was already hot, and they rode at a walking pace, partly to avoid the clouds of choking dust which trotting would have raised. They were still several miles from the city when Jack saw a small Chinese boy hastening in their direction.

"That's young Hi Lo," he said, as the figure came more clearly into view. "I wonder what he is coming this way for! Surely Wang Shih has not been caught after all?"

The boy had broken into a run, and when he met them Jack saw at once by his face that he bore grave news. But he was not prepared for what the little fellow told him in breathless gasps. Soon after daybreak a squad of Siberian infantry had appeared at Mr. Brown's house, put the merchant under arrest, ransacked his papers, and carried him off a prisoner. Hi Lo's father, the compradore, happened to be at a window of the front room as the soldiers came up; and suspecting, with Chinese shrewdness and dislike of the soldiers, that something was amiss, he had run to the inner sanctum and removed the most valuable papers from the safe before the Russians entered. But knowing that he was likely to be searched, he had handed the papers to Hi Lo, hoping that the boy would escape the visitors' attentions. Mr. Brown made a vigorous protest against the Russians' action, and demanded by what authority they arrested him and the crime with which he was charged; but the officer in command refused to give him any information. Before he was marched off, he was allowed a few words with his compradore, a servant of many years' standing. Learning that the papers were for the present secure, he had managed, without making his meaning clear to the Russian officer, to direct that they should be handed to Jack. They were for the most part vouchers from the Russian authorities for goods supplied; if not concealed, they would certainly be seized, and Mr. Brown knew how impossible it was to make a Russian official disgorge plunder. The whole thing was probably a mistake, at the worst a plot which could no doubt be shown up. The first necessity was to put the securities out of harm's way; then Jack could take whatever steps might be called for to obtain his father's release, if he were still detained after he had met the charge against him.

The boy told his story rapidly in pidgin English; not that Jack did not understand Chinese, but because, like all Chinese servants, Hi Lo made it a point of pride to use his master's language. Monsieur Brin could make nothing of the narrative.

"What is the matter with you, my friend?" he asked, seeing the look of concern on Jack's face.

"An annoying mistake, Monsieur. My father has been arrested by the Russians."

"Oho! What has he been doing?"

"Nothing, of course. Some official has been too zealous, I suppose. I must ride on, Monsieur."

"But may not you be arrested, too?"

"I don't think so. If they intended it, they would already have sent a detachment after me. You may be sure their spies know very well where I have been. No, I'm in no danger; but anyhow I must find out what it all means, so if you don't mind, Monsieur, we'll hurry on and chance the dust."

"Certainly, my friend. My word! this is an unfortunate end to our pleasant little picnic."

"You have the papers, Hi Lo?"

The boy produced them from some pouch in his wadded cotton garments. Jack looked them over. They represented a considerable sum of money. He did not care to have them about him, in case he should be searched. What could he do with them? For a moment he thought of giving them into the care of Monsieur Brin, but on reflection he hesitated to involve the correspondent in his difficulties. Hi Lo was a clever little fellow, devoted to him; probably he would be the best custodian for the present. He gave the papers back to the boy.

"Keep them carefully, Hi Lo. Don't come near our house till I send for you."

Then he put his pony to a canter, and with Brin by his side hastened on to the city. At the moment, as Jack knew, there were few Russian soldiers in Moukden. General Kuropatkin was at the front, somewhere south of Liao-yang; Admiral Alexeieff was at Harbin. The arrest must have been made in their absence, and probably unknown to them, by the local military authorities. But, knowing his father's innocence, Jack expected to find that he had already been released.

On entering the city he said good-bye to Monsieur Brin, who was full of condolence.

"If I can do anything, tell me," he said. "Unhappily I cannot telegraph; the soldiers have monopoly of the wires; and, besides, there is the terrible censor. But if I can do anything——"

"Don't worry, Monsieur. It will be all right. My father is a British subject; and though the Russians don't love us just now, they won't do anything very dreadful, I imagine. Many thanks! I will let you know how things stand."

He rode straight home, and, finding that the house was shut and locked, sought the compradore at his cottage at the rear of the compound behind. Learning from him further details of the arrest, he at once set off for the military headquarters near the railway-station. He knew several of the Russian officers, but

those to whom he spoke had heard nothing of the singular occurrence. One of them offered to make enquiries. He returned by and by with the information that the order for Mr. Brown's arrest had been given by General Bekovitch. This was not cheering, for General Bekovitch, as Jack knew, was an officer who under a surface polish and refinement was thoroughly unscrupulous, and one indeed whose enmity Mr. Brown had incurred by his uncompromising attitude towards the official methods of corruption. Some time before this, when Bekovitch was a colonel, he had transferred to the Pole, Sowinski, a contract which had been placed in Mr. Brown's hands. The latter protested, and Bekovitch's superior disallowed his action and gave him metaphorically a rap on the knuckles. The colonel was deeply chagrined, both at the reprimand and at the loss of the secret commission arranged with Sowinski. He was now promoted major-general; his superior was gone; and Jack could hardly doubt that he had seized the opportunity to pay off his grudge against the English merchant. Jack shrank somewhat from a meeting with the general, but his indignation outweighed every other feeling, and, plucking up his courage, he made his way to the luxurious railway-carriage which served Bekovitch for quarters.

He had to wait some time before he gained admittance to the general's presence. When at last he was invited to enter, he found Bekovitch lolling on a divan smoking a cigarette, a champagne bottle at his elbow. He was a tall fair man, inclining to stoutness, with a long moustache and carefully-trimmed beard, and looked in his white uniform a very dignified representative of the military bureaucracy.

Jack's residence as a boy in Vladivostok had given him a good colloquial knowledge of Russian, so that he had no difficulty in addressing the general in his own language.

"I have recently heard, sir, of my father's arrest," he said, "and I have come to ask if you will be good enough to tell me where he is and what he is charged with."

"You are Mr. Brown's son? How do you do?" said the general suavely. "I am sorry for you. It is a bad business altogether. I should be quite justified in refusing to give you information, but I am, of course, willing to stretch a point in a case like this—father and son, you know. Well, I regret to say that I had to arrest your father for giving military information to the Japanese."

"But, sir, that is ridiculous. My father never did such a thing. He has had no connection, not even a business one, with the Japanese; he doesn't like them. Besides, he would never think of doing anything underhand. No one who knows him could even imagine it."

If Bekovitch felt the personal application, he did not show it.

"Very creditable, very creditable indeed. A loyal son; excellent. I should be

the last to undeceive you; therefore we will say no more about it. Let me offer you a cigarette."

"No, thank you, sir. Really the matter cannot end thus. What evidence have you against my father?"

The general shrugged.

"Well, if you will—— We had our suspicions; your father is an Englishman, you know; we examined his papers and found proof of our suspicions—full, conclusive. There is no doubt at all about it."

"But you will allow my father to clear himself. I am sure he can do so."

"We have no time for long-winded processes," replied the general, throwing away the end of his cigarette and lighting another. "Moukden, as you must be aware, young man, is under martial law."

"Then what has become of my father, sir? Where is he?"

"We might have shot him, you know." The general's manner was suaver than ever. "But we are a merciful people. Your father has merely been—deported."

At this Jack felt that either there was a hole in the net woven around his father, or the Russians had feared to proceed to extremities owing to his British nationality.

"Well, sir," he said, "I shall, of course, appeal to our government."

"Certainly, my young friend, certainly! But on what ground? See, I recognize your anxiety; it is perfectly natural; for that reason I am patient with you. But we must be the judges as to who shall stay in Manchuria, who shall leave. Your father is now on his way to—to the frontier. You will follow without loss of time. I give you twelve hours to quit the city. A pass shall be made out for you; you will go by to-night's train to Harbin."

General Bekovitch's manner was as urbane and polite as ever, but there was in his tone a something that warned the boy that further protest would be useless. Still, he must make one more effort to discover his father's whereabouts.

"Has my father gone to Harbin?" he asked.

"I have told you, my young friend, he has been deported. I can tell you no more."

"But why not tell me his route, General Bekovitch? He was in any case leaving for England in a few days. If I am to go to Harbin I should like to know whether there is any possibility of overtaking my father and proceeding to Europe with him."

For answer the general summoned an attendant.

"Michel Sergeitch, show this young man out."

Jack gave him one look, then turned in silence towards the door.

"One moment," called the general after him. "As I said, a pass shall be sent you. The train leaves at eight. If you are found here to-morrow, you will be

arrested and escorted as a prisoner to the frontier. That, I may remark, is an unpleasant mode of travelling. Remember, eight o'clock."

CHAPTER IV
The Great Siberian Railway

Duty and Inclination—A Domiciliary Visit—Monsieur Brin Protests—A Reminder—The Ombeloke—Quandary—Salvage—A Fortune in Soles—Fellow Passengers—From a Carriage Window—A Further Search—At the Sungari Bridge—Off the Line—The Compradore's Brother—Consultation—A Bargain—The Terms—The Last Load—In a Horse-box

Jack had rage in his heart as he walked back to the city. He was angry and indignant, but even more alarmed. The general had told him little: was that little the truth? What did he mean by "deported"? If Mr. Brown had really been put across the frontier, why should the general have refused to say by what route he had travelled? Jack feared that there had been foul play, and his anxiety was none the less because he could not imagine what form the foul play had taken.

His own position was awkward. He was homeless; in a few hours he was to be packed like a bundle of goods into a train and carried away against his will. His father might have preceded him to Europe; on the other hand, he might not. Was he to leave Moukden thus, in uncertainty as to his father's fate?

Thus perplexed and troubled in mind, he walked back to his house. At the door he found Monsieur Brin in a state of desperation at his inability to make head or tail of the compradore's pidgin English.

"Ha, my friend!" he exclaimed, "I am glad to see you; I must know the worst; I come in haste, but the Chinese man speaks a language of monkeys; I understand it not. Tell me what is arrived."

"I have seen General Bekovitch," replied Jack. "He told me almost nothing. My father has been deported—for betraying secrets to the Japanese, if you please! Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous, so preposterous!"

"But that is all right. O.K. Deported! Mr. Brown is the happy man. It would please me to be deported also. He goes back to Europe: that I could accompany him!"

"But that is the point. Has he gone back to Europe? The general would

not tell me. And he is packing me off too! I have to leave by to-night's train for Harbin, or he will put me under arrest."

"Hé! That is a scandal. I will expose it. I will write it all to my redacteur. Ah! But I ask myself, will the redacteur publish my letter? France is allied to Russia. A French publicist has to consider not solely his own persuasions, but his duty to his country. I reflect: it will be best actually to write nothing. But if, my friend, there needs money, demand me; I can furnish hundred, hundred and fifty roubles: it will be to me a pleasure."

"Many thanks, Monsieur! I do not think I shall need your assistance. I told the general I shall appeal to our government. Unluckily we have no consul here; the nearest, I suppose, is at Shanghai; and being sent off to Harbin, I don't know when I shall have an opportunity of communicating with our authorities."

"Truly, it is a difficult situation. And your goods here: what will they become?"

"They'll be confiscated, I suppose. As you see, I am locked out. Luckily we have nothing of any great value. My father sent off in advance all that he wished to keep, and they can't touch his account at the Hong-Kong and Shanghai bank."

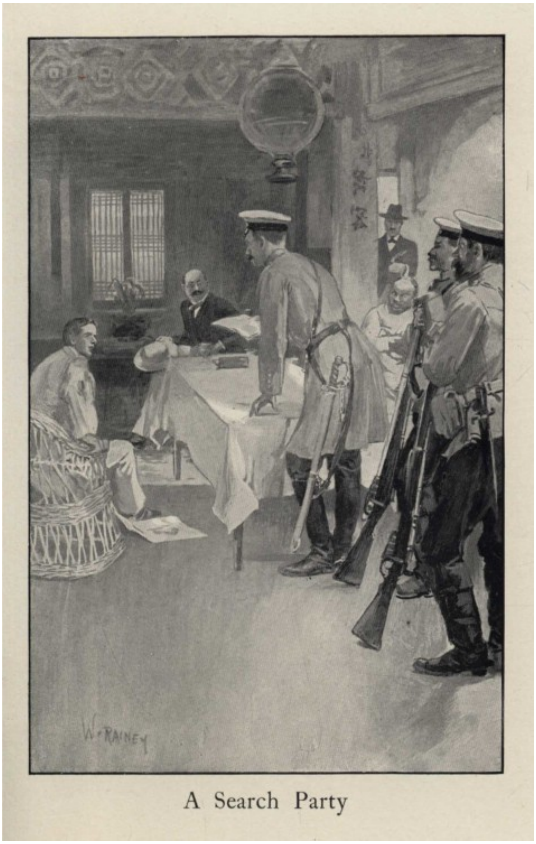
He said nothing about the securities in Hi Lo's possession, not from any want of faith in the Frenchman's good-will, but not entirely trusting his discretion.

"They have no right to lock me out," continued Jack. "And as General Bekovitch said he'd send me a pass for the train, he must suppose he'll find me here. So if Mr. Hi will put his shoulder to the door, I think we'll force the lock and see what they have been doing."

The stalwart compradore made short work of the fastenings. Accompanied by Monsieur Brin and the Chinaman, Jack entered his father's house. There were manifest signs of ransacking. The floor of the office was strewn with papers; in the dining-room the drawers had been emptied; and a large oaken press, a fine specimen of Chinese cabinet-making on which Mr. Brown set much store, had been forced open. They were contemplating the dismal scene when Hi Lo came running in.

"Masta," he said hurriedly, "thlee fo' piecee Lusski walkee chop-chop thisside."

A few moments later the house was entered by four Siberian infantrymen, headed by a lieutenant and accompanied by a tall, fair, hook-nosed man, at the sight of whom Jack started. A light flashed upon him. Anton Sowinski was the Russian Pole who had been doing his best to ruin Mr. Brown's business, and had so bitterly resented Mr. Brown's successes. It was he, too, who had instigated the charge trumped up against Wang Shih in revenge for a business defeat. Was it unlikely that Sowinski had been the agent in this other trumped-up charge of



A Search Party

A Search Party

espionage? If not, what was his business now?

"I have come," said the lieutenant, "to bring you the pass promised by General Bekovitch. Here it is."

He drew a large unsealed envelope from his pocket, and took from it a paper which he proceeded to read. It stipulated that Mr. John Brown, junior, was to leave Moukden by the train for Harbin at 8 p.m., en route for Europe. Replacing it in the envelope, the officer laid this upon the table and said:

"I regret, Monsieur, that I have a disagreeable duty to perform. I am ordered to search the house and everybody in it. Mr. Brown is known to have been in possession of certain vouchers which are now forfeit to my government. They could not be found when he was arrested; the conclusion is that they are in your possession. I must ask you to turn out your pockets."

"I have no papers," said Jack, "and I protest."

"I am sorry. I have my orders to carry out. Resistance is useless."

"Oh! I shall not resist. Search away."

The lieutenant had already posted a soldier at the back entrance, and had sent another man to bring into the room anyone whom he might find on the premises. As Jack was being searched, Hi Lo was brought in; he had slipped away when the Russians entered. Jack hoped that the boy had had time to hide the papers, for though the amount they represented was small in comparison with his father's total fortune, it was yet considerable in itself, and he was anxious to save it, not merely for its own sake, but because without it he would have no means of carrying through a plan he had already dimly determined on. Hi Lo's face was void of all expression. There were now in the room, besides the Russians, Jack himself, Monsieur Brin, the compradore, and his son. The door was locked.

Jack was searched from top to toe. Nothing was found on him save letters of no importance. The compradore and Hi Lo were examined in turn; they submitted meekly, and Jack almost betrayed his relief when he saw that the papers had not been discovered on the boy. Then the officer turned to Monsieur Brin, glancing at the red band on his arm.

"But I am a Frenchman," exclaimed the angry correspondent. "Why do you search me? I have nothing. I know nothing."

"I find you in Mr. Brown's house. I have orders to search everybody. I hope you will make no difficulty, Monsieur."

"Difficulty! It is you that make difficulty. It is an insult, an indignity. I am an ally; peste! for what good to be an ally if I am thus treated as an enemy! But I do not resist; no, I resign myself. From no one but an ally would I endure such an indignity."

"I am exceedingly sorry, Monsieur. General Bekovitch, in giving orders,

of course did not contemplate for a moment the case of a French correspondent being present; but my instructions are positive. I have no choice but to carry them out."

"Well, I protest still once more. I will make the French nation know the price they pay for this so agreeable alliance."

Monsieur Brin was searched. No papers were found on him except his pocket-book, a lady's photograph, and several letters, which the officer glanced through, the Frenchman fuming with impatience and indignation. At the conclusion of the search the lieutenant threw a meaning glance at Sowinski, whose attitude throughout had convinced Jack of the correctness of his surmise. The Pole's presence was in itself a sufficient proof of his personal interest in Mr. Brown's fate. An hour was spent in making a further examination of the scattered papers; nothing incriminating being found, the lieutenant gave his men the order to march. At the last moment he glanced at the envelope on the table.

"Take care of it, Monsieur," he said; "it would be awkward for you if it were lost."

When the party had gone, Monsieur Brin fairly exploded with wrath. English was too slow for him; a rapid torrent of French came from his quivering lips. But Jack's attention was diverted from the Frenchman by the strange antics of Hi Lo, who was dancing round his father, his face beaming with delight.

"You hid the papers?" said Jack. "You are a good boy. Where are they?"

The boy pointed to the envelope on the table.

"What do you mean?"

"Masta, look-see. Masta, look-see."

Jack lifted the envelope. The boy's glee puzzled him. Opening it, he took out the Russian pass, and with it half a dozen thin slips of paper written upon in Russian and French. He could hardly believe his eyes. They were the very papers for which the officer had sought so diligently but in vain.

"How is this? What does it mean?" he said in blank amazement.

"Hai-yah! Velly bad Lusski man look-see Masta; allo piecee bad man look-see all-same; no can tinkee Hi Lo plenty smart inside. Hai-yah! Allo piecee Lusski man look-see that-side; my belongey this-side, makee no bobbely; cleep-cleep 'long-side table; my hab papers allo lightee: ch'hoy! he belong-ey chop-chop inside ombeloke; Lusski no savvy nuffin 'bout nuffin, galaw!"

Jack burst into a roar of laughter, and translated the boy's pidgin to the bewildered Frenchman. While the Russians were intent on searching Jack, and their backs were towards Hi Lo, the boy, knowing that his turn must come, seized the opportunity to slip the precious papers into the unclosed envelope on the table. Monsieur Brin flung up his hands and began to pirouette, then stopped to laugh, and held his shaking sides.

"Hi! hi! admirable! Excellentissime! Bravo! bravo! Ma foi! Comme il est adroit! Comme il est spirituel! Ho! ho! Tiens! Le gars mérite une forte récompense. Voilà!"

In his excess of enthusiasm he took a silver dollar from his pocket, spun it, and handed it to Hi Lo. The boy was sober in an instant. He gravely handed the coin back.

"No wantchee Fa-lan-sai man he dollar," he said.

Brin looked to Jack for an explanation.

"He is much obliged, but would rather not. You made a little mistake, Monsieur. You can't offend a Chinaman of this sort more than by offering him money. He is, indeed, a clever little chap. I'll take care he doesn't go unrewarded."

"Ha! That is another point for my chapter on the characteristics of the Chinese. But now, my friend, what will you do?"

"Really, Monsieur, I don't know. I must talk it over with the compradore."

"Very well then, I leave you. I go to write notes of this most interesting episode. I begin to enjoy war correspondence. You go at eight? I will be at the station to say adieu."

Jack spent more than an hour in serious consultation with Hi An, the compradore, a man of forty, who had served his father for nearly twenty years, and was heart and soul devoted to his interests. There was no question but that Jack must leave Moukden that night, and Hi An advised him to go straight to Moscow and take the first opportunity of communicating with the British Foreign Office. Meanwhile the compradore himself would do what he could to trace the whereabouts of his master. But this course Jack was very unwilling to adopt. In the first place, he had his father's instructions to realize the securities, so cleverly saved by Hi Lo. Then there was the consignment of flour which he hoped might run the Japanese blockade and come safe to harbour at Vladivostok. If it should arrive it would be worth a large sum of money, and Jack was not disposed to yield that a spoil to the Russians. Last and most important consideration, he was oppressed by the mystery of his father's fate. With the likelihood of innumerable delays on the congested railway, he might be three weeks or a month reaching Moscow; he foresaw difficulties in inducing the Foreign Office to move in a case where there was so little to go upon; and, above all, it was unendurable to think that his father might, for all he knew, be still near at hand, in danger and distress.

He was already determined, then, that, leave Moukden if he must, he would not leave Manchuria. But what could he do to secure his objects and his own safety? He wondered whether the news of his father's arrest had been telegraphed to Harbin and Vladivostok. That was unlikely, he thought, for two reasons. It was well known that Mr. Brown had been winding up his business; the Russian authorities, unless specially informed, would not suppose that there was

any plunder to be got apart from what was found at Moukden. And the telegraph had been for months past very much overworked, what with the heavy railway traffic and the constant messages flashing to and fro between the principal depots in Manchuria and between Manchuria and St. Petersburg. It was therefore unlikely that the enforced departure of a Moukden merchant would be considered of sufficient importance to communicate. If this reasoning was correct, and Jack could contrive to reach Vladivostok before the news filtered through, he might save the remnants of his father's property, and turn the vouchers into negotiable securities. He would then find himself in possession of considerable funds, which he might use if necessary in tracking his father.

The first thing was to get to Vladivostok. The pass stipulated that he should go through Harbin over the Siberian railway to Moscow. To reach Vladivostok he must change trains at Harbin, and by that very fact become a fugitive and an outlaw. Apparently General Bekovitch did not intend to send him north under an escort; it probably never occurred to him that with his father deported, his home broken up, Jack would make an effort, in face of the definite order to quit the country, to remain. But though no escort was provided, he would undoubtedly be watched; and to slip away at Harbin in a direction the opposite of that intended promised to be a matter of considerable difficulty and danger.

The compradore shook his head when Jack explained what he had in his mind. Then, finding that his young master was determined, he did not attempt to dissuade him, but set himself in earnest to talk over ways and means. He had a brother in Harbin, a grain merchant, who had dealings with the Russians. This man might be able to give Jack information and assistance, and to him the compradore wrote a short note of introduction. The next thing was to provide for the safety of the Russian vouchers. Jack might be searched again *en route*, and it was therefore inadvisable to carry them in his pocket. He pondered for a time without finding any solution of the difficulty. He was sitting with crossed legs, his hands clasping his knee, his eyes cast down. Studying the heavy thick-soled boot he wore in summer, under stress of Manchurian mud, he suddenly bethought himself.

"You can turn your hand to most things, Mr. Hi; do you think you could split the sole of one of my boots and put it together again?"

"Of course, sir."

"That's the very thing, then. No one would ever think of taking my boot to pieces."

Hi An very quickly and deftly performed the necessary operation. Between the two parts of the split sole Jack placed the vouchers and letter of introduction; then the compradore neatly stuck them together again. He produced a roll of rouble notes, enough to pay preliminary expenses and leave a margin for emer-

gencies.

"There, Master," he said. "I have done all I can."

"You're a good fellow. I must trust to the chapter of accidents for the rest. I may never see you again, Mr. Hi. If I come to grief, you will do what you can to find my father?"

"I will, Master, if I have to trudge on foot all the way to Pekin to ask help of the Son of Heaven himself."

Some minutes before eight o'clock Jack, by virtue of his pass, was admitted without a ticket to the platform at which the train for Harbin was drawn up. He had been compelled to take his farewell of Monsieur Brin, the compradore, and Hi Lo outside, much to the Frenchman's indignation. The line was very badly managed; the officials were soldiers, with no technical acquaintance with railway management. Trains were despatched from Moukden to Harbin, and from Harbin to Moukden, at any time that suited the officials at either end, without prearrangement, sometimes even without communication between the stations. On this particular train there was no distinction of classes, and Jack found himself one of some forty passengers packed into a carriage built for thirty. The company was exceedingly mixed. Russian officers were cheek by jowl with Chinese merchants; a huge long-bearded Russian pope was wedged between a German commercial traveller and a Sister with the red cross on her arm; at one end was a group of chattering Greek camp-followers, who brought out a filthy pack of cards long before the train started, and began a game of makao, which continued, with intervals for squabbling and refreshment, all the way to Harbin. Jack made himself as comfortable as he could in a corner, and prepared to sleep if the close proximity of his fellow-passengers and the stuffiness of the air allowed.

It was past nine o'clock before the train steamed out. Punctuality is a virtue non-existent on the Siberian railway. The journey taxed Jack's patience to the utmost. The line is single, doubled at intervals of five versts to allow of the passage of trains in opposite directions. The train was constantly being shunted into sidings, remaining sometimes for hours, no one could tell why; and one of the most annoying features of the constant stoppages was that the train, after running through a station where the passengers would have been glad to obtain refreshments, would come to a stand several versts beyond, where they had nothing to do but kick their heels and look disconsolately out on the country. On one of the sidings stood a goods train, two trucks of which were loaded with a large gun; it had no doubt been injured by a Japanese shell, and was being returned to arsenal for repair. In another train Jack noticed a truck crowded with poor wretches who appeared to be chained together—misdemeanants from the army, he surmised, on their way to one of the penal settlements in Siberia. At short intervals appeared the little brick huts of the soldiers guarding the line, and

occasionally a group of three or four of those green-coated guards might be seen riding along at the foot of the embankment on their stout Mongol ponies.

Jack had travelled many times along the line, but not recently, and he was greatly interested in the amazing developments which it had undergone. New buildings of brick seemed to have sprung up like mushrooms along its course. Where formerly had been spacious fields of kowliang—the long-stalked millet of the country—with Chinese fangtzes few and far between, there were now wide bare stretches upon which Russian industry was erecting storehouses, engine-sheds, tile-covered residences for the officials. Some thirty-five miles from Moukden is Tieling, which, when Jack's train passed through at three o'clock in the morning—having taken just six hours to run that distance—seemed to be nothing but a collection of scaffolding, with Chinese bricklayers already at work, trowel in hand. Between Tieling and Harbin stretches an immense plain, fertile for the most part, and hitherto left almost unspoiled. Nowhere does the line pass through a Chinese village; these were purposely avoided by the Russian engineers from motives of policy, and in deference to native susceptibilities. They are for the most part out of sight from the railway. All that can be seen is, on the right, the broad rutty mandarin highway; on the left, a narrower road edging interminable fields of kowliang. There are few stations between Moukden and Harbin: at two, Tieling and Kai-chuang, the Russians had established their base hospitals.

Hour after hour passed. Jack whiled away a good part of the time by whittling sticks with his penknife, somewhat to the amusement of the Russian army doctor who sat next to him, and who did not appear to notice that the sticks were shaped to a definite size, and that, after several had been thrown away, two or three were placed in Jack's pocket. Many times the train was halted at a doubling to allow a troop train to pass, filled with Russian soldiers on the way to the front, shouting, singing, in the highest spirits. At one point an empty Red Cross train stood on a siding, having emptied its freight of wounded men at one of the hospitals.

During one of the stoppages the belaced official who acted as guard politely requested Jack to step into the station-master's office, where he was searched by one of the soldiers. He was thus left in no doubt that he was under surveillance, and when he got back to his carriage he found that his bag had been opened. He congratulated himself on his forethought in concealing his papers so effectually in his boot.

At the moment of saying good-bye the compradore had given him a piece of news that made him anxious to complete his journey. A Chinese employed at the station had told him that Anton Sowinski had booked a seat by the next day's train. It was by no means impossible that this train, if it happened to carry any important passengers, would overtake and pass the first somewhere on the line.

The Pole was likely to spread the news of Mr. Brown's arrest, and if he should succeed in getting to Vladivostok before Jack the game would certainly be up.

At length, about forty-five hours after leaving Moukden, someone said that Harbin was in sight, and there was instantly a movement and bustle among the passengers.

"Keep your seat," said the doctor to Jack with a smile.

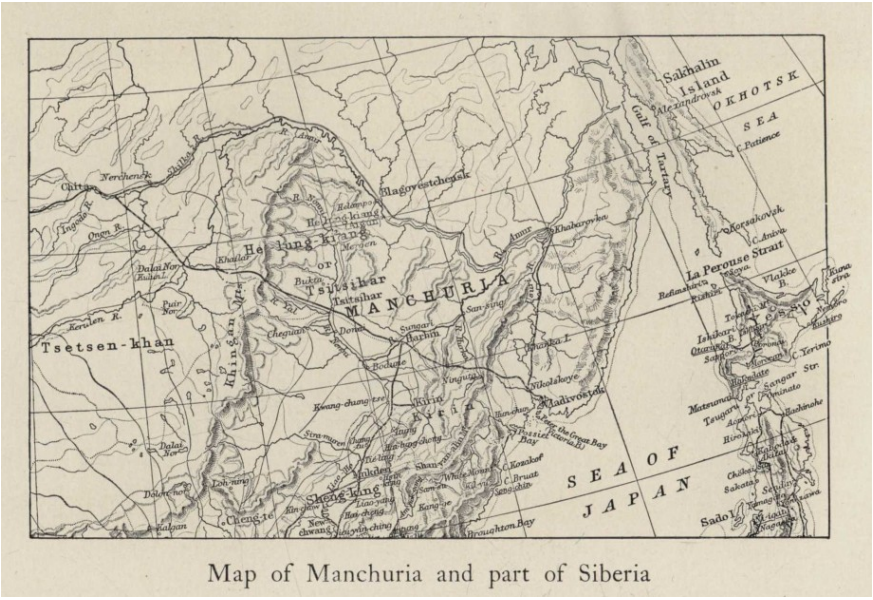
"Thanks! I know," said Jack with an answering smile.

The train slowed down, then stopped at the southern end of the bridge over the Sungari river. It was as though the engine were parleying with the sentry. On the right rose the barracks of the frontier guards, surrounded by a loopholed wall. At the bridge end were two guns framed in sand-bags, and watched by two sentinels. Across the river, above and below the bridge, an immense boom prevented traffic either up or down. While the train halted, an official came along the carriages, fastened all the windows, locked all the doors; to open them before the bridge was crossed entailed a heavy penalty. When all the passengers were thus secured, and there was no chance of any Japanese spy throwing a bomb on to the bridge, the train moved slowly on, passed more guns at the farther end, and came to rest at the spacious station in the Russian quarter of the town.

A train from Vladivostok was expected during the afternoon, and the composite train would leave for the west at nine o'clock. Jack went out with the majority of the passengers into the buffet, which is one of the admirable features of the Russian railway system, and ordered a good meal. Then he looked over some illustrated papers, making no attempt to leave the station, having noticed that he was still watched by one of the train attendants. Time hung heavily; he took a nap on one of the seats, and when he awoke found that the Vladivostok train had arrived, and the night train for the west was being made up. Strolling out with his bag, he showed his pass to an official, and by means of a liberal tip secured a sleeping compartment to himself. He explained with many yawns that, being tired out, he intended to turn in as soon as the train started, and asked the man to arrange his bed and lock him in. The attendant complied, and a few minutes later Jack noticed him in conversation with the man under whose watchful eyes he had been all day. The latter appeared satisfied and went away.

The train was late in starting; a high personage, it seemed, was expected. Jack stood for some minutes at the door, watching the varied crowd on the platform Suddenly he heard cheers; the high personage had no doubt arrived. A warning bell rang; the officials called to the passengers to take their seats. Jack took off his coat in full view from the platform, then drew the curtain, opened his bag, and took from it, not a night costume, but a brush, a comb, and a collar. Then he turned off the light.

But instead of throwing himself on his bed, he went to the opposite door



Map of Manchuria and part of Siberia

Map of Manchuria and part of Siberia

of the compartment and tried it; as he expected, it was locked. He put on his coat, crammed into the pockets the articles he had taken from his bag, and from his vest pocket took one of the sticks he had been whittling on the way from Moukden. Leaning out of the window, he inserted it in the lock. The train was just beginning to move. Would this extemporized key serve? He turned it; the lock clicked; and the next moment he was on the foot-board. Silently closing the door he dropped to the ground, and ran alongside the moving train, stumbling and tripping over the rugged ballast. The pace quickened and the train began to distance him; but he made all the speed he could, and by the time the last carriage had passed him he found, to his relief, that he was beyond the station and in darkness. Dodging behind an engine-shed he clambered over a fence, left the railway, and set off to find the house of the compradore's brother.

He had taken the precaution, before starting, to obtain very explicit directions, in order to save time, and to avoid the risk involved in asking questions. The Chinese part of the town is some three miles from the station, on lower ground near the river. The streets were abominably filthy; and by the time Jack reached the priestan or merchants' quarters he felt sadly in need of a bath. By

following the compradore's instructions he found the grain store of which he was in search, though with some trouble. All the business premises in the neighbourhood were closed for the night; there were few people in the streets: the Chinaman as a rule barricades himself in his house at nightfall. Making sure by peering at the sign that he had come to the right house, Jack gently knocked at the door. It was opened by a Chinaman, whom Jack recognized by the light of the oil-lamp he carried as the compradore's brother.

"I am from Moukden, Mr. Hi," said Jack, "and have a note from your brother Mr. Hi An."

"Come in," said the Chinaman at once, without any indication of surprise. Jack pulled off his dirty boots and followed him to a little back shop, where he had evidently just been engaged in brewing tea. He asked Jack to sit down, poured him out a dish of tea, and then waited with oriental patience to hear what his visitor had to say. Prising open the sole of one of his boots, Jack drew out the compradore's note. It bore only three Chinese characters, and said merely that Hi An wished his brother to give all possible assistance to the bearer. The Chinaman looked up with an expression of grave polite curiosity and still waited.

The compradore having said that his brother could be thoroughly trusted, Jack explained to him, as simply and clearly as he could, the circumstances that had brought him to Harbin, and the object of his visit. When the Chinaman had heard the story, and learnt what was expected of him, he looked somewhat scared. He said that the Russians would inflict the most terrible punishments upon him if they discovered that he had sheltered and assisted a fugitive. He spoke of his terror of the Russian knout. But the Englishman might command him to do what he could. Had he not himself received benefits from Mr. Brown? Five years ago, he said, when he was on the verge of ruin, he had written to his brother the compradore for assistance. Hi An, a born gambler, like every Chinaman, had himself been speculating disastrously, and was unable to give any help. But he had appealed to Mr. Brown, who had at once advanced the sum required and set the grain merchant on his feet again. The loan had long since been repaid: in business transactions the Chinaman is the soul of honour: but he had never lost his feeling of gratitude; and his recollection of Mr. Brown's kindness, together with his brother's request, made him willing to run some risk on behalf of his benefactor's son.

Jack talked long over the situation with his host. His object was to get to Vladivostok as soon as possible. Having no pass he could not travel openly, and when breakfast-time came next morning his absence from the Moscow train would be discovered, even if it were not found out before; the news would be telegraphed to Harbin, and there would instantly be a hue and cry. The Chinaman doubted whether this would be the case; the train officials would be too anxious

to screen their own negligence. Still, it would be unsafe for Jack to remain in Harbin; as for himself, he saw no way of helping him.

"I must go by train," said Jack, "and secretly. Could I go hidden in a goods wagon?"

"That might be possible," said the Chinaman; "but goods trains are not fast; they are often delayed for hours and even days. The journey would take a week, and though you might carry food with you, you would have to leave your hiding-place for water, and you could not escape discovery."

"Still, it may be that or nothing. Have you yourself any goods going in that direction?"

"No. My business is chiefly to supply fodder to the Russians, more especially for horses that are being sent south. I completed a large contract yesterday. One thing I can do. I can go to the station in the morning and learn what trains are expected to leave for Vladivostok. That is the first step. You will remain concealed in my house. You were not seen as you entered?"

"No. The street was clear."

"Then nobody but my wife and myself need know that you are here. I will do what I can for you."

"Thank you! And if it is a question of bribery, you need not be niggardly."

The Chinaman smiled. He had not had dealings with Russian officials for nothing.

Jack was provided with a couch for the night, and, being very tired after his long journey and the excitement of his escape, he soon fell asleep. About five o'clock he was awakened by the Chinaman's hurried entrance.

"It is all arranged, sir," he said, "but at a terrible price. A train conveying horses is to leave for Vladivostok at seven. The sergeant in charge is well known to me: I have had dealings with him. All Russians can be bribed; but this man—sir, he is an extortioner. Still, after what you said, I made the bargain with him. You give him at once twenty roubles; you arrive safely at Vladivostok and give him thirty roubles more. I tried to make him accept twenty-five for the second sum, but he refused."

Jack could not help smiling at this naïve evidence of the oriental habit of bargaining. He felt that if he reached Vladivostok for fifty roubles he would have got off remarkably well.

"But how is it to be managed?" he asked.

"I gave him to understand, sir, that you are a foreign correspondent wishing to see Vladivostok, and that there is a delay in the forwarding of the necessary authorization. It was because you are a foreigner that the sergeant was so firm about the five roubles. He talked about the risk he ran, and said that you must leave the train some time before it arrives at Vladivostok and walk the rest of the

way. He said, too, that if you should be discovered you were not to admit that he had any knowledge of your presence. I promised that you would do all this."

"Very well. I am exceedingly obliged to you. But how am I to go? What will the sergeant do for twenty roubles?"

"He will give you a corner in a horse-box."

"Does the train consist of nothing but horse-boxes?"

"Horse-boxes and the sergeant's van. You cannot go in that."

"No. And how am I to get into the horse-box without being seen? There are sure to be soldiers and officials about."

The Chinaman rubbed his hands slowly and pondered.

"If it had been yesterday," he said, "you might then have gone hidden in a hay-cart. But my last loads were delivered yesterday."

"Who knows that?"

"The inspector of forage; perhaps others."

"And is the inspector likely to be at the station this morning?"

"Not so early as seven; he is too fond of his bed for that."

"Where is the train standing?"

"On a siding at some little distance from the station. You can drive straight up to it from the road through the goods entrance. But there is a sentry at the gate."

"Well, Mr. Hi, I think I see a way to dodge the sentry, with your kind assistance. I suppose you have some hay or straw in your store?"

"Certainly."

"Then if you will load up a wagon with several large bundles, and leave a hole for me in the middle, I think I can get to my place in the horse-box."

"But you might be seen as you slip out."

"We can lessen the risk of that. You can drive the wagon up to the horse-box as though bringing a final load that had been overlooked. I am covered by the bundles. You move them in such a way that the sides of the cart are well screened, at the same time leaving a passage for me. I ought to be able to slip into the box without being observed. And if you are willing I will chance it."

The Chinaman agreed, and as the time was drawing near, and the earlier the plan was carried out the better, he went off to get his wagon loaded. Shortly after six the cumbrous vehicle was brought up as close as possible to a door giving into the yard of the store. Jack thanked Mr. Hi very warmly for his services, and begged him, if he should by any chance learn of Mr. Brown's whereabouts, to communicate with his brother in Moukden. Choosing a moment when nobody but the Chinaman and his wife was near, Jack slipped into the wagon, and was in a few moments effectually concealed by the bundles of hay. He found in the bottom of the cart a supply of food and a large water-bottle thoughtfully provided

by his obliging host.

Mr. Hi himself mounted to the bare board behind his oxen, grasped the rope reins in one hand and the long-thonged whip in the other, and drove off. Jack did not enjoy the drive, jolted over the vile roads, and half-choked by the full-scented hay. The wagon came to the gate of the goods entrance, and the Chinaman was challenged by the sentry. He pulled up, and with much deference explained that he had brought a last load of hay for the horses about to leave for Vladivostok, pointing at the same time to the long line of horse-boxes standing on the siding, about three hundred yards away. The sentry jerked his rifle over his shoulder and said nothing. Taking his silence for consent, the Chinaman lashed his oxen, and the wagon rumbled over the bumpy ground and two or three lines of metals until it reached the last carriage but one, next to the brake-van. The Chinaman jumped to the ground, backed the wagon against the door, and began to arrange his bundles as Jack had suggested. He whispered to Jack that nobody was near; and next moment a form much the colour of hay crept on all-fours out of the wagon into the van. Then Mr. Hi built up the hay with what was already in the vehicle, so as to conceal him and yet allow a little air-space near one of the small windows. There were three horses in the van. Though early morning, it was already close and stuffy, and Jack looked forward with anything but pleasure to the heat of mid-day and the prospect of many hours in this equine society.

CHAPTER V
A Deal in Flour

Vladivostok—Orloff—Russian Resentment—Large Profits—Quick Returns—Overreached—A Droshky Race—The Waverley—Captain Fraser—Sowinski comes Aboard—Sea Law—Pourboire

It was two o'clock in the morning on the second day after Jack left Harbin. The train slowed down as it rounded a loop, and finally came to a stop. Jack was fast asleep in his corner of the horse-box. He was awakened by a touch on the shoulder.

"You get down here, sir."

"Ah! Where are we, sergeant?"

"Four versts from Vladivostok."

"That's well. And what sort of a night?"

"Fine, sir; but dark as pitch."

"Thanks! Let me see; is it twenty-five roubles I owe you?"

"Thirty, sir, no less; more if you like."

"Here you are. Have you got a match? Take care: a spark, you know! Count them; three ten-rouble notes. Now, how am I to get into the town?"

"The road's not far on the other side of the line.—Nobody is to know how you got here, sir."

"I understand that. Many thanks! It has been a pretty rapid journey for Manchuria, I think."

"Yes. Live stock comes next to the Viceroy. Horses are none the better for being jolted over three hundred miles of rail, so they've let us pass several goods trains on the way."

"Any passenger trains allowed to pass us?"

"Not one."

"Then I couldn't have got here sooner. Thanks again!"

Jack dropped from the foot-board, ran down the embankment, and in a few minutes struck the high-road. He had not thought it necessary to explain to the sergeant that he knew the district. It was, as the Russian had said, very dark, but Jack made his way to a plantation near the road, through which he knew that a little stream ran. There he had a thorough wash, changed his collar, brushed and shook his clothes, and felt a different creature. Then he sat down on the moss-grown roots of an oak, and ate the Chinese cakes and dried fruit that remained from the stock of food given him by Hi Feng, the compradore's brother, washing it down with water from the brook. Dawn was breaking by the time he had finished his frugal breakfast, but it was useless to go into the town until the business houses opened. He therefore determined to remain in the secluded nook he had chosen, and sat there thinking of what lay before him.

About eight o'clock he rose to continue his walk to the town. It was two years since he had last visited it, and he was struck by the progress it had made in the interval. Founded only forty years before, the city had grown very rapidly; but since the Russian occupation of Manchuria it had made giant strides. New hospitals and barracks had been erected; the surrounding hills, once decked with forest, but now treeless, were covered with immense forts and earthworks, at which vast gangs of coolies were still at work. The wooden shanties that formerly lined the shore had for the most part given place to more solid and imposing structures of brick and stone. Other signs of development caught Jack's eye as he walked towards the harbour; but he was too eager to complete his errand to dwell upon them, especially as he heard behind him in the distance the rumble of an approaching train. It overtook him just as he turned down one of the steep,

narrow side streets leading to the office of his father's agent; and as he saw the long line of carriages, including several sleeping-cars, roll past, he could not but wonder whether Anton Sowinski was among the passengers, and hastened his steps.

The office had just been opened for the day when he arrived. Alexey Petrovitch Orloff was a big, jovial Russian of some forty years; honest, or Mr. Brown would have had no dealings with him; a little greedy; a good business man, and on excellent terms with his principal. But Jack knew little about him outside their business transactions, and had made up his mind not to trust him with his secret.

"Ah, Ivan Ivanovitch!" exclaimed Orloff as Jack entered. "I was expecting you or your father. You came by the night train?"

"Yes. You must have been asleep when it arrived."

"What sort of a journey had you?"

"It was very hot."

"Yes, we have been baked here. When did you leave?"

"On Thursday."

"A fairly quick journey, considering the state of the line. You left before my letter arrived?"

"Yes. Of course you guess the object of my visit?"

"The consignment of flour? You have had great luck, I must say; but Captain Fraser always is lucky. Of course his cargo was not contraband according to English ideas, but we Russians have been rather strict of late, and the Japanese will probably follow suit. However, Captain Fraser never saw a Japanese cruiser the whole voyage. It should be an excellent speculation for your father. Prices are naturally high just now."

"That is good news. We shouldn't like to wind up with a failure."

"Of course not. It is a pity your father is retiring; we are bound to win in the end; but I've no doubt he can well afford it. And I'm not the man to complain, if, as I hope, I can get hold of a part of his business. Perhaps he is wise after all. Manchuria is not the most comfortable country to live in—just now, at any rate; and I fancy an Englishman will have a poor time of it in Moukden, eh?" (He gave Jack a shrewd look.) "Your newspapers have so completely taken the side of the enemy."

"Yes, there is a strong feeling at home in favour of Japan, and your people resent it. That's natural enough."

"It's rather worse than that. People here are saying that Russia and England will be at war before a month's out."

"Nonsense!"

"They say so. Our cruisers have stopped a P. and O. liner, the *Malacca*, in the Mediterranean, and put a prize crew on board. She was carrying contraband,

it appears; but your fire-eaters—jingoes, is that the name?—are thirsting for our blood."

"We don't all eat fire and drink blood, Alexey Petrovitch."

"True. And you English will find you have backed the wrong horse."

"You haven't been much troubled here, then?"

"No. The bombardment did us no harm. Our cruisers sank three Japanese transports the other day, and they captured another of your ships with contraband, the *Allanton*: you'll see her lying in the harbour now."

"Well, it appears to be lucky for us that the *Waverley* was, in a sense, on your side. About this consignment of flour: do you think you can find an immediate purchaser? We want to realize and get away at once."

The Russian's eyes gleamed, but his reply was cautious.

"Well, Ivan Ivanovitch, it is always more difficult to sell in a hurry than if you can wait. A good profit can be made, but we must take our time. It is a matter of bargaining. The man in a hurry always suffers."

"Yes, I know. We must be prepared to sacrifice something. At the market rate the flour ought to fetch about 27,000 roubles; but look here, if you can find an immediate purchaser at 25,000 I'll let it go."

Orloff still hesitated, but Jack could see that he was making an effort to restrain his eagerness.

"In business," he said, "it is best to be frank. If you will give me my usual commission of two and a half per cent—what do you say to my taking over the stuff myself?"

Jack smiled.

"I say that it pays very well to be principal and agent at the same time. But we won't quarrel about the commission. If you'll write me a cheque for 24,375 roubles, we'll call the matter settled. I've full authority to act."

The Russian, looking as if he was sorry he had not improved the opportunity still further, sat down at once and made out the cheque, adding:

"There will be one or two papers to sign. I will get them from the dockyard people."

"Very well. In the meantime I'll pay this into the bank and call back as soon as I can."

"What is the hurry? Business is slack, and I suppose I shan't see you again for a long time."

"Probably not. But there's a ring at your telephone. Evidently someone wants to do business. I'll see you again shortly."

Orloff was disposed to be talkative, but Jack was on thorns lest the train he had seen come in should have brought Sowinski. He had the cheque; while in the train he had taken the vouchers from the sole of his boot; he wondered

whether he could complete his business at the bank before Sowinski, supposing him to be in Vladivostok, should come upon the scene. He hurried to the branch of the Russo-Chinese bank, where he was well known to the officials. Business there also was slack; the manager said indeed that trade in Vladivostok would be ruined if the war continued much longer. Within half an hour, Jack left the building with bills on Baring Brothers for the amount of the cheque and the sum represented by the vouchers, less 2000 roubles in notes which he kept for his immediate and contingent expenses.

He hurried back to Orloff's office, keeping a wary eye on the people thronging the streets, among them many soldiers in the *pashalik*, their characteristic peaked cap. When he entered the room, Orloff flung down his pen and gave a shout of merriment.

"I must tell you the joke, Ivan Ivanovitch. Not five minutes after you left, who should come in but Sowinski!" Jack repressed a start. "He had happened to hear, he told me, that the *Waverley* had arrived with a consignment of flour for your father. Was I empowered to sell? Ha! ha! It was not a matter of much consequence, he said. Ha! ha! I know Sowinski. But, having a small contract to fulfil in a month's time at Harbin, he could do with the flour, if it was to be had cheap. 'Mr. Brown is leaving the country, I understand,' says he. Ha! ha!"

Sowinski had evidently not told Orloff of the arrest. Jack wondered for a moment why. But the explanation at once suggested itself. If the fact were known, the consignment would no doubt be impounded by the Russian authorities in Vladivostok, and then the Pole would lose his chance of making a profitable deal.

"I assure you I was not eager," continued Orloff, still laughing. "Sowinski is no friend of mine. In the end he went down to the harbour, inspected the consignment, and bought it for 27,000 roubles, the market price, as you yourself mentioned."

"Quick returns and by no means small profits," said Jack.

"Yes. But—ha! ha!—what makes me laugh is something else. I was rung up at the telephone—just as you went, you remember; two vessels had been signalled from the mouth of the harbour carrying flour—not a moderate consignment like yours, but a whole cargo each. You see, Ivan Ivanovitch? The market price of Sowinski's lot will fall in an hour to 20,000 roubles, and it serves him right. How your father will laugh when he learns how his rival has overreached himself! By the way, the *Waverley* is sailing this morning, in ballast of course."

"Indeed!" No information could have pleased Jack more. "Captain Fraser is an old friend of ours. I should like to see him."

"Then you haven't much time to lose. But you may as well sign these papers to complete our little transaction—the last, I am sorry to say. You will be back

again?"

"I am not sure. I am not staying in Vladivostok long, and I'll say good-bye in case I don't get time to run in again."

"And when do you leave for home?"

"As soon as possible."

"By the Trans-Siberian, I suppose?"

"Probably; unless we can get through the lines to Newchang."

"That will be easy enough soon. Reinforcements are pouring in for General Kuropatkin, and he'll soon be strong enough to drive those waspish little yellow men into the sea."

"Perhaps. Well, good-bye, Alexey Petrovitch!"

"Remember me to your father."

"I will, the moment I see him. Good-bye!"

Leaving the office Jack hailed a droshky, and ordered the man to drive down to the harbour. Knowing that Sowinski was actually in the town he felt insecure with such valuable property in his pocket. As he stepped into the vehicle he glanced round, and, forewarned though he was, he started when he saw, a few yards up the street, the man he was anxious to avoid hurrying in his direction. By the look on the Pole's face, and his quickened step, Jack knew that he had been recognized. It was touch and go now.

"Quick, my man!" he said quietly to the driver, "time presses."

The man, scenting a tip, whipped up his horse, and it sprang forward, throwing Jack back into his seat. At the same moment he heard the Pole shouting behind; but his voice was at once drowned by the clatter of the wheels, and the droshky man, standing in the car, and driving with the usual recklessness of the Russian coachman, was too much occupied in avoiding the traffic to turn his head. Jack, however, a minute later looked cautiously over the back of the vehicle. Sowinski, with urgent gestures, was beckoning a droshky some distance up the street. He was now nearly a quarter of a mile behind; and, turning a corner, Jack lost him from sight. But the street he had now reached was a long straight one, leading direct to the shore, and almost clear of traffic. In a few seconds the pursuing droshky swung round the corner at a pace that left Jack amazed it did not overturn. To throw the Pole off the scent was impossible now; it was an open race. In two minutes Jack's droshky rattled down the incline to the shore. He had the fare and a handsome tip in readiness. Springing from the car almost before it had stopped, he paid the man, leapt down the steps into a sampan, and called to the burly Chinaman smoking in it:

"The English ship *Waverley*! A rouble if you put me aboard quickly."

The Chinaman looked stolidly up.

"She is about to sail, master. See! And they will not allow you on board.

There are difficulties. The port officers——"

Jack waited for no more. Taking a rouble note from his pocket, he cried:

"Here is six times your fare; this or nothing!"

At the same time he seized the yuloh,—the pole that does duty for a stern oar, and shoved off. There is nothing a Chinese coolie will not do for a rouble. The man sprang to the oar, worked its flat end backwards and forwards with all his strength, and sent the sampan over the water at a greater speed than its clumsy build seemed capable of. Jack kept his head low in order to be sheltered as long as possible by the shanties on shore and the sampans crowded at the water's edge; Sowinski, he felt, would not hesitate to take a shot at him. He could see the Pole spring from his droshky and rush at break-neck pace towards the waiting row of craft. He leapt into one, pointed Jack out to the coolie, and in a few moments started in pursuit.

The *Waverley* had left the inner harbour where merchant vessels drop anchor, and was steaming dead slow out to sea. The captain stood on the bridge, and the vessel hooted a farewell to the cruiser *Rurik* that lay in the middle of the channel. Suddenly Captain Fraser became aware that the voice sounding clear across the still water was hailing him. Glancing round, he saw a sampan making rapidly towards him from the shore, and in it a youth with one hand to his mouth, the other waving his hat. The captain first swore, then signalled half-speed ahead; it was some Russian formality, he supposed, and as a British sailor he'd be hanged if he delayed another moment for any foreign port officer. But next moment he heard his own name in an unmistakably English accent, and, looking more closely at the shouter, recognized him.

"Young Mr. Brown!" he muttered. "What's he wishing?"

At the same time he jerked the indicator back to "stop", a bell tinkled below, and the vessel came to a stand-still.

"Ay, ay!" he shouted. "And be hanged if there isn't another man bawling. What's in the wind, anyway?"

The first craft was soon alongside, a rope was heaved over, and in a few seconds Jack stood on deck.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Brown," said the Captain. "Ay, and I wouldna have sto'ped for no ither man."

"Thanks, Captain! I want your help." Jack spoke hurriedly; the second sampan was but a biscuit-shot distant. "The Russians have collared my father on a charge of spying for the Japanese; I don't know where he is; that fellow in the boat is at the bottom of it. I've managed to steal a march on him and sell the flour you landed the other day, and I want you to take charge of these bills and deposit them at the Hong-Kong and Shanghai Bank for me."

"Eh, laddie, is that a fact? And what'll you do yersel' the now?"

"Oh, I'll stay and find my father. Here's Sowinski. I'm jolly glad I got here first."

The other sampan was by this time under the vessel's quarter. A seaman came up to the captain.

"A furriner, sir, talking double Dutch."

"Quay."

He left the bridge and went to the side.

"What might you be wishing the now?" he said.

Sowinski began to address him in very broken English, eked out with French and Russian.

"I'm no' what you might ca' a leenguist," said the Captain, after a patient hearing. "What'll he be meaning, Mr. Brown?"

"He says I'm a fugitive, and insists on your giving me up. If you don't, he'll have the boat stopped at the signal station, and you'll be heavily fined."

"He's a terrible man, yon; there's nae doot about it. Just tell him to bide a wee, Mr. Brown, until you an' me has had a wee bit crack. Now, sir," he added in a lower tone, when this had been interpreted to the Pole, "hadn't ye better come wi' me now ye're aboard? If you go ashore you may be caught. I'm no sure but we'll be overhauled by a Russian cutter as we gang out, but I've no contraband aboard; in fact, I've run a cargo in for the Russians, an' well they know it. Your father may be half-way to Europe by this time; I canna see there'd be ony guid biding to look for him."

"That's good of you, Captain, but I must stay. They say they've deported my father; but somehow I feel sure he is still in the country, and I shall try to hang on here by hook or crook till I find him."

"Aweel; then the best thing will be to get yon terrible Turk aboard. Just ask him to step up, sir."

As Sowinski was clambering up the side the captain signalled the engine-room to go ahead dead slow. He invited the Pole to join him on the bridge. Captain Fraser looked him critically up and down; then said blandly:

"And is it a port officer I'm to understand you are, Mister?"

"A port officer! Not so. I am man of affairs, business man. But in name of his majesty ze Imperator I—I arrest zis young man."

"Just exactly. But I beg your pardon, Mister—Mister—what?"

"Sowinski."

"Just exactly. Well, then, Mr. Sowinski, do ye happen to have about ye a warrant for the arrest o' this young man in the name o' the Imperator, by which, I preshume, you mean the Czar? Where's your authority, man?"

The Pole looked puzzled.

"Audority! I have no audority. But I tell you, zis young man is deported; he

escape from arrestation; he——"

"Tuts! And you have the impidence to come aboard my ship: to haud me up, a British subject; to cause loss to my owners—to my owners, I say—without authority? I'll learn you, Mister, what it is to haud up a British ship without authority. Hi, Jim! lug this man below, and if he doesna behave himsel' just clap him under hatches."

Sowinski, wriggling desperately, and volubly protesting in half a dozen languages, was bundled from the bridge.

"He's got the wrong sow by the lug in Duncan Fraser," said the captain, with a grim tightening of the lips. "I'll just tak' him along to Shanghai if the coast is clear, Mr. Brown, though I may have to drop him a few miles lower down if I see signs of any Russians being inqueesitive. And if you must go ashore, laddie, tak' a word frae me—keep out o' the road o' the Russians."

"I'll be careful, Captain. When you get to Shanghai you'll tell our consul all about it, and ask him to wire to England? The newspapers will take it up, and I should think Lord Lansdowne will make official enquiries at St. Petersburg."

"Ay, I'll do what I can. You're quite determined to bide?"

"Oh yes! And another thing, Captain: I think, if you don't mind, you'd better let my mother know; she expects us home, and not hearing, would be alarmed. Tell her not to worry; it's sure to come all right in the end."

"Ay, I'll do that. I never heard the like o't. What the ballachulish will the Russians be doing next! I needna say I wish ye good luck, sir. Will you take a wee drappie?"

"Not to-day, Captain, many thanks all the same! A pleasant voyage to you!"

Both sampans had kept pace with the steamer; the coolies were beginning to be anxious about their fares. Jack bade his friend the captain a cordial farewell; the vessel stopped; and, dropping into his sampan, Jack ordered the man to put him ashore at the nearest point. Within a yard of the shore the Chinaman brought the punt to a stop and demanded two roubles.

"But the bargain was one."

"I did not know, Master. I do not risk offending the Russians for a rouble. Give two, or I will not let you land."

He looked at Jack with victorious malice in his beady black eyes. For a moment Jack hesitated; he did not wish to have an altercation with the man; at the same time he objected to be "done". He stood up in the sampan and drew a bundle of notes from his pocket. Selecting one, he folded it; then, flinging it to the coolie, he sprang suddenly overboard, giving the sampan a kick which sent it backwards. The man also had risen; the sudden movement made him lose his balance, and he fell over the yuloh into the water. Jack quietly walked away. As he did so he heard loud laughter on his left hand. Turning, he saw that

the incident had been witnessed by two Russian officers who had been walking towards the mouth of the harbour. Knowing the ways of the Chinese coolie, they were much amused at the readiness with which Jack had disposed of the boatman. One of them shouted "Well done!" in Russian. Jack smiled, and replied with a couple of words in the same tongue; then hurried on, thanking his stars that the matter had ended so well.

CHAPTER VI
In Full Cry

In Chinatown—A Deal in Horseflesh—North and by East—A Korean Host—Across the Line—Buriats—Father Mayenube—Gabriele—A Shot—Hard Pressed—In Hiding—Suggestio Falsi

Jack's business in Vladivostok was now completed. He had secured the last of his father's property; bills representing several thousands of pounds were in the safe hands of Captain Fraser, soon to be confided to the Hong-Kong and Shanghai Bank. So far his task had been unexpectedly easy; his difficulties, he felt, were now to begin. During the long journey from Harbin he had spent hours endeavouring to think out a plan to adopt if his secret visit to Vladivostok proved successful. By hook or crook he must get back to Moukden and learn the result of the compradore's enquiries; the question was, how? The return journey would be attended by many difficulties; even if he should reach Moukden in safety it would only be to find himself encompassed by danger. Yet he saw no other chance of tracing his father, and whatever the risks and perils, he felt that his duty called him to face them.

The first thing, then, was to make his way back to Moukden. To return by the railway was out of the question. He dared not go openly, and he knew no one in Vladivostok whom he could trust to negotiate for a clandestine passage. His only course was to slip away, gain the Manchurian frontier, and cross the Shan-yan-alin range of mountains—a long and difficult journey at the best, and in the present circumstances hazardous in the extreme. If he evaded the Russians in and around Vladivostok he would still be exposed to capture by Chinese bandits, to say nothing of the tenfold risks as he neared his journey's end.

His difficulties were intensified by the desperately short notice at which he

must now quit Vladivostok. Sowinski, furious at being outwitted in the matter of the bills, would be goaded to madness by his detention on board the *Waverley*, and as Captain Fraser would probably consider it prudent to put him ashore at no great distance, it might not be long before he telephoned to head-quarters and thus raised the hue and cry in Vladivostok itself. To the natives Jack might easily pass for a Russian; carefully made up, he might, with his smattering of Chinese, be taken by the Russians for a native. But there was no time for such preparations; and a Russian policeman on the hunt for an Englishman, with the Pole's description of him, must be an exceptionally incompetent member of his class if he failed to recognize the fugitive. Speed was thus the first essential.

Hurrying up from the shore he made up his mind what to do. Fortunately he was in the Chinese quarter of the town; it was the part of prudence to avoid the Russian settlement on the hill. He remembered a Chinese horse-dealer with whom Mr. Brown had done business when he lived in the town years before. The Chinese had altered less than the official city, and he thought he could find his way to the merchant's house. Taking his bearings, he walked rapidly through several streets, and found to his delight that his recollection had not failed him. The horse-dealer was at home; he did not recognize Jack, who was a boy of eleven when his transactions with Mr. Brown had taken place; but he well remembered the English merchant. And when he learnt that Jack wished to purchase a pony he rubbed his hands together and led him at once to the stables to view the stock. They were a weedy lot, like most of the native animals. Jack was careful to show no haste or eagerness; he looked them over critically, rejected one after another in spite of all the flowery things the Chinaman found to say in their favour, and finally refused to buy. As he expected, the merchant then managed to find a better beast—a beautiful little Transbaikal pony, sturdy, well-made, and evidently full of mettle. Jack could not have wished for a better animal; but, experienced in the ways of Chinese business men, he gave no sign of his approval. The merchant quoted a price; Jack hemmed, hesitated—he knew better than to close at once; and then offered half. Eager as he was to get away, he patiently chaffered for nearly an hour; then, when the Chinaman was beginning to think he had lost his customer, Jack suddenly closed with the last offer, and the pony became his at two-thirds of the price first asked. The purchase of a saddle did not take so long; and when he rode off, both dealer and customer were equally pleased.

In the street Jack stopped a young Chinese boy and sent him to a purveyor's shop for a small supply of portable food. The messenger returned with some dried fish and stale cakes of potato-rice, all he could procure. With this tied behind his saddle Jack set off. It was an anxious moment when he passed a brown-coated Cossack policeman, and a little farther on he gave a jump when a squadron of Cossacks swung round the corner of the street. But they rode on without

giving him more than a casual glance. Not daring to hasten, he slowly made his way through the city and out into the country. It was still only eleven o'clock; he had nine or ten hours of daylight before him, and though the pony was somewhat soft for want of exercise, it was no doubt good for thirty miles at a pinch.

Vladivostok stands at the end of a narrow peninsula, with the Amur Bay running for several miles into the land on the west, and the Ussuri Bay on the east. To gain the Manchurian frontier Jack would have to ride northwards, cross the railway at the head of the Amur Bay or beyond, and then turn to the south-west. It was obviously unsafe for him to ride parallel with the railway line, for his escape, if discovered, would no doubt be telegraphed ahead, and the road would be watched, especially in the neighbourhood of the stations. His best course, therefore, would be to strike up eastwards towards the head of the Ussuri Bay, away from his ultimate destination, and trust to luck to find a hill-path leading back that would enable him to cross the line somewhere between the head of the Amur Bay and the garrison town of Nikolskoye. His way led through the plantation where he had made his toilet early that morning, then to the right towards the hills.

Though Vladivostok itself has sprung up with marvellous rapidity, the country is as yet sparsely peopled. At one time the town was closely surrounded by magnificent woods; but the axe of the lumberman has been busy, and the same work of deforesting that has robbed the town of picturesqueness is now being pursued inland. One of the few people Jack met along the unfrequented road he had chosen was a Russian colonist riding behind a cart laden with pine logs and driven by a coolie. Jack threw him a friendly "Good morning!" as he passed, and received a feeling "Very hot, barin" in return. It was indeed hot; the almost naked Korean labourers in the fields were streaming with sweat; and Jack was glad to halt at a little brook to refresh himself and his beast.

After riding for some three hours, and covering, as he guessed, about eighteen miles, almost entirely uphill, he saw the sea below him on the right, and the far coast-line running to all appearance due south. This must be Ussuri Bay. He had evidently come far enough east; it was time to change his course to the north-west. Swinging round, he had not ridden far before he came to a small farm, the house surrounded, like all Chinese isolated country buildings, with a mud wall. His pony required food, and though he felt some misgivings he thought this too good an opportunity to be neglected. He rode up. The owner, he found, was a Korean; Jack did not speak Korean; but by the help of Chinese and pidgin Russian he succeeded in making the man understand what he wanted. He then asked how far it was to Nikolskoye, and learning that it was thirty versts, roughly twenty miles, he decided to give his pony a good rest and start again about six o'clock, so that darkness would have fallen by the time he came to the neighbourhood of

the railway. Having seen that the animal was rubbed down and provided with a good feed of hay, he joined the farmer in a game of *wei-ch'i*, a difficult variant of chess, and with this and a slow laborious conversation, in the course of which his host expounded his hazy ideas of the war, he managed to get through the hot afternoon.

Soon after six he set off again. The way was mainly downhill now, and easier riding. About nine o'clock he saw in the gloaming a little settlement ahead, and beyond it the hexagonal water-tower and timbered store-house of the typical Siberian railway-station, but on a small scale. The path he was following led direct to the hamlet, and the sight of several small knots of people at that hour of the evening showed that a train would shortly be passing; the peasants have not yet lost their curiosity about the iron horse. He thought it well to avoid observation by leaving the track—road it could not be called—and striking across a bean-field. Making a wide sweep he came to the railway some three versts north of the station. He rode very cautiously as he approached the line, tied his pony to a tree, and scouted ahead to make sure that the line rifle guard, whose hut might be expected a few versts beyond, was not in sight. Suddenly he heard the distant rumble of a train—the night train for Harbin. In a moment he saw that the passage of the train would give him an opportunity of crossing the line unobserved. He went back to his pony, led it as near as he dared to the embankment, and waited.

The engine came snorting along at a fair pace, the fire throwing a glow upon the darkling sky. The train clattered by. Immediately after the last carriage had passed, Jack mounted the embankment, dragging his pony, crossed the single line, and descended on the other side.

With a lighter heart he got into the saddle again, and rode his excellent little steed across the fields in the hope of ere long striking a road. Pursuit would be difficult in the darkness; the greatest danger was to be expected with daylight, and it was very necessary that he should put as many miles as possible between himself and the railway before dawn. His course must be mainly south-west; the nearest town of any size was Hun-chun, some sixty miles in that direction; but having a vague idea that the Russians had erected a fort there, he had already made up his mind to avoid that town itself. Four or five hundred miles and countless perils lay between him and Moukden; but with the hopefulness of youth he rode confidently on. Danger and difficulty were only incentives to caution; if he anticipated them, it was merely that, being prepared, he might be the more ready to grapple with and overcome them. Ever present in his mind was the belief that his father's fate hung upon the success of his enterprise.

Coming by and by to a rough track between the fields, he followed it until past midnight. Then, feeling that his pony could do no more, and being unable in the darkness to guide himself by the little compass he wore on his watch-chain,

he left the track, rode into a plantation to the right, off-saddled, and, hitching the bridle to a tree, threw himself on the ground and fell asleep.

During the short hours of darkness his slumbers were disturbed by dreams. Sowinski, Orloff, Monsieur Brin, the Chinese horse-dealer—all figured in a strange phantasmagoria. Monsieur Brin had lost his pass, and was shedding tears because he could not tear the red brassard from his arm, when Jack awoke with a start. Looking at his watch he found it was five o'clock. He must be up and away. He ate the last of his food; the pony had already made a meal of the shoots of creeping plants; then, with the instinct born of his fugitive condition, Jack approached the edge of the plantation to spy out the country. Before him, not many yards away, was a narrow river; behind—he gave a great start, for little more than half a mile distant he saw a troop of Russian horsemen trotting smartly along the road towards him. They might be going, of course, to Possiet Bay, or Novo Kiewsk, or the Korean frontier. But he noticed at a second glance that the leading man was bending low in his saddle, as though following a trail. He distinguished their uniform now; they were Buriats, Mongols by race and Buddhists by religion, hard riders, excellent scouts, the most reckless and daring of the Russian cavalry. Without a moment's hesitation he went back to his pony, snatched from the ground the saddle that had formed his pillow, threw it over the animal's back, and, tightening the girths with hands that shook in spite of himself, he plunged with the pony into the thickest part of the plantation.

At seven o'clock that morning, in a neatly-thatched, white-washed brick cottage, surrounded by a luxuriant and well-kept garden, in the hill-country above the Chuan, a little group sat at breakfast. The room was plain but spotlessly clean. The wooden floors shone; the white plastered walls were covered with coloured lithographs representing the seven stations of the Cross; the little windows were hung with curtains of Chinese muslin. A narrow shelf of books occupied one corner, a stove another; and the table in the centre was spread with a snow-white cloth, dishes of fruit, and home-made bread.

At the table three persons were seated. One was a tall man of fine presence, with clear-cut features, soft brown eyes, long white hair and beard. He wore the loose white tunic and pantaloons of a Chinaman, but the cross that hung by a cord round his neck was not Chinese. Jean Mayenobe was a Frenchman, a priest, one of those devoted missionaries who cut themselves off from home and kindred to live a life of self-denial, peril, and humble Christian service in remote unfriendly corners of the globe.

His companions were a woman and a girl. The former was plain-featured and plainly dressed, with placid expression and humble mien. The latter seemed

strangely out of place in her surroundings. She was young, apparently of some seventeen years. Her features were beautiful, with a dignity and a look of self-command rare in one of her age. Her complexion was ruddy brown; her bright hair, gathered in a knot behind, rebelled against the black riband that bound it, and fell behind her ears in crispy waves. Before her on the table was a samovar, and she had just handed a cup of tea to the missionary.

"Father," she said in French, "I am so tired of waiting. I am beginning to think that permission will never come. But why should it be refused? It is not as if I were seeking some benefit. In appearance I lose, not gain."

"True, my child, you have nothing personally to gain. I have said before, it is not every daughter who would come thousands of miles and suffer hardship in order to bear her father company in exile and imprisonment. And such exile! The little I know of Sakhalin is frightful. It gives me pain to think of your knowing even so much."

"I am not afraid. And if the treatment of prisoners in Sakhalin is so bad, that is all the more reason why I should be at my father's side, to help and comfort him a little. Why do they refuse to let me go?"

"Probably they have forgotten all about you. The war occupies them completely. And I repeat, if you have patience your father may come to you. I have no belief that the Russians will win in this terrible war. I heard but a little while ago from a brother priest near the scene of operations at Hai-cheng, who has studied the combatants, that he is convinced of the ultimate success of the Japanese. If they are victorious they will probably demand that Sakhalin shall be restored to them, and it will no longer be a place for Russian prisoners. Rest in the Lord, my child; wait patiently for Him, and He will give thee thy heart's desire."

Gabriele Walewska was silent. Father Mayenobe sank into a reverie. The elderly woman looked sympathetically at her mistress, laid her hand on hers, and murmured a few words in Polish, to which the girl responded with a grateful smile. The sound of a distant shot coming through the open window shook the missionary from his musing.

"Russian officers out snipe-shooting again, I suppose," he said. "It reminds me I must go, my child. That poor Korean convert of mine is at the point of death, I fear. I must go to him. I may be absent all day."

"We shall be quite happy, father. I shall pick the last of your strawberries to-day, and make some of your favourite tartlets for supper."

"You will spoil me," said the priest with a smile. "Dominus vobiscum."

When the missionary had gone, Gabriele left the Korean servants to clear the table, and, accompanied by her old nurse, went out into the garden with a light wicker basket. As she did so she scanned the surrounding country for signs of the shooting party. The mission station was at the summit of a low hill, and

below it, towards the east, stretched a tract of sparse woodland, alternating with cultivated fields. A stream bathed the foot of the hill, and wound away to join the Hun-Chuan, its course traceable by the thickness of the wooded belt and the more vivid green of the fields.

While the girl was still picking the ripe red berries she heard another shot, this time closer at hand. She rose, and out of pure curiosity searching the landscape she saw, about two miles away, a band of horsemen galloping through a field of kowliang, already so well grown that the stalks rose almost to the horses' heads. There were some thirty or forty of the riders, at present little more than specks in the distance. It struck her as rather a large hunting party, and she wondered what they were chasing, big game being unknown in the neighbourhood, and the time of year unusual for such sport. As she stood looking, the horsemen left the field and disappeared into the wooded belt bordering the stream.

Expecting them to come again into sight a little higher up, Gabriele remained at the same spot. It occurred to her that one of them might be bringing the written permission she desired, and had taken advantage of his errand to organize a hunt. Suddenly she was startled to see a figure on horseback emerge from the copse but a few yards below her. It was a young man, a European; he was swaying in his saddle; and she noticed with feminine quickness that one arm was supported in a sling—a handkerchief looped round his neck. The next moment the rider caught sight of her; his eyes seemed to her to speak the language of despair. He swayed still more heavily, and was on the point of falling from his horse when Gabriele sprang down the slope and caught him. Calling to her nurse and a Korean man-servant near at hand, with their help she lifted him from the saddle and loosened his shirt-collar, then sent the Korean for water.

Jack was dazed at first, all but swooning.

"Thank you!" he said in Russian. "I was almost done, I think. But please help me to mount again. I must ride on."

"Impossible, gospodin!" she said. "You are hurt, I see; the injury must be seen to."

"It is good of you, but my arm must wait. Please help me to mount my pony."

His wounded arm, his urgent manner, recalled to Gabriele the shots she had heard, the band of horsemen she had seen galloping in the distance.

"You are in danger?" she said quickly. "Is it not so?"

"Yes. There are Buriats behind me; they are close on my heels. Indeed"—he smiled wanly—"it is your duty, as a Russian, I suppose, to give me up."

"I am not a Russian," she exclaimed. "And if I were, I should not lightly give up a fugitive to the Russian police. You can go no farther; what can I do? There is so little time."

For a few seconds she appeared to be considering. Her brow was knit; she looked at him anxiously. Fully trusting her, he made no further effort to continue his flight, for which, indeed, he was manifestly unfit. Half-reclining on his pony's neck, he waited, panting.

Then she spoke rapidly to the Korean.

"Take the pony, unsaddle him, and turn him loose in the kowliang yonder. Saddle the Father's pony, ride a few yards in the stream, then gallop past the edge of the copse, through the hemp field, up to Boulder Hill. If you are followed by horsemen, throw them off the scent. Don't let them see you closely. Return after dark, but make sure the Buriats are not here before you come in."

An unregenerate Korean would probably have hesitated, but this man had been for some time under Father Mayenobe's training, and in a few minutes he had brought out the pony and cantered away. Meanwhile Gabriele, asking Jack to lean upon her arm, had led him into the copse to a large beech, the lowest branch of which sprang from the trunk about twelve feet from the ground. Asking him to remain there, she ran off with the fleetness of a doe, and soon returned with a light ladder. Setting this against the tree, she assisted Jack to mount; when he reached the fork he saw that the interior of the trunk was hollow. Then she pulled up the ladder, lowered it into the hollow space, and helped Jack to descend. Drawing up the ladder again, she let it down outside, ran down, and carried it swiftly back to the house, leaving Jack inside the trunk, where he stood upright, supporting himself with his uninjured arm.

Scarcely five minutes had passed since his first appearance. The Buriats had not yet come in sight; they had clearly been checked by the fugitive's sudden divergence from his previous line of flight, and nonplussed by his precaution in riding for some distance through the stream. But in another five minutes half a dozen horsemen, with a handsome young Russian lieutenant at their head, drew rein in front of the house. Gabriele was unconcernedly shelling peas at the window of the little dining-room.

The officer was evidently surprised to see a young European lady. With heightened colour he bent over his saddle and addressed her in Russian.

"Have you seen a man on horseback in (he neighbourhood, Mademoiselle?"

Gabriele looked up, with a puzzled expression.

"Monsieur parle-t-il français?" she said.

"Oui, Mademoiselle," returned the officer, then repeating his question in French.

"Yes," she replied. "A few minutes ago a man galloped from the stream, past the copse, and rode auay along the side of the hill."

"Merci bien, Mademoiselle," said the lieutenant, translating the information for his men.

They at once began to hunt for the tracks, and in a few moments spied the hoof-marks of a galloping horse. One of them discharged his rifle to bring up the rest of the troop, who had scattered over the face of the country, endeavouring to pick up the trail of the fugitive. Some were already galloping off in the direction indicated by Gabriele. Soon the rest of the Buriats came riding by in twos and threes, until the whole band was in full cry up the hillside.

Gabriele remained at the window shelling peas until she was sure that the last horseman had passed. Then she took a bottle of home-grown wine from the missionary's store, filled a cup and gave it to her old nurse to carry, and returned with the ladder to the tree.

"It is I," she said as she approached. "I am bringing you wine."

Mounting into the tree, she handed down the cup. Jack drained it at a draught.

"You are suffering?" said the girl.

"Not much. It is a flesh wound; I have lost some blood, and was faint. I am better now."

"You must remain in the tree. The danger is not yet past; but have patience. I dare not stay longer; they will come back soon. Hope on."

CHAPTER VII
A Daughter of Poland

Suppressio Veri—The Keys—At Fault—A Polish Patriot—A Daughter's Love—A Common Sorrow—A French Mission—A Council of War—From Canton—A Surprise Visit—Hide and Seek—Ladislas Streleszki

All was silent for nearly an hour. Slowly the minutes passed. Jack felt he had never been so wretchedly uncomfortable. His legs ached; his arm throbbed with pain; there was not room in his hiding-place to sit; the stuffiness of his prison and the attentions of innumerable insects so tortured him that he could hardly refrain from crying out to be released. Eagerly he listened for the return of the tall strong girl whose quick wit had thrown the Buriats off his track. When would she come again? At last, after a period of waiting that seemed ten times as long as it really was, he fancied he heard her footsteps. He listened; yes, it was certainly some-

one approaching; his long imprisonment was ended. But just as the footsteps, now distinctly audible, neared the tree, his ears caught the heavy thud of horses galloping, and a few moments afterwards an angry voice saying in French:

"The man you saw, Mademoiselle, is not the man we are searching for. My sergeant, who is following him up, sends me word that he got a clear view of him as he breasted the hill. The dress is different, the horse is different——"

He broke off as if expecting an explanation.

"How unfortunate, Monsieur!" exclaimed Gabriele in a tone of concern. "I fear you must have come a long distance out of your way."

"That is as it may be, Mademoiselle," replied the lieutenant, somewhat nettled. "Perhaps not so far either, for we tracked our man to within a few hundred yards of your house." He paused a moment, then added suspiciously: "What was he like, the man you saw galloping?"

"What was he like?" she repeated reflectively. "I think he was about your height; but then you are mounted, and so was he, and it is so difficult to judge when a man is mounted, is it not, Monsieur? And then he was going so fast; in a flash he was by; there was his back disappearing into the copse. It was a broad back; yes, certainly a broad back; and he was hitting his pony; yes, I remember that clearly, poor thing! and it was going so fast, too."

All this was said with the most artless simplicity, and Jack was amused, though his heart was beating hard with apprehension.

"But, Mademoiselle, what was he like?" repeated the officer, finding some difficulty in repressing his anger.

"The man I saw, Monsieur, or the man you saw, or the man your sergeant saw? There are so many—they confuse me."

"The man you saw. Come, Mademoiselle, we are wasting time. Was he a white man, or a Chinaman, or what?"

"Oh, his colour! Really, I cannot say. You see, Monsieur, the sun was in my eyes. I saw his back plainly, a broad back; but he was riding fast, and hitting his pony; yes, poor thing! he was hitting it very hard."

The lieutenant hesitated; Jack held his breath.

"You will pardon me, Mademoiselle, if I ask you to let me search your house."

"Not my house, Monsieur. It belongs to Father Mayenobe."

"Peste!" he exclaimed as he dismounted. "This house, whosesoever it is. The man gave us the slip in this neighbourhood, and my orders are to capture him."

"Certainly search, Monsieur. Father Mayenobe is away from home, or I am sure he would receive you as the occasion demands. The house is open to you. Perhaps a few of you would enter at a time?"

The frowning officer glanced at her, unable to decide whether she was mocking him. But her face was perfectly grave.

"Certainly, Mademoiselle," he replied a little uneasily. "Two will be sufficient; and with your permission I will accompany them. Doubtless," he added, as by an afterthought, "it will prove a mere form."

"I suppose it is quite right, Monsieur. I know nothing about these things. Perhaps I ought to say no until Father Mayenobe returns. But then I couldn't prevent you, could I? So you had better go in and do your duty. Let me see, you will want the keys." She took a bunch from her pocket. "There are very few. This is the key of the larder."

She innocently handed him the bunch, indicating the one she had mentioned.

"Only the larder is locked," she added. "The natives, you are aware, Monsieur, will overeat if one is not careful."

The young officer, looking very much ashamed of himself, took the bunch, and having no answer ready, moved towards the house.

"Will you show us the house, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh no, Monsieur! that would be to countenance your intrusion. I cannot be expected to do that."

The conversation had been carried on throughout within a few feet of Jack. In spite of his wound, his uncomfortable position, and the danger of discovery, he found himself shaking with silent laughter, imagining the play of expression on the faces of Gabriele and her victim.

The lieutenant with two of his men went into the house. There was silence for a while, broken only by the champing of the Buriats' ponies and the rattle of accoutrements, the men sitting their steeds mute and motionless. Then the voice of the officer could be heard interrogating the old nurse, who merely shook her head to every question. She knew nothing but Polish, and the officer's Russian was as incomprehensible to her as his French. After a few minutes he returned.

"Accept my apologies and my thanks, Mademoiselle," he said, as he handed her the keys. "We must pursue our chase elsewhere. Bonjour!"

"Bonjour, Monsieur!"

The troop rode away, taking a different course. Gabriele's lips curved in a smile as she watched them. The officer glanced back just before riding out of sight. She was walking slowly towards the house.

Half an hour afterwards the missionary returned.

"Father," said Gabriele, "I have played the good Samaritan since you have been away."

She explained to him rapidly what had occurred.

"My daughter," he said gently, "I cannot blame you, but you acted rashly,

very rashly indeed."

"What would you have done, Father?" she asked archly.

"Just what you did, my dear," he replied with twinkling eyes. "But we must be careful. The Russians look askance at our missions as it is; they only want a pretext to expel us."

"And the poor young man is all the time in the tree! He must be nearly dead with fatigue."

"But we cannot release him yet. Some of the Russians may return this way from their chase of Min-chin. I hope they will not shoot the poor fellow by mistake."

Jack waited, feeling more and more exhausted, and wondering how long his irksome durance was to last. By and by he again heard horses galloping. The Buriat sergeant and one of his men had returned from their fruitless chase. Min-chin, the Korean servant, had outridden them, and they had lost trace of him. They pulled up at the missionary's house to ask the whereabouts of the remainder of the troop, then they rode on. Watching them out of sight, and waiting for some time to assure himself that danger was past, Father Mayenobe carried the ladder to the tree, and soon Jack, pale, worn, and hungry, lay in the priest's own bed. The father, like most of the French missionaries in China, knew something of medicine and surgery; he examined Jack's wound, dressed and bound up his arm, and said that he was not to think of getting up for several days. It was in fact nearly a week before he was allowed to leave the bed, and the missionary saw that watch was kept night and day to guard against a surprise visit from the Russians.

During this period of enforced seclusion Father Mayenobe learnt Jack's story. Though it made him feel more than ever the gravity of his position if his guest should be discovered, it did not abate by a jot his determination to do what he could for him. Indeed, his sympathy for Jack was enhanced by a certain similarity between his circumstances and Gabriele's. He told Jack her story. Her father was a large land-owner, the descendant of a great Polish family, a man of noble character, greatly beloved of his tenants and respected by his peers. Like every true Pole he was a strong patriot, and had been a member of one of the secret associations that have for their object the restoration of Polish liberties. Some six years before, the society had been betrayed by one of its members; Count Walewski, with several of his compatriots, was arrested and sent without trial into exile; and as a deterrent to other Poles who might contemplate revolt, the place selected for his punishment was the bleak barren island of Sakhalin, the farthest eastern limit of the Russian empire. There was special cruelty and indignity involved in this choice, for the island was reserved as a rule for murderers and the lowest class of criminals; and his friends in Poland were aghast

when they heard to what a living death he had been condemned.

At the time of the count's arrest and banishment, his daughter Gabriele was only eleven years of age. Her father's estates being confiscated, and she a motherless child, she was adopted by her paternal aunt, an unmarried lady of ample means, who took her to her home in Paris, educated her, and treated her with a mother's care. But as the girl grew older and learned to understand more fully the hopelessness of her father's fate, she resolved at all costs to share his exile, and to do what lay in her power to alleviate and sweeten his terrible lot. Her aunt, fearful of allowing a young girl to undertake a mission so terrible, and being too infirm to accompany her, did all that she could to turn her from her purpose. But with increasing years the girl's determination became ever stronger. She grew up quickly into a thoughtful strong-willed maiden, full of patriotic ardour, of passionate resentment against the Russian government, and of an overflowing love for the father whose affection she remembered so well, and whose noble qualities she had not been too young to appreciate. While grateful for all the kindness her aunt had showered upon her, she was possessed by an overmastering sense of duty to her father. At last, when she was nearly seventeen, but in looks and mind older than her years, she threatened to set forth without assistance if her aunt refused her assent and help. Having no alternative the poor lady yielded, only stipulating that Gabriele's old nurse should accompany her. For some months they vainly tried to get permission from St. Petersburg for the girl to join her father. In the case of ordinary criminals no difficulty was usually made; it was clear that, as happens so often in Russia, the political offence was to be visited more heavily than the worst of crimes. Then she started without permission, hoping to obtain the necessary authorization at Vladivostok. She was provided with letters of introduction to a Polish family in Siberia, and one to Father Mayenobe, whose sister had been a teacher at the pension Gabriele had attended in Paris. But the outbreak of the war had so much disorganized things that the Polish friends were not to be found. She arrived in Vladivostok; there her request for permission to go to Sakhalin had been referred by one official to another, shelved, and finally ignored. Then, friendless and despairing, she had written to the missionary asking his advice. He had already heard of her from his sister. Riding at once into Vladivostok he endeavoured to get the required permission; but the governor and officials had something more important to consider than the romantic impulses of a Polish school-girl, and they politely shunted all his representations. At his suggestion Gabriele and her nurse had returned with him to his little mission station in the hills, where they had since remained, hoping that in course of time they would gain their object.

When Jack was well enough to leave his bedroom and share the simple life of the missionary and his household, it was apparent that the two young people

were drawn together by the common circumstances of their fate. From the first moment Jack had felt a strong admiration for the girl whose resourcefulness had saved him from capture; while Gabriele regarded his position as even worse than her own, for she knew at any rate where her father was. They had many long conversations together; the girl put her own sorrows into the background, and entered heartily into Jack's perplexities and plans. Father Mayenobe often joined them in talking things over, and soon won Jack's admiration for his character, and respect for his wise counsel.

Jack had opportunities of seeing something and learning more of his new friend's mission work. Jean Mayenobe had been a favourite pupil of Monsieur Venault, the young nobleman who gave up his career as a courtier of Louis XVIII, and devoted his whole fortune and forty-two years of his life to his labour of love in Manchuria. A great part of a French missionary's work consists in relieving the poor and sick and caring for orphans. He does little actual preaching of the Gospel; he conducts service in a small church or oratory attached to his house, but converts are made chiefly through the agency of native Christians, and through the training of orphan children from tender years. The priest dresses and fares little better than the poorest of his flock, and is never absent from his charge, fulfilling with absolute literalness the Divine command.

One day a Korean youth in training for the priesthood came in with a message from the Sister in charge of the orphanage at Almazovsk. He remained for several days in the house. Observing his manly open countenance and his air of energy and enthusiasm, so much in contrast to the average Korean's flabby effeminacy, Jack understood what an influence for good the Christian missionary can wield.

The talk in the little mission-house turned again and again upon the mystery of Mr. Brown's fate.

Father Mayenobe confessed that he was unable to make a likely guess as to the merchant's whereabouts.

"There are so many places in Siberia to which he may have been sent. Sakhalin, you suggest? Sakhalin is little used now for political prisoners, although, as in Count Walewski's case, some few are still sent there."

"How am I to find out? It is the uncertainty that is so terrible."

"I can think of no safe means. If the Russians are determined to keep his whereabouts secret——"

"That is itself an admission that they are in the wrong," interrupted Gabriele.

"It may be. I was going to say that if that is their determination it will be very difficult to trace him, and the only likely course would be to follow up enquiries along the railway."

”That is almost hopeless in present circumstances. The war has disorganized everything. Besides, how am I to get into Moukden again?”

”Why attempt it? Why not try to gain the coast and make for home, and trust to diplomatic representations at St. Petersburg?”

”No, no, father, I certainly disagree with you,” cried Gabriele. ”You know how slowly diplomacy works. Think of it; Monsieur Brown may pass months, perhaps years, in the most terrible uncertainty and suspense. No; if I were in his place I would do as he means to do. Oh, I wish I were a man!”

”But think of the danger! If he were to go as a European, he would be set upon by Chinese in the out-of-the-way parts through which he must pass. In the towns the English and the French are respected when other Europeans are not, but in the country parts all alike are foreign devils, of less account than pigs. If he got safely within the Russian lines he would probably be arrested as a spy and shot. His only chance is to go as a Chinaman.”

”As a Chinaman?”

”Yes, disguised to the best of our ability.”

Gabriele looked dubiously at Jack, as though questioning whether any disguise would serve.

”What do you say yourself, Monsieur Brown?” asked the missionary.

”I must risk it, father. I have been long enough in China to know the difficulties and dangers in my way; I don’t underrate them, I assure you. But anything is better than this harrowing uncertainty. I could not remain idle; I feel I must do something to clear up the mystery, even though I should be venturing on a forlorn hope.”

”Well, my son, I will not dissuade you. Fortune favours the brave, they say. You are determined to go; God go with you! But we must think of how it is to be done.”

”I must go as a Chinaman, that is certain. It had better be as a southern Chinaman. Mademoiselle perhaps does not know that the spoken language of the north and south are so unlike that natives of the one can only communicate with the other by written characters or by pidgin English. I can’t write Chinese, and if I pretend to be quite illiterate (as indeed I am from the Chinese point of view) I may hope to pass muster. I can speak pidgin English. We had a Canton servant in Shanghai with whom I spoke nothing else, and we use it still with the servants in Moukden.”

”But there is a greater difficulty—the difficulty of feature. You would pass better in Canton as a Manchu, than as a Cantonese in Manchuria.”

”I can only risk it. A little saffron and henna——”

”And a pigtail, Monsieur Brown?—will you have to wear a pigtail?” said Gabriele.

"Yes, unluckily," said Jack with a rueful smile. "My own hair won't suffice. But false pigtails are common enough in China. I shall ask your help with that, Mademoiselle."

"It would amuse me—if it were not so terribly serious."

"You will go as a Chinaman, then," said the priest. "But you must have a story to tell on the way if you are questioned: have you thought of that?"

"Yes. Suppose I give out that I am the servant of a Moukden mandarin, returning from a special mission to Hun-chun, hinting perhaps at anti-Russian intrigue?"

Father Mayenobe stroked his beard.

"It is inevitable," he said. "For you this is a state of war, and in war the first principle is to deceive the enemy. Still, I do not like your venture. The more I think of it, the more heavy do the odds appear against success."

"Father, do not let us go into that again," pleaded Gabriele. "Can you suggest any better plan for Monsieur Brown?"

"I confess I cannot. Well, let it be so, then. I will do all in my power to help you, my son."

A fortnight passed away. The wet season had begun, and though the rainfall was not so continuous as is commonly the case, the streams were swelled to overflowing and the rough tracks rendered impassable. The mission station, being on a hillside, suffered less than huts on the lower ground. During the unfavourable weather much anxious care was given to Jack's preparations. The costume was got ready in every detail; Gabriele with her own hands plaited the pigtail and wadded the loose tunic and pantaloons. At last all was in readiness, and Jack only awaited a fine day to set off.

One afternoon, when the sun was hot, raising a thick vapour from the sodden fields, Min-chin came running into the house with the news that a party of Buriats were riding up the hill. It happened that Father Mayenobe had taken advantage of the change of weather to visit some of his little flock a few miles off. Without a moment's delay Jack hastened to the hollow tree, and was safe inside by the time the horsemen rode up. They surrounded the house, and the officer, an older man than the lieutenant whom Gabriele had discomfited, alighted at the door and called for the priest. Gabriele appeared. It was evident from the officer's manner that he had heard of her.

"Mademoiselle," he said in French, "you will please give me a plain answer. A stranger has been seen in and about this house. Who is he?"

"Oh! you mean the catechumen from Almazovsk?"

The captain looked hard at her.

"Come, Mademoiselle, where is the man?"

"The catechumen? He is gone. He went three days ago, all through the

rain. He would not remain, though Father Mayenobe pressed him to wait in hope of finer weather. You seem to doubt me," added the girl. "The house has been already searched once, in Father Mayenobe's absence; I assure you there is nobody in it but our servants; if you will not accept my assurance you had better search again."

She moved away, and began to occupy herself with simple household matters, completely ignoring the Russians. The captain did not go shamefacedly about his work as the lieutenant had done; he searched the little house thoroughly, ransacking every hole and corner. The task did not take him long; he found nothing. Coming out again, he beckoned to a man in civilian costume whom Gabriele had not previously noticed. As he rode forward, she started; but in an instant recovered herself. He spoke a few words to the captain; then the latter, with a curt word of farewell to the girl, gave his men the order to ride away. Gabriele did not like his look; he had seemed too easily satisfied, and consulted with the civilian; and she sent two of the servants to keep watch at the only convenient approaches to the settlement. Her precaution was justified. Two or three hours later the party rode back at a gallop. The alarm was given by one of the sentinels, and Jack had time to get back into the serviceable beech before they arrived. A second search was made, this also fruitless; then the horsemen finally departed, convinced against their will that they had come once more on a false scent.

When Jack left his hiding-place he saw by the expression of Gabriele's face that she had something to tell him. A red spot burned on each cheek, and her eyes were blazing.

"How dare he! How dare he!" she exclaimed. "Oh, if I could have killed him! It was Ladislas Streleszki, the traitor, the villain, the man who betrayed my father. He was our steward; we did not know for a long time who had done that foul deed; but when my father was arrested Streleszki disappeared, and it was many months before we understood."

"Do you mean, Mademoiselle, that he is now a Russian officer?"

"No, no; but when they came the second time he was with them."

"Did he not recognize you?"

"No; it is six years since he saw me, and I have changed very much. I was afraid he might; I thought perhaps a chance word from one of the officers in Vladivostok through whom my applications have passed, had brought him here to persecute me. But it cannot be so; he hardly looked at me. I knew him at once; he has altered little; his hair is turning grey; but I could never mistake him; one eyelid droops and——"

"Indeed!" cried Jack with a start. "Is it his left eyelid?"

"Yes. Oh, why do you ask?"

"Sowinski, my father's enemy, has the same defect. Did you hear him speak, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes; his voice is gruff and coarse."

"Then Streleszki and Sowinski are the same man. Good heavens, we have indeed had a narrow escape! It would have been all up with me if I had been found, and I fear your fate would have been sealed too. I am to blame for staying here so long. I must not bring you into danger again. I will go to-day."

CHAPTER VIII
A Custom of Cathay

The Forbidden Mountain—Two from Canton—Clutching at Straws—Ipsos Custodes—A Question of Dollars—The Yamen—The Majesty of the Law—Judge and Jury—The Cage—Torture—Mr. Wang—Benevolence and Aid

"Hai-yah!"

"Ph'ho!"

"Fan-yun!"

"Fan-kwei!"

"Look at his eyes! How big! Round as the moon. See how they goggle and glare!"

"Yah! Ugly beast! His nose! Look at it! Like the beak of a hawk."

"And his hair! Ch'hoy! Like the fleece of a sheep."

"And his clothes! Ragged as a quail's tail."

"No doubt of it, he is a foreign devil, ugly pig."

"Why still alive? Kill him at once, say I. Foreign devils are dangerous to keep. One come, thousands follow. Kill at once; if we had done that with the Russians, no more trouble. He will bring ill-luck on the village. What luck have we had since the Russians came digging into the Hill of a Thousand Perfumes? Who can say how many demons they let loose?"

"Yah! Who has found ginseng since then, who? Nothing but ill-luck now. An Pow dead, strong as he was; Sun Soo drowned in the river; all our oxen carried off by Ah Lum and his Chunchuses. Hai! hai! And this foreign devil will make things worse. Why did they not chop off his head at once?"

To this conversation, carried on within a few feet of him, Jack listened in a somewhat apathetic spirit. He was utterly dejected, worn out, humiliated. He lay in a large wooden cage near the headman's house in the village of Tang-ho-kou in the Long White Mountains. It was a secluded spot, in a district supposed to be sacred to the emperor's ancestors, where it was sacrilege even for a Chinaman to tread. The inhabitants were an exclusive community, ruled by a guild, owning only nominal allegiance to the emperor, and essentially a self-governed republic. They were unmolested, for government is lax in Manchuria, and the Long White Mountains are far from the capital and difficult ground to police; theoretically the guildsmen went in danger of their heads, practically they were monarch of all they surveyed.

A group of the villagers was collected on this July evening about the cage, discussing the foreign prisoner, interrupting their conversation to snarl at him.

"It is true; his head ought to be chopped off, but they were afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of what might be done to them. The illustrious viceroy at Moukden is very strict. Even a foreign devil may not be killed without leave. Why? Because if one is killed, there is trouble. The kings of the foreign devils are angry, and many good Chinese heads have to fall. They have sent to ask leave to behead the barbarian: better still, to slice him. He fought like a hill tiger when they caught him, and two men even now lie wounded."

"How did they catch him?"

"A Canton man, mafoo to his excellency General Ping at Moukden, overtook him riding in the hills. He was making a bird's noise with his lips; that was suspicious. But the Canton man was wary. He spoke to him as a friend, and rode alongside. Where did he come from? Thus asked the Canton man. The barbarian shook his head and answered in pidgin, the tongue of the foreign devil in the south. Yah! That was his ruin. Our Canton friend also speaks pidgin. 'You come from Canton?' says he. 'Yes.' 'What part? Where did you live? Do you know this place or that? What is your business?' Those were his questions; a shrewd fellow, the Canton man. He left him at the next village; then followed with six strong men. They got ahead of him, hid in a copse by the roadside, and when the foreign devil came up, rushed out upon him. They were seven; but it was a hard fight. Ch'hoy! These barbarians are in league with a thousand demons; that is why they are so fierce and strong. But they got him at last, and brought him here; worse luck! he shall suffer for it yet."

The crowd drew nearer to their helpless prisoner, stared at him, jeered, cast stones and offal, and, worked up by the teller of the story, were only kept from tearing him to pieces by the guard and the bars of the cage. Exposed without shelter to the broiling sun, Jack was dizzy and faint. His clothes had been torn to

tatters in the struggle, his pigtail wrenched from his head. He had had no food for many hours, and, what was worse, no water.

He had been able to catch the gist of what the chief speaker in the crowd had said. How stupid of him to whistle—a thing a Chinaman never does! How unlucky that he had met a man from Canton! The dialects of the north and south differ so much that by professing to be a Southerner he had come so far on his journey undetected; but in conversation with a Cantonese his accent had inevitably betrayed him. And now he knew that he could expect no mercy. A European carries his life in his hands in China whenever he ventures alone out of the beaten track. In Manchuria just then, with the natives embittered by the wanton destruction of their towns and villages, the chances of a captive being spared were infinitesimal. Only fear of the mandarins had apparently caused them to hold their hands in his case; but Jack had little reason to suppose that the mandarins would interfere to protect him. No order would be issued; but the villagers would receive a hint to do as they pleased; and Jack well knew what their pleasure would be. In the unlikely event of diplomatic pressure being afterwards brought to bear, the mandarins could still repudiate responsibility, and the villagers would suffer; several, probably the most innocent, would lose their heads. But Jack knew that he had placed himself outside the protection of the British flag. Neither the mandarins nor the villagers had anything to fear.

The sun went down; the village watchman beat his wooden gong; and the group gradually dispersed. Only the guard was left. Parched with thirst, Jack ventured to address him, asking for a cup of water. The man, with more humanity than the most, after some hesitation acceded. He was generous, and brought also a mess of rice. Greatly refreshed by the meal, scanty though it was, Jack felt his spirits rising; with more of hope he began to canvass the possibilities in his favour. But he had to admit that they were slight. There was just one ray of light, dim indeed; but a pin-point glimmer is precious in the dark. He had heard the villagers mention the brigand Ah Lum, the chief of the Chunchuses, who had levied upon their oxen. This was the chief whom Wang Shih had left Moukden to join. If Jack could only communicate with Wang Shih there might still be a chance for him.

He began a whispered conversation with his guard, and learnt that, a few days before, Ah Lum's band was known to be encamped in the hills some twenty miles to the south-west. It was resting and recruiting its strength after a severe brush with a force of Cossacks, who had almost succeeded in cutting it to pieces during a raid on the railway.

"Do you know Wang Shih?"

"No; Ah Lum has several lieutenants. His band numbers nearly eight hundred; there were more than a thousand before the fight with the Russians."

"You know what a dollar is?"

"It is worth many strings of cash."

"Well, if you will take word to Mr. Wang about me, I will give you fifty dollars."

"Where will you get them from?" asked the man suspiciously. "Were you not searched, and everything taken from you?"

"True, I was searched; but the foreign devil has ways of getting money that the Chinaman does not understand. It is a small thing I ask you to do. The reward is great; fifty dollars, hundreds of strings of cash. You will never get such a chance again."

True to the oriental instinct for haggling, the man argued and discussed for some time before he at last agreed to Jack's proposition.

"You must make haste," said Jack. "If the messenger to the mandarin returns before you, I shall be killed and you will get no money."

The man at once explained that it was impossible for him to leave the village; he must find a messenger.

"Very well. He is to find Wang Shih and say that Jack Brown from Moukden is in peril of death. You can say the name?"

"Chack Blown," said the man.

"That will do. Now, when can you send your man?"

The guard said that he would be shortly relieved; then he would lose no time. In a few minutes a man came to take his place, and Jack, with mingled hopes and fears, settled himself in a corner of the cage, to sleep if possible. Half an hour later the guard returned with the welcome news that a messenger had started, after bargaining for twenty of the fifty dollars, and would travel all night on foot, for he had no horse, and to hire one would awaken suspicion.

"But," added the guard, "he is a trusty man, much respected, and a great hater of foreign devils, like all good Chinamen. If he had had his way the honourable foreign devil would have been executed this afternoon."

"Then how comes it," asked Jack, "that he is willing to go as messenger?"

The guide looked puzzled.

"Surely the honourable barbarian understands? Did I not explain that I promised Mr. Fu twenty dollars?"

Even in his misery Jack could not forbear a smile. His messenger was doubtless the man who had led the chorus of threats and insults a few hours before. The man's convictions were no doubt still the same; but the prospect of a few dollars had completely divorced precept from practice.

Then Jack reflected that the enterprise was a poor chance at the best. There was little likelihood of the man finding Wang Shih in time, and if he found him, it was uncertain whether his sense of gratitude was sufficiently keen to bring

him to the rescue. Yet, in spite of all, Jack's impatient eager thought followed the messenger, as though hope could give him winged feet.

He spent a miserable night. In that hill country even the summer nights are cold; and his clothes having been well-nigh torn from his back, he had scant protection. He slept but little, lying awake for hours listening to the mice and rats scampering around the cage, and to the long-drawn melancholy howls of the village dogs.

Soon after dawn he heard a great commotion in the village. His pulse beat high; he hoped that Wang Shih had arrived. But when his friendly guardian came to resume duty, his heart sank, for he learnt that the headman's messenger to the local mandarin had returned, bringing word that the barbarian should be suitably dealt with by the guild. The mandarin had evidently washed his hands of the matter; the guard had no doubt that when the headman was ready Jack would be taken before him, and he must expect no mercy. The people had never ceased to grumble at the delay in executing him; and nothing could be hoped of the headman, for he was a native of Harbin, and bore a bitter grudge against the Russians, who in constructing their railway had cut through his family graveyard, and in defiling the bones of his ancestors had done him the worst injury a Chinaman can suffer. Jack was to have no breakfast; his captors were so sure of his fate that they thought it would be a mere waste to feed him.

An hour passed—a terrible hour of suspense. The villagers began to gather round the cage, and their looks of gleeful and malicious satisfaction struck Jack cold. All at once they broke into loud shouting as a posse of armed yamen-runners forced their way through. Jack was taken out of the cage, and, surrounded by the runners and followed by the jabbering crowd, was marched to the headman's house. He there found himself in the presence of a dignified Chinaman, a glossy black moustache encircling his mouth and chin, his long finger-nails denoting that he did not condescend to menial work. He was in fact a prosperous farmer, who, besides possessing large estates (to which he had no title) in the Forbidden Country, carried on an extensive trade in ginseng, a plant to which extraordinary medicinal virtues are attributed by the Chinese, and so valuable that a single root will sometimes fetch as much as £15 in the Peking market. The headman, feeling the importance of the occasion, had got himself up in imitation of a magistrate, wearing a round silk buttoned cap and a blue tunic.

He had evidently made a study of the procedure in a mandarin's yamen. He was the only man seated at a long table; at each end stood a scribe with a dirty book, which might or might not have been a book of law, outspread before him; at his right hand stood a man with a lighted pipe, from which during the proceedings the headman took occasional whiffs; in front stood a group of

runners in weird costumes, wearing black cloth caps with red tassels. From the sour expression on the Chinaman's face Jack knew that he was already judged and condemned; but he held his head high, and gazed unflinchingly on the stern-visaged Chinaman.

It is proper for a prisoner to take his trial on his knees, and one of the runners approached Jack and sharply bade him kneel. He refused. Two other men came up with threatening gestures, and laid hands on him to force him down. He resisted; he had the rooted European objection to kowtow to an Asiatic. With too much good sense to indulge himself in heroics, he yet recalled at this moment by a freak of memory the lines written on the heroic Private Moyse of the Buffs. His back stiffened; there was the making of a pretty wrestling match; but the headman, mindful of the stout fight when the prisoner was arrested, and desiring that the proceedings should be conducted with decorum, ordered his men to desist. Then he began his interrogatory.

"You are an Russian?"

"No, an Englishman."

"Where have you been living?"

"In Moukden."

"What have you been doing there?"

"I lived with my father."

"Who is he?"

"He is a merchant."

"What is his name?"

"He is known as Mr. Brown of Moukden."

"What did he trade in?"

"In many things. He supplied stores of all kinds."

"To the Russians?"

"Yes."

"Assisting them to build the iron road that is the ruin of Manchuria?"

"I believe your august emperor gave the Russians permission."

"Do not dare to mention the Son of Heaven. Do not dare, I say, you foreign devil! Where is your father now?"

"I do not know. He was arrested by the Russians."

"Why?"

"They accused him of giving information to the Japanese."

"Did he give information?"

"No."

"Ch'hoy! Then clearly he was in league with the Russians. He, too, is worthy of death. What brought you into the Shan-yan-alin mountains?"

"I am trying to find my father. I was on my way to Moukden."

"Do you know that the Ch'ang-pai-shan is sacred to the emperor? Nobody is allowed to tread these hills, on pain of death."

"I am in your honour's august company."

The headman winced and blinked. That was a home-thrust. He grew angry.

"Enough! You are a foreign devil. By your own confession you have been in league with the Russians, assisting them in their impious work, disturbing the feng-shui in the most sacred city of the virtuous Son of Heaven. You are found in insolent disguise within the limits of the Forbidden Mountains; you resisted lawful arrest, to the severe injury of two of my officers. It is clear that you are a vile example of the outer barbarians who are scheming to drive the Manchu from his immemorial lands, defiling the graves of our fathers, and bringing our sons to shame. You are not fit to live; every one of your offences is punishable with death; in their sum you are lightly touched by my sentence upon you, that you suffer the ling-ch'ih, and then be beheaded. Confess your crimes."

Jack had answered the man's questions briefly and calmly, and listened with unmoved countenance to his speech. The decision was only what he had expected. The worst was to come. He knew that by the laws and customs of China he could not be executed until he had acknowledged the justice of the sentence and made open confession of his crime; he knew also that, failing to confess voluntarily, he would be tortured by all the most fiendish methods devised by Chinese ingenuity until confession was extorted from his lacerated, half-inanimate frame. The end would be the same; for a moment, in his helplessness and despair, he thought it would perhaps be better to acquiesce at once and get it over. But then pride of race stepped in. Could he, innocent as he felt himself to be, act a lie by even formally acquiescing in the sentence? He did not know how far his fortitude would enable him to bear the tortures in store; but he would not allow the mere prospect to cow him. He had paused but a moment.

"I have nothing to confess," he said.

The headman gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Put him in the cage," he said.

Jack's blood ran cold in spite of himself. The word used by his judge was not the name of the cage in which he had already been confined, but meant an instrument of torture. Amid the exultant hoots of the crowd of natives, who spat on the ground as he passed, he was hauled from the presence and taken to a yard near by. In the centre of it stood a bamboo cage somewhat more than five feet high. Its top consisted of two movable slabs of wood which, when brought together, left a hole large enough to encircle a man's neck, but too small for his head to pass through. The height of the cage was so adjusted, that when the prisoner was inside with his head protruding from the top he could only avoid being hung by the neck so long as his feet rested on a brick. By and by that would

be removed; he might defer strangulation for a short time by standing on tiptoe, but that would soon become too painful. Jack had never seen the instrument in use, but he had heard of it, and he quailed at the imagination of the torture he was to endure.

His arms were bound together; he was locked into the cage; his head was enclosed; and the mob jeered and yelled as, the brick being knocked away after a few minutes, he instinctively raised himself on his toes to ease the pressure on his neck. How long could he endure it? he wondered. Had the messenger failed to find Wang Shih? Had some perverse fate removed the Chunchuse band at this moment of dire peril? Humanly speaking, his salvation depended on Wang Shih, and on him alone: was his last hope to prove vain? Should he now yield, confess, and spare himself further torture? Already he was suffering intense pain; he gained momentary relief for his feet by drawing up his legs, a movement which brought his whole weight upon his neck; but that was endurable only for a few seconds. He closed his eyes to shut out the sight of the yelling mob; pressed his lips together lest a moan should escape him: "I will never give in, never give in." he said to himself; "pray God it may not be long."

The pain became excruciating; he no longer saw or heard the yelling fiends gloating over every spasm of his tortured body; he was fast sinking into unconsciousness, and the headman, fearful of losing his victim, was about to give the order for his temporary release, when suddenly his ears caught the sound of galloping horses. The noise around him lulled; he heard loud shouts in the distance, and drawing ever nearer. Then the crowd scattered like chaff, and through their midst rode a brawny figure brandishing a riding-whip of bamboo. Dashing through the amazed throng at the head of thirty shouting bandits he leapt from his horse, sprang to the cage, tore away the catch holding the two panels together, and Jack fell, an unconscious heap, to the bottom of the cage.

The first alarm being now passed, the villagers raised a hubbub. They clustered about the new-comers, protesting with all their might that the prisoner was merely a foreign devil, an impious pig. But Wang Shih cleared a space with his whip; then, springing to the saddle again, he raised his voice in a shout that dominated and silenced the clamour of the mob.

"Hai-yah! What are you doing, men of Tang-ho-kou? Is this foreigner a Russian that you treat him thus? A fine thing truly! You skulk in your fangtzes, afraid to come out with the honourable Ah Lum and me and fight the Russians, and yet you are bold enough to catch a solitary man, a friend of the Chinaman, and to misuse him thus because he is alone! Know you not that he is an enemy of the Russians? They have imprisoned his father; it is reverence for his father that brings him here. Is filial piety so little esteemed in Tang-ho-kou to-day? Ch'hoy! I see your headman aping a lordly mandarin; let him listen. I say you are lucky I

do not burn your village and execute a dozen of you as you were about to execute the stranger. But I will be merciful. I will take from you a contribution of five thousand taels for my chief; and your headman—ch'hoy! he shall stand for half an hour in the cage. That shall suffice. But beware how you offend again. Learn to distinguish your friends from your enemies—an Englishman from the Russians whom the dwarfs of Japan are helping us to drive back to the frozen north. Take heed of what I say—I, Wang Shih, the worthless servant of his excellency Ah Lum, the virtuous commander of many honourable brigands."

This speech made an impression upon the crowd. The headman was beginning to slink away, but Wang Shih noticed the movement and sent one of his men after him. In spite of his protests he was dragged to the cage, from which Jack, now fully conscious, had been removed; he was fastened in it, and compelled to tiptoe as his erstwhile prisoner had done. But after some minutes Jack, with a vivid remembrance of his own sufferings, interceded for the wretched man, and Wang Shih released him, bidding him collect from the villagers the tribute he had demanded. The presence of the thirty well-armed Chunchuses was a powerful spur to haste, and within half an hour the amount was raised. Meanwhile Jack's neck had been bathed, and his muscles were beginning to recover from the strain to which they had been put. He declared that he was well enough to ride away with his deliverers. He had first to pay the guard the fifty dollars agreed upon. Not wishing to disclose the hiding-place in the soles of his boots where he kept his notes, he borrowed from Wang Shih the necessary sum in bar silver. Then, mounted upon a horse borrowed from the headman's own stables, he rode with the brigands from the village.

CHAPTER IX
Ah Lum

Ishmaels—The Chief—Fair Words—Wise Saws—Ah Fu's Tutors—An Honorary Appointment—Chopping Maxims—A Deputation—Hunting the Boar—A Forest Monarch—Charging Home—The Knife—A Close Call

The Chunchuse camp, Jack learnt as he rode, was some thirty miles distant in the hills. It had been shifted; it was always shifting; that was why the intervention

of Wang Shih had been so nearly too late.

Jack was somewhat amused when he reflected on the strange company in which he found himself. He had heard a good deal about these redoubtable bandits, but never till this day had he seen any of them. Their bands were, he knew, very miscellaneous in their composition. Escaped prisoners, whether guilty, or innocent like Wang Shih, frequently sought refuge with one or other of the brigand chiefs. Men who had been ruined in business, or were too indolent for regular work; men possessed of grievances against the mandarins, or by a sheer lust of adventure and lawlessness; helped to swell their numbers; and Mr. Brown had once remarked that they reminded him of the motley band that gathered about David in the cave Adullam: "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented".

The name Chunchuse means "red beard", and was originally applied by the natives to any foreigner. Since the bandits were almost all clean-shaven, like the majority of Chinamen, Jack could only conjecture that they were styled "red beards" from some fancied resemblance of their predatory ways to the methods of the hated foreigners. They were held in terror by all the law-abiding inhabitants, and the machinery of the Chinese government was totally unable to keep them down. Since the coming of the Russians they had grown in numbers and in power. Knowing every inch of the country they were able to wage an effective guerrilla warfare against the invaders, often surprising scouting parties of Siberian riflemen or Cossacks, raiding isolated camps, damaging the railways, and capturing convoys.

Jack was interested in taking stock of his strange companions. They were tall strapping fellows, powerfully built, with muscular and athletic frames, and they included men of every race known in Manchuria. Their costumes differed as greatly as the men themselves. Some were clad in the usual garb of Chinamen; others had black cloth jackets with brass buttons, tight-fitting trousers, and long riding-boots reaching to the knees. Their heads were covered with knotted handkerchiefs of red, black, or yellow cotton, beneath which their pigtails were coiled up out of sight. Each carried a rifle and a revolver stuck in his leather belt.

On the way to the camp Wang Shih gave Jack a few particulars about the band, in which he had already risen to a high position. Ah Lum, the chief, had been for many years notorious for the daring with which he would swoop with a few men on rich merchants travelling through the country, even though they might be escorted by Chinese soldiers. But since the outbreak of the war such sources of gain had ceased, and he had gradually collected a very large following for the purpose of conducting irregular operations against his country's despoilers. All were magnificent horsemen; the Russians had in vain endeavoured to hunt them down; and the very rifles they carried were the spoil of successful

raids.

After a ride of about five hours through the hills, Wang Shih's party reached the Chunchuse camp. It was a strange mixture of shelters, many of them huts built of the stalks of kowliang, yet arranged, as Jack noticed, in a certain order. Conspicuous in the middle of the camp was a large tent, in which, as they approached, Jack recognized the Russian service pattern. This too was evidently part of the spoil of a raid.

At the outskirts of the camp Wang Shih dismissed his men, proceeding alone with Jack to the tent. It was the head-quarters of the chief. There was no sign of state, no sentinel at the entrance; Wang Shih rode up unquestioned, and unceremoniously shouted into the tent for Mr. Ah. If Jack had expected to see the typical brigand of romance he must have been disappointed. Ah Lum was the shortest member of the band, a wiry figure with a slight stoop. His appearance was that of a university professor rather than a warrior. He was apparently between forty and fifty years of age, with an intelligent and thoughtful cast of countenance, enhanced by a pair of horn spectacles over which he looked searchingly when Jack was introduced to him. Ah Lum was, in fact, a man of considerable education and even learning. He had taken the highest honours in the examinations for the successive degrees of Cultivated Talent, Uplifted Literary Man, and Exalted Bookworm; and the poems he composed when competing for a place in the Board of Civil Office were acknowledged as superior to anything recently written in the Mandarin language. But his success on this occasion awoke a bitter jealousy in the breast of a "same-year-man" who had kept pace with him throughout his career until this last promotion. The disappointed candidate adopted a characteristically Chinese mode of wreaking vengeance. He committed suicide on Ah Lum's door-step. According to Chinese belief Ah Lum would not only be haunted ever after by his rival's spirit, but would also have to clear himself before the mandarin's court of a charge of murder. Unluckily the mandarin was an enemy of Ah Lum; his price for a favourable judgment was more than the Exalted Bookworm could offer; and the latter, seeing that his condemnation was certain, discreetly vacated his desk at the Board of Civil Office and betook himself to the mountains.

Jack only learnt all this gradually. His first impression of Ah Lum as a spectacled, courteous, polished savant left him wondering how such a man had succeeded in imposing his authority on the hard-living, hard-faring, reckless set of outlaws who composed his band. That he had some personal force of character was a foregone conclusion, for his position could depend on nothing else. He received Jack very kindly, and, having Heard his story from Wang Shih, promised to do all he could to help him.

"Mr. Wang," he said, bowing to his lieutenant, "does me the honour to be

my friend. Has he not rendered me great services? Surely it becomes me to serve his friends when my insignificant capabilities permit. Meanwhile deign, sir, to regard all our contemptible possessions as your own, and excuse our numberless shortcomings. Where good-will is the cook, the dish is already seasoned."

He paused, as though expecting a comment on the proverb.

"Quite so," said Jack, feeling that he ought to say something.

The chief proceeded at once to warn him of the danger of pursuing further his attempt to enter Moukden in disguise. If he tried to pass as a Canton man he might at any moment meet a real Cantonese, as had already happened to his cost; and, besides, the Cantonese were not loved in Manchuria. As a Manchu, on the other hand, he would be apt to betray himself in endless little ways. However, if he were bent on it, Ah Lum would do what he could to secure him good treatment. Meanwhile, after what he had gone through, a few days' rest in camp would do him no harm.

"Haste is the parent of delay," he said; "whereas if one has a mind to beat a stone, the stone will in due time have a hole in it."

Again he paused, like an actor waiting for the gallery's applause to his tag.

"A very sound maxim," said Jack, thinking it well to humour this singular moralist.

The chief concluded with an offer of hospitality so cordial, that Jack, anxious as he was to pursue his mission, could not well decline it.

Wang Shih, Jack found, was third in command. His enormous strength, allied to a bull-dog courage, had enabled him to force his way to the front in a community where those qualities were esteemed above all others. That they were not the only titles to respect was proved by the position of the chief; and the longer Jack stayed in the camp the more he was impressed by the ease and firmness with which Ah Lum swayed his band.

The chief had a son, a boy of twelve, who from the first took a great liking to Jack. Ah Fu was a bright boy, vivacious for a Chinese; and Ah Lum loved him with even more than the usual Chinaman's devotion. He doted on the child. He never tired of talking about him to Jack.

"If," he said, "a man has much money, but no child, he cannot be reckoned rich: if he has children, but no money, he cannot be reckoned poor. And I am blessed in my son: he is dutiful, respectful, voracious of knowledge. 'A bad son', says the Sage, 'is as a dunning creditor; but a good son as the repayment of a long-standing debt'."

At great pains he had kidnapped two graduates for the express purpose of having Ah Fu carefully trained in the elements of Chinese culture. Himself a man of education, he set the highest value on learning. "Weeds are the only harvest of an untilled field," he would say. "Though your sons be well disposed,

yet if they be not duly instructed, what can you expect of them but ignorance?" In addition to his daily instruction in the philosophers and poets, the boy went through all kinds of physical exercises—practising with the bow and the rifle, riding a spirited little pony, learning fearless horsemanship from the best rider in the band; and the Chunchuses rival the Cossacks in the superb management of their steeds. Before Jack had been a day in the camp he was requested by the chief to teach his son English. He agreed, though he thought that in the short time he was to spend with them not much could be done. Ah Lum was very pressing in the matter. Jack, he was sure, had all the learning of the west (this tickled Jack; how the fourth-form master at Sherborne would have roared!). The learning of the east Ah Lum himself could get for the boy. In addition to the kidnapped graduates he had his eye on an astronomer of distinction at Kirin, and at Tieling there lived a very learned man, skilled in the casting of horoscopes. But he had naturally few opportunities of providing European instruction. "True doctrine cannot injure the true scholar," he said. "An ounce of wisdom is worth a world of gold." He was particularly anxious that Ah Fu should lack nothing in education through his father's outlawed condition. Himself a poet, he set much store by poetry; and having learnt from Jack that the most popular English poet was Tennyson, he made it a special point that the boy should from the first learn some of his poems. Jack was amused; he did not tell the chief that poetry was not so highly esteemed in England as in China; but happening to know a few odds and ends of Tennyson's verse, he got Ah Fu to repeat them after him until the boy could recite them faultlessly. Jack had his doubts whether the poems thus recited would have been recognized by an Englishman, but that was nothing to the point.

After a week, when he felt his strength thoroughly recruited, Jack spoke of continuing his journey. But Ah Lum, in his politest manner, urged excellent reasons why he should remain a little longer. It had been raining almost continuously since his arrival; the streams were in flood; the rivers were not fordable. Moreover, a large body of Russian troops was moving between the camp and Moukden; and Chinamen were being narrowly questioned and examined under suspicion of being Japanese spies in disguise. Day after day passed; every hint of Jack's that he wished to be off was met by some new excuse enforced by maxims, and turned by a question as to how Ah Fu was getting on with his poetry. At last Jack grew uneasy and suspicious; it appeared as if Ah Lum intended to keep him as an additional tutor, unpaid. He began to think of taking French leave, but was restrained by several considerations: the fact that he owed his life to the brigands; the danger lest his disappearance should cause a quarrel between Wang Shih and the chief; the hope that he might find the Chunchuses useful in prosecuting his search; and the risk of recapture, for he knew that the country

people would certainly give him up to the chief if they caught him.

He abandoned therefore the idea of flight, resolving to stay on with what patience he could muster, and hoping to obtain his end by mild persistence. But his courteous and repeated applications were met by still more courteous and equally firm refusals—not direct refusals, but regrets that on one pretext or another the "Ingoua superior man" could not safely leave the camp. Ah Lum's stock of proverbs and maxims was again drawn upon. "Though powerful drugs be nauseous to the taste, they are beneficial to the stomach. So, candid advice may be unpleasant to the ear, but it is profitable for the conduct. The carpenter makes the cangue that he himself may be doomed to wear."

"Exactly."

There was a want of conviction in Jack's stereotyped reply. He was growing tired of these eternal copy-book headings, which seemed to him often the merest platitudes—tired of expressing the assent which his sententious host always looked for. He asked Wang Shih to expostulate with the chief; but when the Chinaman ventured to suggest that the young Englishman's dutiful regard for his father ought to be respected and his errand furthered, he got a good snubbing for his pains.

"It is easy to convince a wise man," said Ah Lum with a snap; "but to reason with fools, that is a difficult undertaking. You cannot turn a somersault in an oyster-shell."

Greatly daring, Wang Shih cited a maxim very pertinent, he thought, to the case.

"True, honourable sir; but is it not written: 'Of a hundred virtues, filial piety is the best'?"

"No doubt," retorted Ah Lum, still more snappishly. "But remember that if a man has good desires, heaven will assuredly grant them."

And Jack had to kick his heels, and drum poetry into Ah Fu, thinking disrespectfully of proverbial philosophy.

Thus three weeks passed. During this period the band grew steadily stronger. Jack reckoned that it now numbered at least eleven hundred. The rains having ceased, the camp was moved some twenty miles to the north-west, not in a direct line to Moukden, but nearer to that city. To Jack this was a crumb of comfort; but there were disadvantages in the change, for with the finer weather and the removal to somewhat lower ground, the midges and mosquitoes became more lively and troublesome, and he spent many a hot hour of pain and smart.

Another fortnight went by. The Chunchuses had been inactive so far as brigandage was concerned, and, except that they did no work, they might have been nothing but a peaceful mountain tribe. But one day a deputation came to the chief from a village lying in the midst of a woody and well-cultivated valley a few

miles from the camp. They announced that their plantations of young bamboos were being devastated by a herd of wild boars with which they were unable to cope, and they had been deputed to beg the Chunchuse chief to come to their assistance. Ah Lum was never unwilling to please the country people when he saw a chance of gaining a substantial advantage. "Let no man," he would say, "despise the snake that has no horns, for who can say that it may not become a dragon?" Food was running short, and but for the deputation it was probable that some fine night the village would have been raided and plundered. But the request for assistance opened the way for a deal; Ah Lum consented to organize a battue in return for a large supply of food and fodder; and after half a day had been spent in haggling, the deputation returned, promising to send in the quantity first demanded.

The chief was exceedingly pleased.

"Do not rashly provoke quarrels, but let concord and good understanding prevail among neighbours. Seeing an opportunity to make a bargain, one should think of righteousness."

Jack welcomed the impending hunt as a pleasant change, and appeared to gratify the chief when he asked to be allowed to join in it. As a diversion from the sugared sweetness of Tennyson, he bethought himself to teach Ah Fu Fielding's fine song "A-hunting we will go"; and when the boy learnt the meaning of the words, he was all afire to share in the chase. Ah Lum was pleased with his spirit; but being unwilling that his only son should run any risk, he at first declined his request. The boy persisted, pointing out that he was already a good shot, and asking what was the good of his learning poems of hunting if he was not allowed to express in action the ardour thus fostered. This argument appealed to the chief's sense of the fitness of things; he would have agreed with Socrates that action was the end of heroic poetry; he yielded, stipulating, however, that throughout the hunt the boy should remain at his side.

Jack soon found that the hunt was not to be conducted on the lines of pig-sticking in India. He remembered the vivid account of such an adventure given him by a Behar planter whom he had once met on board a steamer between Shanghai and Newchang. Nor were the animals to be caught in artfully-contrived pits, as is the custom in Manchuria. The chief was ignorant of the Indian method, and was possessed of too strong a sporting instinct to be content with the work of a trapper; it was to be a real hunt, as he understood it. The cover in which the boars were known to lurk was about a square mile in extent. Ah Lum intended to take advantage of the large force at his disposal and arrange for beaters to drive the animals to a comparatively open space, at the end of which he and a select few would take up their positions and shoot down the boars as they emerged from cover. This seemed likely to be a safe way of effecting the desired object;

and though not sport in the British sense, it would at any rate make some demand on their nerve and their marksmanship.

The important day came. On a bright fresh morning, soon after the sun had gilded the hilltops, when the air was clear and a cool breeze tempered the summer heat, Ah Lum, accompanied by seven of his best marksmen and by Ah Fu and Jack, rode down to skirt the base of the hill and gain the northern side of the clearing to which the boars were to be driven. Jack had been provided with a rifle and a long knife; his pupil rode at his side, armed with a carbine; and very proudly the boy bore himself. At the foot of the hill the party were met by some of the villagers, come to guide them to their destination. When they reached the spot they found that the clearing was about a furlong across, with thin plantations behind them and on either side, and in front a mass of dense, almost impenetrable scrub interspersed with trees.

The party of ten took up their position in line facing the scrub, standing a few feet apart; Ah Lum was in the centre, with the boy on his left, and Jack one place farther in the same direction. Jack felt that if the Manchurian boar was anything like the Indian specimen of which his planter friend had told him, the party might have a lively time should two or three of the beasts break cover at the same moment, especially if they should charge down through the plantations on left and right. The Chunchuses, however, were evidently secure in their numbers and the stopping power of their military rifles.

The beaters, nearly a thousand strong, had been sent to their allotted positions earlier in the morning. They formed a rough semicircle more than two miles in length. When all was ready, the chief sent a horseman to the farthest point with orders to begin the beat. The clang of a gong soon rang out in the still morning air; immediately the sound was taken up all along the arc; drums, gongs, rattles, shrill yells combined to form a pandemonium of noise. Flocks of birds clattered out of the tree-tops and flew in consternation over the country; hares and rabbits darted out of the underwood as the beaters closed in; a fox or two, even a wolf, came padding out, stopped at the edge, gave a glance at the line of men, and disappeared on either side. All these passed unmolested; the ten stood in silent expectation, ready to bring their weapons to the shoulder.

Suddenly from the centre of the scrub pounded with lowered tusks a large boar. He had advanced some yards into the open before he was aware of the ten human figures ranged opposite to him. Then, swerving heavily to the left, he trotted towards the plantation. At the same moment two shots rang out as one; the chief and his son had fired together, the others waiting in courtesy. Ah Lum, for all his spectacles, his poetry, and his sentences, was an excellent shot; the boar fell within a yard of the trees; the chief's bullet had penetrated his brain.

Hardly had the smoke cleared away when two other boars appeared at

different parts of the scrub. Eight rifles flashed; the boar to the right fell; but the other, unhurt, instead of making towards safety in the plantation, dashed straight across the open. As by a miracle it survived a volley from the whole party of ten, and had come within twenty yards of them before it was struck mortally and rolled over. The hunters, their attention fixed on the gallant beast that had just succumbed, did not notice that he was followed at a few yards by a huge tusker, the glare of whose red eyes sent a thrill through one at least of the party. Dashing at headlong speed through the plantation almost in a line with the hunters, the boar came on unswervingly, heedless of a scattering fire. The hunters impeded each other; Ah Lum and the men on his right could hardly fire as they stood without hitting their companions. There was a moment's hesitation; then the chief, with a cry to his boy to run, stepped calmly to the front, preparing to fire at a range of only a few yards. But one of his men on the left, in a nervous anxiety born of the emergency, rushed forward, and, stumbling against his leader, spoilt his aim. The shot flew wide. The unfortunate man paid dearly for his clumsiness. In another moment the boar was among the party, making frantic rushes, ripping and tearing with his formidable tusks, his bloodshot eyes glaring with the concentrated fury which only a wounded boar can express. Several shots were fired, but the beast's movements were so rapid that they either missed him, or, hitting him at a non-fatal spot, served only still further to infuriate him. The inexperienced hunters, indeed, were in greater danger than the boar from each other's firearms. They hesitated in confusion, moving this way and that to avoid each other; then, in a sudden panic, several of them took to their heels and made for the shelter of the trees.

But Ah Fu stood his ground, as though fascinated. His father and Jack perceived at the same moment that the boar in desperate and vengeful rage was heading straight for the boy, who held his carbine at the slant, looking on as at some fearful thrilling spectacle. Ah Lum and Jack, separated from the boy in their movements for securing good aim, sprang to his assistance. But before they could reach his side the beast was upon him. Awake to his danger, the little fellow raised his carbine to his shoulder and fired almost point-blank; but the Russian service bullet has no stopping power to check a wild boar in full career; the boy was toppled over, receiving a gash in the leg from the mighty tusk. Then the animal wheeled in his tracks to pursue his vengeance. Jack's rifle was empty; even if it had been loaded he could hardly have fired without running the risk of hitting the boy. The chief was still a few yards away, he, too, rendered helpless by the same appalling danger. Jack saw that in an instant his little pupil, now gamely struggling to his feet, must be gored to death. Dropping his rifle, he drew his knife, and flung himself upon the blinded, maddened brute, driving the weapon between its shoulders. So great was his impetus that he stumbled full across the

boar, which, intent upon its purpose, struggled on a foot or two, staggering under the blow, but making light of Jack's weight. Even as Jack was wondering whether his stroke had failed, the beast uttered a long squealing grunt, fell on its knees, then rolled over stone-dead within a few inches of Ah Fu.

Jack saves Ah Fu

Jack saves Ah Fu

The chief caught the boy in his arms and held him in a warm embrace; the runaway Chunchuses, no more boars being visible, came dropping back from the plantations; and Jack, his coat covered with blood, rose panting from the back of

the victim.

CHAPTER X
The Hired Man

Gratitude—On Humanity—A Broken Thread—The Hill Country—Nearing Moukden—The Compradore—News at Last—Sowinski's Address—Burnt Offerings—A Little Black Box—Toitshe!—Pidgin—Excellence—Herr Schwab—Photographabbaratus

After the rescue of Ah Fu, Jack stood in a new relationship to Ah Lum. The boy was the apple of the chief's eye; nothing was too good for his deliverer. When the party reached camp after the memorable adventure, Ah Lum paraded his whole band, and, his voice broken by unwonted emotion, proclaimed the Englishman his friend. In all such moments of ceremony the literary man, the university graduate, appeared through the brigand chief. After reciting the heroic deed in the flowery language a scholarly Chinaman always has at command, he continued:

"Forgetfulness of a favour received is a sure sign of a bad heart. Let me speak in a similitude. A man is on a long journey; his money is all spent; he is destitute, far from home, without friends, and perishing from want. To him comes a stranger whose goodness of heart leads him to present the wanderer with a few hundred cash, thereby preserving his life. Should he afterwards see this man, his benefactor, ought he not to make some expression of gratitude? It is a common saying, if we receive from others a favour like a drop of water, the return should be as an overflowing fountain. How much more when a man snatches from death a male child! Does not the Sage say: 'The three greatest misfortunes in life are: in youth to bury one's father; at the middle age to lose one's wife; and, being old, to have no son'? Heaven has already afflicted me with the first and the second of these tribulations; the honourable foreigner by his magnanimous courage has spared me the last. It is a true saying, 'The brave act like tigers, not like mice'. Some of you, to the shame of your ancestors, acted like mice; the Ingoua leapt forth like a tiger and saved my pearl from the snout. He is my friend; whosoever does him a service does a greater service to me. As the Poet says:

"'The Spring that feeds the Mountain Rill
Helps the great River to grow greater still'."

Making allowances for the chief's surcharged emotion, Jack felt that there could be no longer any obstacle to his departure. Ah Lum, indeed, was torn between two impulses. He wished to keep by his side the youth who had shown that he could not only teach English poetry, but display courage and readiness in a moment of danger. He wished also to show his gratitude practically, and knew that he could do so in no more acceptable way than by furthering Jack's search for his father. After a night of indecision his generosity prevailed; he called Jack into his tent, and promised, if he still wished to go, to do all that he could to help him. But he pointed out that it would be very dangerous for him to venture into Moukden. There were both the Chinese and the Russians to reckon with. As for the former, he could furnish Jack with a pass which would probably secure him from molestation; but if it were found upon him by the Russians, it would in itself be sufficient to hang him. Jack, however, felt that there was little chance of tracing his father except by beginning at Moukden and working along the railway, and he once more expressed his unalterable determination to face whatever risks this course might involve.

Ah Lum then settled down to a serious discussion of ways and means. He agreed that Jack's best plan would be to try his luck again as a Chinaman; but not this time as a Cantonese; there were too many Cantonese about. It would be better to pass as a native of one of the interior provinces, such as Sz-chuen. The dialect was not likely to be known to anyone in Moukden, so that the matter of speech would not be a difficulty. He might be supposed to have come down the Yang-tse-kiang on river boats, and to have drifted to Manchuria with an Ingoua; the Ingoua, as every Chinaman knew, were great travellers; this would explain his knowledge of pidgin English.

The chief spoke with great simplicity and earnestness; evidently he was sincerely anxious on Jack's behalf. It was only at the end of the conversation that he reverted to his academic manner.

"Prudence," he reminded Jack, "is what is most necessary to be cultivated by the young. Your path will be beset with perils; a chance word may be your undoing. When you converse in the road, remember there are men in the grass. For myself, I am old enough to be your father; this and my affection must be my excuse for offering words of advice. What says the proverb? 'In a melon-patch, do not stoop down to arrange your shoes; under a plum-tree, do not lift your hand to adjust your cap.'"

Jack knew from experience that, being fairly mounted on his hobby, the

chief could not easily be stopped, and settled himself to listen in patience.

"There are three things mainly to strive for: filial piety, that is the most important; integrity; and humanity. Let us take the last first. Humanity is among the greatest of the virtues. If a man wish to attain the excellence of superior beings, let him cultivate the attributes of humanity. They include benevolence, charity, clemency——"

At this moment a voice was heard at the entrance: "The august decree is fulfilled."

The curtain was parted, and there entered the chief's second in command, a big ferocious-looking fellow, holding up to Jack's horrified gaze two ghastly blood-stained human heads. Ah Lum looked at the hideous objects with unmoved countenance.

"That is well," he said. "Affix them on poles, and set them in the centre of the camp, with this scroll in large characters from the poet P'an T'ang-she'n:

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

The incident interrupted the chief's homily before his first heading was developed. The flow of his ideas seemed broken, for on the departure of his lieutenant he turned the conversation into another channel.

Jack afterwards learnt that the unfortunate wretches decapitated were two members of the band who had stolen fowls from a farmer. Since robbery was a principal reason of the Chunchuses' existence, Jack was amazed at such an offence meeting with so terrible a punishment, until he heard that the farmer thus robbed had purchased immunity from Ah Lum by a gift of fodder, and the chief was inexorably merciless to any who were guilty, or who made him appear guilty, of a breach of faith. Jack was now convinced, if he had not been before, that Ah Lum was no mere spectacled pedant.

One fine morning Jack set off on his long journey to Moukden. His appearance was indistinguishable from that of a well-to-do Manchu. Every detail of his costume was correct, from the round black hat and glossy pigtail to the cloth boots with white felt soles. He was mounted on a good pony, and accompanied by a trusty Chunchuse. Ah Fu shed tears at parting; Ah Lum and Wang Shih were undisguisedly sorry to lose him, and the former indeed declared his willingness at any time to welcome him back, and even to give him a command in his band. Jack thanked him warmly, pressed his closed fists to his breast in Chinese salutation, and rode away.

It was nearly a thousand li—more than 300 miles—from the camp to Mouk-

den; not as the crow flies, for in that country of forest, mountain, and river a straight course is impossible. The traveller has to proceed by pack roads, to ford streams deep and swift, to ascend and descend rugged forest-clad slopes; and if his journey is timed in the rainy season he suffers inconveniences and perils without number. It was fortunate for Jack that the rains were not so persistent and continuous this year as is sometimes the case. He was delayed at one or two stages of his journey by thunder-storms and swollen rivers; but, thanks to his guide, who knew the country perfectly, he was able to cover an average of about twenty-five miles a day. At another time nothing would have delighted him more than to take things easily, for he passed through some of the most magnificent scenery in the world, a country teeming with game of all kinds, and dotted at out-of-the-way spots with interesting monuments. But, determined to reach Moukden as soon as possible, he was not to be allured by the cry of pheasants or the trails of the tiger and the deer.

Furthermore, unequipped for such travelling as attracts the globe-trotter, he found the inevitable discomforts of the route somewhat trying to his patience. On fine days he was plagued for hours at a time by myriads of midges, which swarmed about his head, biting with fiendish ferocity. But his own sufferings were slight in comparison with his pony's. From sunrise to sunset huge gadflies infested the poor animal, settling upon its tough hide, and piercing it till the beast was streaming with blood. Jack spent the greater part of the day in smashing the terrible insects with his whip, slaying hundreds and still leaving hundreds unslain. The nights also were times of torment. Putting up at some inn, he had to pass the hours in a crowded room, sealed up to prevent the ingress of midges, filled with smoke and the sickening odours of stewed pork and rancid vegetables. He slept on the k'ang, sometimes wedged in among a crowd of natives by no means too clean, never knowing but that he might have the dangerous company of an adder before the morning. He had to put up with such food as the inn afforded, mostly Chinese pork and salted eggs, with an occasional bonne bouche in the way of a trout when there happened to be Korean fishermen in the neighbourhood. But night by night he rejoiced in the completion of another good stage of his journey; and, thanks to his prudence and the clever management of his guide, he aroused no suspicions, and was accepted as a native, morose and uncompanionable indeed, but excused as being a wanderer from a distant province.

At length, on the fourteenth day after leaving the Chunchuse camp, the two travellers reached a village some twelve miles from Moukden. They were squatting at dinner in an inn when a detachment of Cossacks rode up, in the course of a foraging expedition. Jack felt a little anxious as they entered, but to them he was a mere Chinaman like the rest; he escaped notice, yet was relieved

when they rode off in the direction of Moukden. When they were well on their way he suggested to his guide that it would be good policy to follow hard on their heels; entering the city in their wake he might hope to pass without attracting special attention.

It was late in the day, near the time for the closing of the gates, when the Cossacks approached the city. To Jack's disappointment, instead of entering they rode off to the north-west, in the direction of the railway. He thought it advisable to put up in a little hamlet some two miles from the walls and wait till morning. There was sure to be a considerable crowd of country people awaiting the opening of the gates, and in the crush he was likely to pass unrecognized. Early in the morning, therefore, he took leave of the Chunchuse and turned his pony's head towards Moukden. Though outwardly calm, he had many an inward tremor as he joined the crowd of people—labourers, farmers with carts loaded with beans, drovers with black pigs, women with fowls and geese slung round their necks—a miscellaneous throng, all too intent on their business, however, to give more than a passing glance to a rider hardly distinguishable from themselves.

The gates were thrown open, and Jack passed through with the rest, feeling tolerably secure now that he was at last within the walls. Turning off from the main road, he made his way by narrow and tortuous alleys to the street where the compradore lived in his cottage at the foot of Mr. Brown's garden. The man was smoking at the door, and his son Hi Lo was playing at knuckle-stones on the ground near him. Jack reined up and dismounted, saying nothing at first in order to test the efficacy of his disguise. The compradore looked up, but did not recognize him. The boy was quicker. At the first glance he jumped up, ran to his father, and whispered in his ear. The man started, kowtowed, then, looking hurriedly and anxiously around and up and down the street, invited Jack to enter. When the door was shut he expressed his delight at seeing his young master once more. He had heard from his brother at Harbin of the successful stratagem by which Jack had managed to start for Vladivostok, but, knowing what risks the journey involved, he had ever since been fearful lest some harm should have befallen him.

"I have had some narrow escapes," said Jack, "but here I am, you see, safe and sound. I'll tell you all about it by and by; but first tell me, Mr. Hi, have you discovered anything about my father?"

The compradore's face fell as he related the result of his enquiries. A Chinaman once in Mr. Brown's employment had been working at the railway-station at Shuang-miao-tzü, about half-way between Moukden and Harbin, when, on a siding in an open truck, among a crowd of malefactors in chains, he had been amazed to recognize his former master. The truck had remained there for two days; the man had tried to get speech with Mr. Brown, but in vain. By ques-

tioning and comparing notes Jack came to the conclusion that this was the very truck he had seen from the window of the train on his way to Harbin. His blood boiled at the recollection of the miserable wretches and the thought that his father was among them; he felt an insane desire to rush off at once and confront General Bekovitch with the discovery; but he knew how fatal such a step would be; and after an explosion of wrath which he could not control, and at which Hi An looked on with every mark of sympathy, he regained his composure, and, recognizing that there was no hope save in patience, settled down to discuss his future course of action. He knew full well that an unlucky accident might at any time put an end to his quest and perhaps his life, and resolved that so far as in him lay he would not fail through lack of caution.

After the first moment of relief and happiness at seeing Jack again, the compradore showed himself seriously concerned for his young master's safety. If he were detected by the Russians he ran the risk of being shot as a spy. His disguise was perfect; Moukden was probably the last place where his enemies would expect to find him; but while the Russians were in possession there would always be found Chinamen ready to curry favour with them, and earn a little cash. After some discussion it was arranged that the compradore should give out that Jack was a distant relative from Sz-chuen, and Hi An himself suggested that he should feign illness for a time until his future movements could be carefully thought out.

"I shall want a name," said Jack with a smile. "What can you call me?"

"Sin Foo, master. I had a nephew of that name; he is dead, poor boy; it is a good name."

"Very well. Now we must make further enquiries along the line to see what has become of that truck. I have plenty of money; the flour we expected came safely to Vladivostok, and I sold it. You have friends you can employ?"

"Yes. But it will take a long time."

"Of course. I wish I could go up the line myself. Is it impossible?"

"You must not think of it, master. If it were known that questions were being asked about an Englishman arrested by the Russians, suspicion would be awakened, and what could you say if you were caught? No, leave it to my countrymen; they will know exactly how to enquire, without seeming too curious. As for you, it is best to remain in Moukden, and wait until we get more news."

"I'm afraid you are right. Well, let it be so for the present. Tell me, is Sowinski in the city?"

"Yes, he is living in your father's house."

At that Jack fired up again. Red with anger he strode up and down the room, itching to do something, yet feeling all the time his helplessness. Then he checked himself with a laugh.

"I'll never do for a Chinaman," he said, "if I show temper so easily. You must teach me to fix my face, Mr. Hi."

"Yes, master," said the compradore seriously. "I will buy a little image of Buddha, and put it in a corner of the room. If you look at it for two hours every day your face will be as calm as a still pool."

The compradore's house was very small, and before a week was out Jack was terribly sick of being cooped up in it from morning till night. Only after dark, when the quarter was quiet—and that was at a very late hour, for when Chinamen start playing fan-tan it becomes a trial of endurance—only then did the compradore think it safe for his guest to issue forth for a breath of air. The proximity of Sowinski was itself a danger. Moreover, his acquaintances, among them Sowinski's Chinese servants, were becoming curious. It was impossible to harbour a stranger long in secret; for a couple of days the story of a sick cousin passed muster, but the compradore had omitted to state the nature of the illness, and his friends began to enquire whether they might not be allowed to see the sick man and join Hi An himself in the charms and exorcisms proper to cure him. Thus pushed into a corner, the worthy man drank in their sight the ashes of burnt yellow paper, and whispered that he feared his relative was sickening for a fever; it would not be safe to admit visitors. He was about to sacrifice to the divinities on the sick man's behalf; and, taking his courage in both hands, he invited a number of his friends to accompany him.

Jack rolled with laughter when he afterwards learnt what had happened. His amusement was all the greater because the compradore was so obviously ill at ease lest he should have incurred the displeasure of the divinities by sacrificing for a man who was not ill. Professing to be not quite sure of the disease, he had gone first to the roadside shrine of his Excellency the Small-Pox and burnt incense there; then to the Honourable Divinity the Plague; finally, to make short work of it and cover all imaginable complaints, he had proceeded to the deity known as Mr. Imperfect-In-Every-Part-Of-His-Body, a hideous idol with sore eyes, hare-lip, and ulcerated legs. Convinced now that the travelled relative must be in a desperately bad state, the inquisitive neighbours gave a wide berth to Hi An, and no longer desired to cross his threshold.

But when a week had passed, Jack, finding his inactivity intolerable, came to the conclusion that it would really be safer if he moved about a little. The neighbourhood would expect to be invited either to his funeral or to a feast in celebration of his recovery, and the talk that would ensue when neither event happened might develop danger both for himself and for his host. One evening the compradore, on returning home, chanced to mention that during the day he had been asked by a foreign war-correspondent if he could recommend a servant. The stranger already had a capable mafoo, or groom, but this man had absolutely

refused to carry or have anything to do with a little black box on which his master set great store, and the foreigner had met with the same refusal from every native to whom he applied. Hi An himself was somewhat amused at the situation. Having served Mr. Brown for so many years, and in so many different places, including the southern treaty ports, he was well aware that the black box was a harmless photographic camera: had not Master Jack himself possessed one in Shanghai? But the Moukden natives, not yet accustomed to the kodak of the globe-trotter, were convinced that the mysterious box was choke-full of little black devils impatiently waiting for any confiding Chinaman simple enough to be lured within their influence. The correspondent, being somewhat stout and far from active, was loth to carry the camera himself, and had almost resigned himself to the dead-lock.

"Poor fellow!" said Jack, laughing. "How did you come across him, Mr. Hi?"

The compradore explained that the correspondent appeared to be a business connection of Mr. Brown's, for he had tried to find the merchant when he arrived in Moukden some weeks before, and was greatly disappointed and distressed when he learnt what had happened.

"How should I suit?" said Jack, as an idea struck him.

"Ch'hoy!" exclaimed the compradore. "Master a servant?"

"Why not? I should be able to move about then; as the servant of a European I should run less risk of being suspected either by Russians or Chinese than if I were a masterless man; and I might—the chance is small, but still it is a chance—I might come upon some trace of my father if attached to a foreign correspondent, whose duties will surely take him from place to place."

"But, master, a servant! And to a foreigner; not even a Yinkelis or a Melican man, but a Toitsche! Ch'hoy!"

There was a world of contempt in the Chinaman's tone. To the average Chinaman all "foreign devils" are alike; only those whose business brings them into relations with Europeans recognize degrees.

"I know you don't like the Germans; but what does it matter, Mr. Hi? A German is less likely to see through my disguise than an Englishman. Besides, of a hundred virtues, filial piety is the best. You know the maxim?"

The compradore scratched his head. He found these ideas difficult to reconcile. But after some further talk he yielded, and promised to go to the correspondent early next morning and offer the services of Sin Foo, a young man whose honesty and industry he could guarantee.

A little before noon next day he returned. The correspondent was delighted with the prospect of engaging a suitable man, but must see the candidate first. He was living with a number of other correspondents at the Green Dragon Hotel, and wished to see Sin Foo at once.

"Is Monsieur Brin there?" asked Jack instantly.

"No, master. He went to Harbin a week ago. He was very sad."

"Lucky for me! Then we'll go at once, Mr. Hi."

The neighbours had already been prepared to see Hi An's relative out-of-doors at last; the application to Mr. Imperfect-In-Every-Part-Of-His-Body had been abundantly successful. Most of them were engaged in their usual occupations at that time of day, and Jack attracted little notice as he walked through the streets at Hi An's side. At the hotel he was presented to a short, corpulent German, wearing gold spectacles and a battered wide-awake, and smoking a huge pipe.

"He belongey Sin Foo," said Hi An.

Jack made the kowtow in the most approved style. The German looked him up and down.

"So!" he said. "You been servant before?"

"Suttingly," replied Jack, remembering his fagging days at school.

"So! You strong?"

"My plenty stlong, masta!"

"Not afraid of little box?"

"No fea'! My cally littee box this-side, that-side, allo-side, all-same."

"Goot! You are shust ze man I seek. Now to fix ze so imbortant business of vages. Business are business. Vat you say to ten yen—ach! I zink still I am in Japan: vat say you to ten dollar per mensem—ze monce?"

"Allo-lightee—" began Jack, but the compradore interposed.

"Ch'hoy! Ten piecee dollar! Ph'ho! My hab catchee Sin Foo—one piecee first-chop man; he numpa one boy; my fetchee he this-side; no can makee pidgin so-fashion for littee bittee cash. Sin Foo, come wailo chop-chop; folin genelum no savvy pidgin China-side fashion."

The compradore's intervention showed Jack that he must needs exercise every care if he was to play his part properly. To have accepted the German's first offer without bargaining would have betrayed him to any travelled man. After an hour's discussion an arrangement was concluded between the stranger and Hi An. Sin Foo was to have nothing else to do but to take charge of the photographic apparatus. The terms agreed upon were so high that the German declared that he must dismiss his mafoo and engage a cheaper man. Whereupon the compradore suggested Hi Lo to fill the place, and Jack regarded the opportunity as almost a special providence, for he had been dreading the discomforts and dangers that might arise from enforced companionship with a Chinese mafoo. With Hi Lo for a fellow-servant, however, he need fear neither danger nor discomfort, and he was pleased when the German accepted the boy, but at ridiculously low wages.

Jack was to enter upon his duties at once. As soon as the compradore had

gone to fetch Hi Lo, the German took the opportunity to explain who and what he was.

"I cannot shpeak your bidgin talk," he said. "You understan' blain English, boy?"

"My savvy littee bit Yinkelis; my tly understan' masta—he talkee Yinkelis first-chop."

"Ver' vell. Now you call me Excellenz; you can say zat?"

"No, not a bit of it."

The phrase slipped out before Jack could check it. Luckily the German was not aware of the *lapsus linguae*.

"Zat is not bolite English; you should say, 'No, sir, I am sorry, or I regret, zat I cannot say Excellenz.' Vell, can you call me 'mein Herr-r-r'?"

"He no belongey lightee China-side. My no can talkee so-fashion. China boy tly; he say 'mine hell'."

"Ach!" grunted the German. "Zat vill nefer do, not at all. But I cannot vaste ze time to egsblain. You must zen call me—master. Ver' vell. Now, my name is Schwab—Hildebrand Schwab." Jack suddenly remembered the letter his father had shown him on the day before the arrest; this, then, was the representative of Schlagintwert & Co. and correspondent of the *Illustrirte Vaterland und Colonien*. "And remember zis," continued Schwab. "If you meet any man vat vant Birmingham screw, Manchester soft goots, Viltshire bacon, or hair-oil, superfine, you vill let me know at vunce—at vunce. Ven ze var is ofer I shall do goot business in all zose zinks—ja, and many more. It is only in var zat I am gorresbondent; in beace I rebresent ze solid firma Schlagintwert Gombany of Düsseldorf. You understan'?"

"Allo lightee, Herr."

"Ver' goot, ver' goot inteed. You say it not so bad. Now I tell you ozer zink. I haf come at great egsbense from San Francisco to take photographs of ze scenes of var. I am already some veeks here, vaiting, vaiting, for bermission to go to ze front. You understan'? At last it come. I haf it now in my pockett. How do I get it? Ach! it vas qvite simble. Ven I am tired of vaiting, I go to Herr Oberst Pesteech, bresscensor, and I say: 'Your servant, noble sir; Hildebrand Schwab. Entweder you give me ze bermission to see zis var business, or I vire to our Kaiser who is in Berlin. At Berlin, and viz ze Kaiser, business are business.' Zat is ze vay I shpeak. So I return to my hotel: siehe da! ze bermission is already zere. Zat vere business. Ver' vell. Now I tell you vat ve do. To-morrow ve go to ze front, vere ze var is. You vill haf ze camera; you vill assist me to make my photographs. I vill learn you how. And give notice, boy, zat I am not bermitted to photograph ze bositions of ze Russian army; nor Russian troops on ze march; nor Russian troops in action, egzept I get anozer bermission from ze Russian general. Vat is zat for a kind of bermission I do not say. Zerefore you vill take photographs ven

I tell you, and no ozer time. You understan'?"

"Savvy allo masta talkee; my tinkey velly nice."

"So; come zen viz me; I vill learn you ze—ze—ze control of ze photographabbaratus."

CHAPTER XI
War-Look-See

Schwab is Shocked—Snapshots—The Coming Battle—To Liao-yang—Schwab's Opportunity—Carpe Diem—Suobensius—Shimose—Last Wishes—Stackelberg—Something Accomplished—Rhapsody—Two-Piece Pony

That night Jack shared a tiny room with Hi Lo. The boy had become accustomed to see his master in Chinese dress, but the situation was entirely changed now that he had to regard him as an equal and address him as Sin Foo. Jack impressed on the little fellow that everything depended on his caution—Jack's own safety, and the prosecution of his quest; and Hi Lo showed a quite painful anxiety to behave with discretion and yet with naturalness.

Next day Schwab spent several hours in explaining to Jack, not too lucidly, the working of the camera; the development of the negatives he reserved for himself. Then he prepared to sally forth to make a few experiments. An American correspondent, standing with his hands in his pockets at the door of the little Chinese hotel, observed Jack as he passed.

"Hello, Schwab!" he shouted. "Caught a Tartar at last, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Vanzant—if zat is not a shoke. Zis man is not afraid—he gif sign of modicum of intelligence; I zink he vill do."

"I guess he will do for your camera; well, so long!"

Walking out of the city, Schwab set Jack to take photographs of a few prominent objects—the Temple of Earth beyond the eastern gate, the Tomb of Wen-Hsiang, the statesman who rose from being a table-boy to the highest official appointments, Dr. Christie's Hospital, where the little Scots doctor had dispensed the blessings of Western surgery and medicine to thousands of grateful patients. Schwab was delighted with Sin Foo's rapid progress; it amazed him.

"Truly I zink ze Manchu is not such a fool as he look," he said.

"My plenty muchee glad masta likee Sin Fool," said Jack gravely.

"Ach! You do so vell zat to-morrow ve go to take var pictures. Zere vill soon be a great battle; ze Russians shall at last do goot business."

In the afternoon they went up to the railway-station to see if seats could be booked in next morning's train, Jack carrying the camera in case anything of interest should offer. The station was crowded. For many days troops had been passing towards the south; the platform was now thronged with soldiers, surgeons, nurses, camp-followers. Schwab was amazed, his German sense of discipline was shocked, to see colonels walking arm in arm with lieutenants; still more when he noticed a placard stuck up in the buffet, signed by General Sakharoff, threatening with dire punishment any officer who should presume to criticise his superiors or their conduct of the operations. He was disgusted also to observe, in a siding, a superb dining-room car in which a company of officers and ladies were eating and drinking with a light-hearted gaiety that ill matched the occasion, if the rumours of the stupendous battle approaching were well founded.

"You, Sin Foo," said Schwab, "I tell you zis; zat is not var. Zat is not ze vay ve Gairmans shall behave ourselves ven ve go to invade England; zen you vill see var zat *is* var. You understan'?"

Seeing little probability of obtaining a seat in the train, Schwab decided to return to the hotel and journey south on ponies.

As they left the station a number of Russian soldiers who had just marched in were lying dead-beat in a sort of trench parallel with a siding. A troop train was being slowly made up, doubtless to convey these and other men southward to the front. Schwab stood contemplating them for a moment. Then he turned to Jack.

"Boy, upfix ze camera; ve vill take schnapshot of zese men."

"Allo lightee, masta," replied Jack, wondering at the German's choice of a subject. He was to be enlightened on that point later.

It was late in the day by the time they reached the city. Passing along the principal street, they saw a crowd of natives hurrying down a side alley uttering piercing shouts. Jack noticed that two or three of them had buckets suspended from the ends of a long bamboo pole carried on the shoulder.

"My tinkey house hab catchee fia."

"A gonflagration in Moukden! Zat vill be ver' interesting to ze abonnenten of my baber. Ve vill take it on ze hop."

Schwab led the way, his tall bulky form making a path through the crowd. A pawn-shop was ablaze. The roof had already fallen in. Siberian infantrymen were trying to keep order in the crowd—hundreds of Chinamen yelling, jostling each other, going hither and thither with their buckets, splashing through the mud. Many of them were laughing uproariously; to the Chinaman a fire is

purely a spectacle, to be enjoyed without any disturbing sympathy for the victims, whose efforts to save themselves and their goods are greeted as the most enjoyable farce. Some of the crowd were waving bright-coloured flags; in the glare from the burning house it was like a scene from a country fair. Here and there Chinamen were squirting feeble and futile jets of water on the house from tiny copper pumps, like the syringes used at home for watering flowers. An old mandarin in yellow silk forced his way through the press, paying no heed to the fire, anxious only to get home without soiling his white socks. But the throng was becoming unwieldy; there was danger of the whole quarter being set ablaze; and at last a Russian captain came up with a squad of men at the request of the Chinese Viceroy himself, and set about clearing the street in a business-like way. For a few minutes the confusion seemed redoubled; the Chinamen scampered this way and that as the Russians came at the double along the street. This moment was seized by Schwab, who evidently had a keen eye for a tableau. At his bidding Jack took a snap-shot of the strange scene—a scene that would have been appropriate to the stage of a comic opera. Then he returned with his employer to the Green Dragon. The correspondents there—French, Italian, English, and American—were in the bustle of preparation for moving out next day to Liaoyang, where a big battle was expected to take place.

Jack, it must be confessed, was considerably excited at the prospect of seeing something at close quarters of this terrible war, which had brought forth so many surprises for the world. Hitherto he had seen nothing but its fringe; and of the many contradictory rumours he had heard he was not disposed to believe too much. The Russian officers with whom he had talked were divided into two classes: the partisans of Alexeieff and those of Kuropatkin. The majority pinned their faith to Kuropatkin. If he had been left alone, they said, the war would have followed an entirely different course. He would have waited patiently at Harbin until his army had been raised to overwhelming strength; then he would have taken the offensive and driven the Japanese into the sea. But his strategy had been dictated either by Alexeieff or from St. Petersburg. Worse than that, he had not been able to devote his whole energies to the proper work of a commander-in-chief. That in itself was a stupendous task for one man, afflicted with a poor staff. But the general had been compelled to attend to details of commissariat, hospital arrangements, the supply of clothes, the preparation of maps. His was a harassing struggle against corruption, incompetence, and drunkenness. Once, alighting at a railway-station to make an inspection, he found the platform strewn with intoxicated officers. With a burst of anger, unusual in a man habitually patient and calm, he ordered the wretched men to be sent on by the first train to the front.

What had been the course of the war since that memorable May day when the invading army crossed the Yalu? General Kuroki's brilliant dash was followed

by several weeks of what to the outside world seemed comparative inaction. But during that period both sides were straining every nerve: the Russians to hurry forward reinforcements and complete the great fortified positions along the railway; the Japanese to perfect the arrangements for the three great armies which were, first, to cut off Port Arthur, and then to move northwards against the main Russian forces concentrating in the neighbourhood of Liao-yang. General Stackelberg having failed at Wa-fang-ho in his forlorn hope against the army investing Port Arthur, the northward movement of the Japanese was slowly resumed, the Russian right being steadily driven back along the railway with occasional half-hearted attempts to stem the Japanese advance. Meanwhile General Kuroki on the east had forced the mountain passes at Motien-ling, and General Nodzu, in command of the centre, was preparing for the attack on the Russian position at To-ma-shan that resulted in the evacuation of Hai-cheng. The beginning of August found the three Japanese armies relentlessly driving the Russian forces towards the fortified positions south of Liao-yang which General Kuropatkin had prepared as the scene of his first serious attempt to roll back the tide of invasion.

It was a warm, dry morning, the 29th of August, when Schwab, Jack, and Hi Lo, mounted on hardy ponies, hit the Green Dragon for their forty miles ride to Liao-yang.

Just before they reached the gate, Jack had an exceedingly uncomfortable moment when he noticed his father's enemy Sowinski hurrying in the opposite direction in a Pekin cart. The Pole passed without recognizing the tall figure in Chinese dress, though he gave a nod to Schwab. Jack knew that to the European all Chinamen look pretty much alike; but he did not wish to come to too close quarters with the Pole, and was glad that for a time at any rate he would run no risk of being recognized in the streets.

The rains had ceased some days before; the wind was beginning to dry the mud which in the wet season renders all traffic impossible. The other correspondents had already gone to the front, and when our riders left the mud walls of Moukden behind them they saw nobody on the road except a regiment of Cossacks marching off behind their band, and a number of Greek camp-followers going south in the hope of reaping some profit from the battle.

As they approached Liao-yang they heard the dull boom of guns in the distance. For several days the three Japanese armies under Generals Kuroki, Oku, and Nodzu had been marching through mountain passes and the valleys opening upon the Tai-tse-ho, and the Russians had been falling back on the circular line of defences which for three months they had been strengthening. As he heard the thunderous reverberations, Schwab exulted.

"So!" he exclaimed, "I haf vaited long time. At last my obbortunity haf come. Zis are business. Ze *Illustrirte Vaterland und Colonien* shall haf fine bictures

taken egsbress by a Gairman viz native assistance on ze sbot. Famos!"

Liao-yang is a walled city lying on the direct road from Moukden to Newchang and Port Arthur, and even more picturesquely situated than the capital. Three miles north of the city flows the Tai-tse-ho, taking a northerly course by the north-east corner of the walls. The railway passes at some distance to the west, making an acute angle with the western end of the city. Southward the ground rises gradually. Here the Russians had prepared their defences; the crests of the hills were scored with several lines of trenches, the result of three months' diligent spade-work.

Schwab and his two companions, entering the city from the north, found themselves in the midst of great bustle and activity. The streets were thronged with soldiers; long lines of transport wagons were arriving; and the merchants, native and foreign, were plying a brisk trade. Schwab had some difficulty in finding a lodging; the hotel, kept by a Greek, was full; but he at length secured a small cottage near the wall at an exorbitant rental. It was evening when they arrived; Hi Lo prepared a supper consisting of tinned sausages and biscuit brought from Moukden, and pears purchased from a local fruiterer. The booming of artillery had ceased, but the city was full of noise, and Jack was amazed at the careless light-hearted mood in which the soldiers, officers and men, were preparing for the struggle.

Before seeking repose on his frowsy k'ang that night, Herr Schwab went out to prospect for a spot on which to place his camera next day. He returned in a state of exaltation.

"Zere shall be colossal combat," he said. "I haf shtood on ze blatform by ze reservoir, and zere I converse viz high Russian officer, his gloves vite as snow. No more shall zere be evacuation, he tell me; ze fight shall now be to ze death. Boy, ve shall see shtubendous zinks. You are afraid?"

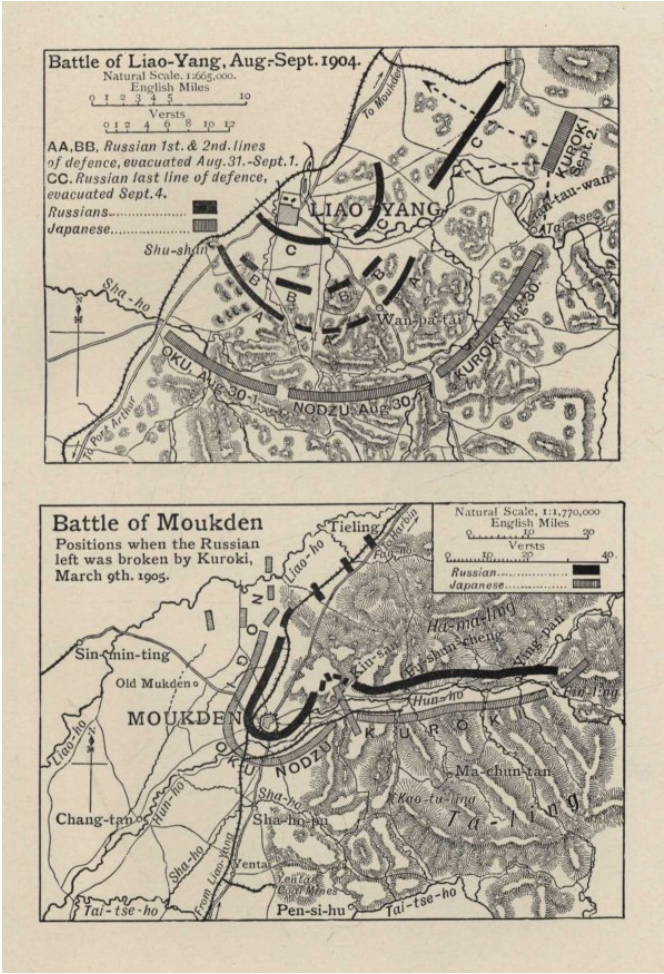
"My no aflaid this-time, masta; allo-same my tinkey no hab look-see bobbely yet; what-time guns makee big bang-lo, that-time masta talkee 'bout Sin Foo he belongey aflaid."

"Vell, you muss screw your gourage to ze shticky place, for vizout doubt ve shall be in ze midst of schrapnells. It insbires me: I breeze deep. I zink of my ancestor Hildebrand Suobensius, a great fighter, a Landsknecht, in ze Middle Age. Vun say zat I am ver' like."

Herr Schwab struck his chest, and continued:

"It is in ze blood. Zerefore vake me early in ze morning; ve shall be early out to secure a goot blace."

But there was no need for Sin Foo to wake his master. Before day had fully broken, Herr Schwab was shocked from his sleep by the boom of heavy guns—the opening of a cannonade that broke the paper windows and set the crockery



Map of Battle of Liao-Yang, Aug-Sept. 1904. Map of Battle of Moukden.

rattling. Springing up, he bade Hi Lo saddle the two ponies, and, stuffing some biscuits into his pocket, set off with Jack and the camera, leaving Hi Lo to guard the house.

He led the way to the north-west of the town, past the reservoir and the brick-built government offices near the railway-station, which was already crowded with officers scanning the horizon through their binoculars. On the previous night he had marked a solitary hill, known as the Shu-shan, some distance south-west of the city, as an ideal place for a general view of the battle-field. An old Korean signal-tower crowned its summit; it was approached on two sides by easy slopes, but on the north was precipitous, its rocky face cut by ravines dark with overhanging clumps of firs. At the western base a battery of artillery was posted.

Arriving at the hill, Schwab saw that it was impossible to ride up its northern face, while to ascend on either side would be to court death from the Japanese shells. But in his zeal on behalf of the *Illustrirte Vaterland* he was determined to gain the summit. Hitching the pony's reins to a tree, he bade Jack follow him up the steep acclivity nearer the road, warning him to be very careful of the camera. After a stiff climb they, panting, reached the top. Just as they appeared there was a prolonged whistle followed by a sharp crack; the new-comers were assailed with loud shouts; several hands seized upon Schwab and forced him into a trench cut in front of the tower, and rough Russian voices informed the puffing German that he had narrowly escaped a shrapnel. He did not understand what they said; but Jack, who had slipped into the trench behind him, whispered:

"My tinkey this plenty nasty place. Japanese he shoot too stlaight."

Herr Schwab mopped his face with a red bandanna and glanced somewhat nervously around. But the shock wore off, and finding himself to all seeming well protected, his courage soared into antiquity.

"My ancestor, Hildebrand Suobensius——" he began.

There was a shriek above him; another shell had burst but a few yards away. He dropped flat in the trench. Twisting his neck until one side of its fleshiness was creased with deep furrows, he said:

"Tell me, boy, do you see any more shells goming?"

Jack peeped cautiously over.

"My no look-see no mo'e, masta. He come long-long chop-chop all-same."

Schwab slowly rose to his knees, again mopping his brow.

"Zis is most terrible. Never did I zink zat var vas such a business! Gnädiger Himmel! vy haf I gome? Boy, I haf a bresentiment." His voice sank on a tragic note. "I feel it here." He laid his hand on the lower buttons of his ample waistcoat. "I, Hildebrand Schwab, shall vizout doubt be killed." He wrung the bandanna out. "Listen, boy, gif notice: ven I am killed you shall send all my goots to Schlag-

intwert Gompany in Düsseldorf, all egzept ze letter to Schneiders Sohne, vich gontain order for vun dozen trouser stretchers for General Belinski; zat you shall bost. And listen, boy:"—here his voice sank to a confidential whisper—"in my writing-desk zere is a visp of my hair tied up viz bink ribbon, and a boem, a boem of lov; zese you vill send to ze Frau Jane Bottle, at ze address on ze envelope, and you vill register ze packett. Yes—and insure it—you shall insure it for hundert dollars."

Herr Schwab sighed deeply, at the same time keeping an eye on the direction whence the last shell had come.

Another shrapnel burst a few yards in his rear. He groaned, lamenting bitterly. The men of Stackelberg's 1st Siberian Infantry paid no attention to him; in the trench they were secure. General Stackelberg himself was at the other end, grimly peering through his glasses over the epaulement.

Suddenly the projectiles ceased to pass over them. Jack ventured to raise his head and scan the surrounding country. Before him stretched a plain dotted with villages, the fields covered with the waving green stalks of kow-liang. On the crests beyond, some two miles away, lay the batteries of the Japanese; their infantry was swarming in the intervening level, but concealed by the kow-liang. To the left, separated from the Shu-shan hill by the An-shan-chan road, was an irregular line of lower heights, stretching as far as the eye could reach and out of sight. Here were posted the main forces of the Russian infantry, ensconced in cunningly devised trenches. In every gap between the rocky hills batteries were placed, concealed by every possible device. To the west of Shu-shan the Russian cavalry, with a portion of the 1st Siberian Army Corps, was stationed to protect the railway and the right flank. Behind, between the hills and the town, large forces of infantry were held in reserve, with the hospital tents and field ambulances. Temporary lines of rail had been laid from the station to the rear of the hills, and on these trolleys containing ammunition were pushed along by men.

Jack explained as much of the position as he could see to Schwab, who, in the security of the trench, took diligent notes, for reproduction in the *Illustrirte Vaterland* as first-hand evidence.

"But tell me, boy, do you see General Kuroki? I do not lov General Kuroki; he ill-use me, he gif me vat zey call beans, ven I vas in Korea last year. Is he in sight?"

"My no can look-see one piecee Japanese. Allo hidee inside kowliang."

"So! I make a note of zat. All ze Japanese hide. Ver' goot."

Jack now became aware that General Stackelberg was standing erect at the end of the trench, fully exposed to the Japanese gunnery. The general, in hooded cloak, wearing white gloves, spick and span as if on parade, was calmly sweeping

the plain with his glass, issuing orders, dictating telegrams, slowly, deliberately. Shells again began to fly around; but Stackelberg, summoned to the telephone installed behind the tower, walked erect towards the spot heedless of a shrapnel that burst within a few yards of him, bespattering his clothes with black dust. Jack felt a thrill of admiration; the general was giving the lie to the slanderers who said that at Wa-fang-ho he had skulked in his carriage.

Now the sharp crackle of musketry was mingled with the shrieking of the shells. Long lines of Japanese were threading their way through the fields, endeavouring to turn the Russian right. Stackelberg marked the movement; he gave an order; the Russians in the trenches sprang to their feet and ran down the slope to reinforce the threatened position. Rain began to fall, and Schwab raised his head from the trench.

"Ach! it rains. Vill it shtop ze battle, zink you?"

"My no tinkey so," said Jack. "Japanese, he fetchee plenty big guns; he come this-side chop-chop."

"Ach, ich Unglücklicher!" Schwab hastily dropped back into safety. "Nefer shall I leave ze Vaterland again. But I shall not return; Düsseldorf shall zee me no more; no; I haf a bresentiment; I feel it here."

Jack, following the movement of his employer's hand, made a suggestion.

"P'laps masta he belongey hungly; p'laps he want-chee chow-chow." He offered him a biscuit.

Schwab shook his head dismally.

"No, no; I haf no abbedide."

"My eat he."

Nibbling the biscuit, Jack, in a lull of the firing, ventured to leave the trench. A moment later he called to Schwab.

"My hab catchee one-piecee pictul. Japanese lunning long-side kowliang; littee littee black t'ings inside gleen stalks."

"Gott sei dank! I shall not die vizout agomblishing somezink for ze Vaterland. Ach! zere is anozer!"

There was a gentle sound overhead, like the cry of a wounded bird. An aide-de-camp crossing the hill-top fell with a groan. A bearer-party marked with the Red Cross appeared from behind the tower and swiftly bore him out of sight.

Schwab flattened himself as much as his rotund form permitted against the floor of the trench. The cannonade was resumed with redoubled fury. The din was incessant; shells whistling and shrieking; musketry crackling; the Russian batteries in their emplacements thundering as they replied to the Japanese.

Whole ranks of the Japanese were mowed down in the fields; still they pressed on. They were attempting to turn the Russian right. Reinforcements were hurried to the threatened regiments; battery answered battery; the ground

trembled under the repeated shocks. The attack was repulsed, and long blood-stained tracks marked the path of the bearers as they conveyed thousands of wounded to the rear. Stackelberg had held his own.

Dusk was falling, the rain ceased, and a steaming mist rose over the ground. There was a lull in the firing. Jack stood upon the epaulement. To the left he saw a village in flames.

"My hab catchee nuzza velly good pictul, masta," he said.

"Goot boy! Zink you it is now safe for me to shtand opp?"

"My tinkey so. He fightey man tinkee hab plenty nuff."

Schwab got up slowly on his knees, peered over the edge of the trench, then stood upon his feet. He was beginning to regain his spirits.

"So! Famos!" he exclaimed. "I see all ze whole fielt of battle; I see burning villages, black fielts, hundert or tousand dead men. Zis is var. Vat a—vat a"—Herr Schwab was at a loss for words—"vat a zink is var!" He threw out his chest and snuffed the smoke-laden breeze. "But I muss go and describe ze battle for my journal, illusdraded viz photographs taken by a Gairman sobjeck on ze sbot. My ancestor Hildebrand——"

They were turning to walk down the hill; a belated shrapnel shell burst within a few yards of them, peppering the ground in all directions. A splinter shaved off an inch or two of the leather cover of the camera. Schwab cut short his reminiscence by dropping flat upon the rain-soaked ground. When he arose, a pitiable object, after a short period of self-communing, without further words he hastened towards the path.

Another shell crashed upon the rocks to the left, hurling a lofty fir-tree into the ravine.

"Ach! gome alonk, gome alonk! Ve shall be killed. Let us go to find our bonies."

Scrambling down to the spot where they had left the animals, Schwab uttered a woeful cry; they had disappeared. A Siberian infantryman was passing; him the German interrogated. But the Russian shook his head; he knew no German. Jack ventured to question him in broken Russian.

"Yes, I did see two ponies. A Chinaman led them. That was long ago."

"He say-lo China boy hab catchee two-piecee pony, wailo long-time."

Schwab lifted up his voice in bitter lamentation. It was growing dark; the ground had been made a miry swamp by the rain; there was no alternative but to tramp back through it to Liao-yang. They reached the mandarin road. Their feet sank ankle-deep in mud; at every step they almost left their boots behind. Long stretches of the road were under water. Carts were passing drawn by long teams of mules. Schwab tried to bargain for a seat, but the drivers refused to listen to him; their loads were wounded men, who at every jolt uttered heart-

rending moans. Jack suggested that they should leave the road and cut across the fields to the railway; they would find the embankment easier walking. This they did, pursued, as it seemed, by the whistling bullets of the Japanese. At length, unharmed, untouched, they reached the northern gate, and, entering, made their way all bemired, weary and famished, to the cottage where Hi Lo awaited them.

CHAPTER XII
The Retreat from Liao-yang

Rifle and Bayonet—Kuroki—Schwab's Strategic Movement—The Moukden Road—At Yentai—One of the Wounded—Pawns in the Game—Our Friends the Enemy—Story and Song—Schwab Smokes

Next day dawned bright and clear. The fusillade had continued almost throughout the night, and the Japanese had made repeated assaults on the Russian trenches in the centre, only to be driven back every time with enormous slaughter. The first day's battle had no decisive result; the Japanese had failed to dislodge the Russians from any part of their line of defences. Jack was eager to go out again; his excitement had been kindled by what little he had been able to see of the opposing movements; after the first tremors, the shriek of shells and whistling of bullets had left him unmoved, and he was all afire to witness the continuation of the great struggle. But Schwab absolutely refused to budge.

"It vas not a bresentiment," he said. "It vas a bileattack. Zose shells, zeir schmell vas vorse zan Schwefelwasserstoffgas—I forget ze English name, but ze schmell is ze same; it is a schmell of eggs suberannuated. I suffer egstremely. Besides, zey haf shtole my bonies. And vat do I discover? I discover a damage in ze ubber egstremity of ze camera. Vy you tell me nozink about zis? I discover it, I say. Who done zat? Vy you bermit it? It is not business: it annoy me egstremely. I lose many dollars ven I shall gome to sell ze photographabbaratus. My gustomers vill now see it is not new. Venever I zink of it I suffer bile. I go not again to zis battle, no more does ze camera; I vait for ze next. I vill stay and cure ze bileattack. You shall see ze battle; I vill take notes ven you return."

Jack had no intention of running unnecessary risks in order that Schwab might make "copy" out of his experiences. But he made his way towards the railway-station, expecting to obtain from the embankment as good a view as

was possible without venturing again on the shell-swept hills. His choice was fortunate, for it happened that the closest fighting of the day took place west of the railway. General Oku had made up his mind to force this, the weakest spot in the Russian position. While, therefore, General Nodzu in the centre was repeating the first day's bombardment, the Russian right, throughout the day, was the scene of as terrible a series of infantry attacks as the world's history has known. Time after time the Japanese advanced to storm the trenches; time after time they were mowed down by the pitiless bullets of the enemy; but again and again they returned to the charge, recking nothing of death or wounds, thinking it a privilege indeed to end their lives in their country's cause. On both sides the bayonet did its fell work; at one point a trench was captured by a company of Japanese, but their ammunition was spent, they were unsupported, and their plight being perceived from a Russian trench a hundred yards distant, they were bayoneted to a man. As the hot day wore on, the Russians were driven back against the railway embankment; streams of wounded, their cries of agony mingled with the horrid sounds of war, flowed incessantly towards Liao-yang; and when sunset put an end to the firing, the bearer-parties went about their awful work on the battle-field.

Except for the slight impression made on the right, the Russian position was intact. The Siberian regiments had held their own with splendid tenacity, and were almost recompensed for their terrible sufferings by the message of thanks from General Kuropatkin, who had witnessed their heroic resistance from his train beyond the railway-station. Jack started to return to Schwab with the impression that the force of the Japanese attack was broken, and that on the morrow the Russians would take the offensive. The day closed with a terrible rain-storm that turned the fields and roads into a quagmire. The streets of the city were thronged; soldiers, Chinamen, camp-followers, pedlars improving the occasion, all jostling one another in noisy confusion.

Standing at the door of his cottage, Schwab hailed an American correspondent who was passing just as Jack appeared.

"Is ze battle finished gomblete?" asked Schwab eagerly.

"Yes; the Russians have won. It is their first victory. I am on my way to telegraph the news to New York—if I can get a wire."

"Zen I vill write my account of ze closing scenes," said Schwab to Jack. "To-morrow, if ze sun shine, you can take more pictures of ze Japanese defeat."

But half an hour later the American looked into the house on his way back to his own quarters.

"I was mistaken, Schwab," he said; "it is not a victory after all."

"Eh?" said Schwab, looking up from his papers.

"The Russians are leaving their positions; evacuation has begun."

"Himmel! Vat is ze meaning of zat?"

"Kuroki has crossed the Tai-tse-ho, and is threatening our communications. You had better clear out."

Schwab might well be amazed. During the desperate and persistent attacks on the Russian right and centre, General Kuroki had crept steadily round their left, and forced a passage at a ford twenty-five miles east of the town. The news, as conveyed to Kuropatkin, was that the Japanese general had four divisions; he had, in truth, only two; and, misled by the exaggeration, Kuropatkin had felt it necessary to detach some of the seasoned Siberian regiments from Stackelberg's command in order to reinforce the less trustworthy European corps whom Kuroki was attacking. But the American was mistaken in speaking of evacuation. The commander-in-chief had only decided to abandon his advanced position, which had always been too widely extended for effective defence, and to withdraw his forces to the inner entrenchments, forming a large arc almost encircling the town, and resting at each end on the river.

Overpowered by the terrors of "war that was real war", Schwab was goaded into feverish activity by the news of the withdrawal. His own pony was gone; so was Jack's; but Hi Lo's remained, and this the German ordered to be instantly prepared for himself. Whether the interest of the Schlagintwert Company or the safety of his own rotund skin was the more important consideration did not appear; but it is certain that, within half an hour after receiving the news of Kuropatkin's order, Schwab was riding as fast as the congested traffic would allow towards the north. He carried the precious camera and the negatives with him, leaving the tripod with Jack.

"You muss shift for yourself," said he at the moment of leaving. "You and Hi Lo muss gome on behind. I muss go qvick; it is a matter of business. Vun bony vill not carry zree, and if I do not arrive in Moukden before ze Russians zere vill be no money left to bay your vages. Take most egstreme care of ze dribod."

Jack was not ill pleased to see the back of his employer. In other circumstances he might have been amusing; as it was, he was a trial of patience.

"I think we will wait till morning," said Jack to Hi Lo. "I am not sure all is over yet. In any case the Japanese won't come into the city in the dark; the firing has stopped; and we shall see our way better by daylight."

So they stretched themselves on the k'ang and slept until the dawn. When they arose it was obvious that Schwab's flight was premature. True, the roads northward were crowded with fugitives, but they were in the main natives; the Russians held their positions; and Jack saw a fine regiment marching, not northward, but southward, in the direction of the enemy, singing the Russian national anthem with a spirit that little betokened a failing cause. But Jack felt that Schwab would expect his two servants to follow him; he would be helpless without them.

The exodus from the city was already so great that it seemed best to go northwards by the pontoon bridge while it was possible. He therefore started on his way back to Moukden. Hi Lo had managed to secure a mule—Jack did not enquire how; and on this, with the boy trudging by his side, Jack crossed the river by the pontoon and gained the mandarin road.

He found himself in a scene of terrible confusion. The road was blocked with vehicles of all descriptions,—droshkies, Pekin carts, ammunition wagons, country carts with their unwieldy teams; and crowds of camp-followers and Chinese tradesmen. Drivers were shouting, soldiers cursing, women shrieking. Chinamen staggered along with poles over their shoulders, a basket slung at each end containing a child barely awake, but laughing with glee at what seemed to its innocence a novel and pleasing adventure. Women passed, bent under heavy bundles containing their household gear; carts were heaped with bits of furniture, ambulance wagons with wounded and dead; here was a soldier leading a little donkey with a battered drum upon its back, there a farmer whose clumsy cart was filled with cackling ducks and squealing pigs. Now an axle would break, and the contents of the wagon were scattered over the ground; now the wheels of one cart would become locked with those of another, and the tangled teams plunged and kicked in the mud. Then the uproar became still more furious; riders, careless of what damage they might do, pressed their horses through the throng in haste to make good their escape from the terrible shells whose coming was announced from afar. The Japanese had begun to bombard the station.

Jack saw that he had little chance of making his way through the crush. Calling to Hi Lo, he turned aside into a field of kowliang, already trampled, and rode on over the ruined crop. In the distance, on the left, he caught sight of train after train steaming northwards. Behind, dense clouds of smoke obscured the city: the Russian quarter of Liao-yang was in flames. Ever and anon a detonation shook the air, and by and by the whistle of bullets was heard; the Japanese had occupied the Shu-shan hill, and with their terrible long-range weapons were firing into the Russian settlement.

The fourteen miles from Liao-yang to Yentai took Jack six hours. It was evening when he arrived—too late to go farther; and he put up for the night in a ruined hut. Russians were massed in the town, and covered the slopes towards the mines. The Russian left wing had been driven back in this direction, and it was to reinforce the hard-pressed troops here that Kuropatkin had withdrawn Stackelberg with his Siberians. But it was too late. Next day Kuroki flung his divisions upon the Russian entrenchments. At a critical moment General Orloff, professor in a Russian military college, attacked, contrary to his instructions. The Japanese hidden in the kowliang awaited the onset, then poured in a terrible fire, which threw the first regiment, composed of raw recruits, into confusion. They

broke and fled; the regiment behind, prevented by the high stalks from seeing what had happened, opened fire upon their own comrades; a third was led into the same fatal error; and the entire left wing, bewildered, disorganized, sought safety in flight. Yentai was filled with the Russian wounded; surgeons, with coats off and shirt sleeves tucked up, went about their work in the open streets; the air was filled with the screams and groans of men in agony.

Jack hurried through the town, and came again into the open country. A mile north of the town he overtook a bearded veteran crawling painfully along; he was wounded in the chest. He looked with haggard, covetous eyes on Jack's mule; his face was drawn and white; sweat was streaming from his brow. Jack stopped and sprang to the ground.

"Get on my mule," he said in Russian. "Hi Lo, help me to lift him up."

The man broke into sobbing exclamations of thanks. Supported by Jack on one side, by Hi Lo on the other, he rode on during the rest of that hot day. At dusk they entered a straggling village, and Jack was thinking of looking for a shelter for the night when a rough voice from a cottage cried:

"Ach, Strogoff! come here, comrade."

"Nu, Chapkin," said the wounded man. "I am wounded, old friend."

Jack led the mule to the door, and helped to carry the man into the cottage. It had been appropriated by a group of Russian soldiers who had become separated from their regiment. They received their wounded comrade with rough expressions of sympathy; and, learning from him of the Chinaman's kindness in lending his mule, they invited Jack and Hi Lo to stay with them. Jack was nothing loth. He shared his few remaining biscuits with the men, and sent Hi Lo out to buy some fruit if possible.

The boy returned with some pears and peaches, which formed a welcome addition to their black bread and cakes of buckwheat.

Sitting on the k'ang, Jack was an interested listener to the soldiers' talk. He did not understand all they said; they were simple moujiks, whose broad dialect was not easy to follow; but he picked up a good deal of their conversation.

Strogoff had to relate how he had received his wound. His story was long in the telling, punctuated by many an "Ach!" "Och!" "Eka!" "Nu!" from his comrades.

"Ach!" he concluded, "the Japanese are fine fellows, but they are too little to use the bayonet. A bigger man would have made a better job of it, and I should be dead now."

"Da! But you'd rather be alive, Strogoff?"

"How can I tell, Kedril? Will the doctors be able to mend my wound?"

"Not if they're such fools as the generals," grunted Kedril, a big, shaggy rifleman who had lost an arm.

"True, there are some fools among them. But better be a fool than a knave,

like the commissaries. Why, half the biscuits served out to us to-day were full of maggots, and my boots—look at them!—are made of paper. Do you think the Little Father knows how we are cheated?"

"No, no; the Emperor does not know, Almazoff. He would not suffer these evils if he knew them. Nu! he cannot be everywhere, like the Lord God."

"Things will be better some day. We've done our part, little pigeon. But the Emperor would not like it if he knew what lies they have told us. Why, they said the Japanese were dirty little men like monkeys; but they're cleaner than you and me, Strogoff."

"And they said they walked with their heads downwards."

"No, Chapkin, that's the English. They say the English walk upright in their own country, but when they go to another place of theirs called Australia they turn upside down and walk on their heads."

"That can't be true, because Australia belongs to Germany. It's a part of America, I believe."

"Nu! America belongs to England, so I dare say I was right after all. Anyway, the Japanese walk on their feet like us, and they fight well. I wonder what made them so angry with us?"

"I don't know. What do we get angry about when we're at home? Perhaps the Little Father called the Emperor of Japan a sheep; if you called me a sheep I should fight you; but emperors can't fight; of course not, for they've no one to give them orders except the Lord God, and He couldn't give orders to both at once."

"But if they quarrel, why should they make us fight in thousands? It would be much better if his excellency the general and the Japanese marshal took off their coats and fought, just they two. That would be a fight worth seeing, eh, comrades?—a fight after the old style, before they did everything by machinery."

"Da! It wouldn't matter so much if they made each other's nose bleed, instead of us shooting at the little Japanese and them shooting at us. Why, think of the thousands of widows there must be in Little Russia—da! and in Japan too, for I expect they have a kind of marriage there."

"True, we haven't any quarrel with the little men; and they're not very angry either. When I was wounded in the bayonet charge, and lay on the ground, a Japanese came up and gave me a cigarette; ach! the sun was hot, and I was fanning myself with my cap, and he made me take a little paper fan he had. Here it is: I shall give it to my little Anna, dushenka! when I get home again."

"Ach! shall we ever get home again? Look at the thousands of versts we are away; and we've got to stay till we beat the Japanese! Sing us your song, Chapkin—you know, the one that always makes me cry."

The big veteran addressed took a sip from his half-empty flask of vodka,

and began, in a fine baritone every note of which was charged with pathos—

"No more my eyes will see the land
Where I was born.
I suffer at my lord's command;
My limbs are torn.
Upon my roof the owl will moan;
The pigeon for her mate will yearn;
My heart with grief is broken down:
No, never more shall I return!"

The simple words brought tears to the eyes of all those rough soldiers. Kedril grunted and growled.

"Don't make us more sad. Almazoff, you're the only fellow among us who can read: read us something out of your English book; the piece about the great fight in heaven; that's the stuff for a soldier."

Almazoff took from his pocket a dirty dog-eared paper-covered book, and turned over the leaves. Having found the place, he began, in a slow sonorous chant—

"Then rose a storming fury, and such uproar as never yet had been heard in Heaven. Arms clashed on armour, a din of horrible discord; the furious wheels of brazen chariots roared with rage; dire was the noise of battle. Overhead with awesome hiss flew fiery darts in flaming volleys, and their flight covered either host with a vault of fire. Beneath this burning dome the embattled armies shocked together, with deadly onset and unquenchable rage: all Heaven resounded; and had earth been then, the whole earth had quivered to her centre. What wonder, when on both sides millions of angels fought, fierce foes, of whom the feeblest could wield the elements and arm himself with the might of all their regions!——"

Thus he read on, and through the rough prose of the Russian translation Jack caught echoes of the famous passage in *Paradise Lost*.

Far into the night the reading, story-telling, singing, went on. In the morning Jack took leave of the simple brave fellows and resumed his journey. On the way he learnt that the Russian army was in full retreat. General Kuropatkin's able dispositions had extricated his worn troops from the danger of being surrounded, and they were falling back in good order, disappointed but not disheartened, towards Moukden. Thither Jack made with all speed; and entering the city with Hi

Lo by one of the south gates in the evening, he found Schwab placidly smoking his pipe at the door of the Green Dragon.

CHAPTER XIII
Mr. Brown's House

Schwab and Sowinski—Extempore—The Camera cannot Lie—Sowinski Suspicious—Shadowed—Short Notice—Run to Earth—A Hole in the Fence—Lares et Penates—The Press—Sowinski's Supper

Weeks passed. Moukden was no longer the city Jack had known. Hitherto but few Russian troops had been seen in its streets; now these were thronged from morning till night. Regimental wagons, ammunition carts, rumbled hither and thither, raising clouds of dust. Officers strolled about, buying knick-knacks of the curio dealers; war correspondents kicked their heels in the hotels; droshkies, rickshaws, troikas, flew this way and that, to the disturbance of the placid people of this ancient city.

There were already signs of winter in the streets. The seasons in Manchuria do not shade off one into another; summer heat stops, almost at one stride comes winter cold. One morning the shops in the principal streets were hung with furs—the skins of wild cats, foxes, martens, otters, sheep, raccoons; fur caps, lined coats, woollen hoods, sheepskin leggings, stockings of camel's hair. The Chinese merchants near the eastern ramparts plied a brisk trade with Russian officers, offering their customers cups of tea with true oriental politeness, and raising their prices a hundred per cent.

They had been weeks of idleness for Jack. The Japanese had occupied Yentai; the Russians had thrown up entrenchments to the south of Moukden. There was talk of their taking the offensive; but warlike operations had ceased for a time, and Schwab had been too busy developing his negatives to think about taking more photographs. Jack spent much of his time with the compradore, hoping day after day, but in vain, for news of his father. He had caused money to be forwarded to Mr. Hi Feng in Harbin for the purpose of pushing enquiries in the north, through Chinese channels, and two trusty Chinese had been sent to make investigations along the Moukden-Harbin section. The latter returned quite baffled. But Jack sent them out again; he chafed at his own helplessness:

meanwhile no stone must be left unturned. Once or twice he had seen Sowinski in the streets; once he met him face to face near the palace; but the Pole passed by without giving any signs of recognition.

Schwab had become tired of the Green Dragon, and now lived in a little house which he rented from a Chinese grocer. He was waited on by Hi Lo, who shared with Jack a room looking on the street. One day Jack was standing at the window, watching the thronging traffic. He was in low spirits: he had been so hopeful when he left Father Mayenobe; was he to endure a long suspense like Gabriele Walewska, but in more pain even than she, not knowing whether his father was alive or dead? Suddenly, behind a string of carts he saw Schwab approaching in company with Sowinski. Schwab was talking eagerly. Jack knew that his employer had had several interviews with the Pole; he had probably been establishing business relations between him and Schlagintwert in anticipation of the close of the war. The two entered the house, and Jack, with a certain tingling of the nerves, betook himself to the kitchen. Presently Hi Lo came in to prepare dinner; Sowinski was dining with his master. The boy waited at table, and, coming in and out of the kitchen, he gave Jack from time to time information of what was going on. The Pole knew a little German; both he and his host knew a little English; and as they eked out their acquirements the quick-witted China boy picked up scraps of their conversation and reported them to Jack.

"He piecee Polo man talkee; say-lo what plice Melican lails? Masta he say velly cheap; he sellum evelyting cheap; he say belongey plenty pidgin what-time fightey man all wailo."

"Boy!" shouted Schwab from the other room.

"Hai-yah, masta!" replied Hi Lo, hurrying away. He returned in a few seconds.

"Masta say wantchee Sin Foo chop-chop."

Jack whistled under his breath. For a moment he thought of slipping out of the room. But Schwab knew he was there. To leave without explanation would cause trouble. It would perhaps be best to brazen it out. He had already met Sowinski several times without being recognized. Yet he regretted that he had not taken French leave the moment he saw the Pole coming. He obeyed the summons.

"You Sin Foo, bring ze photographs, zose I haf developed."

"Allo lightee, masta."

Jack went out conscious that the Pole's eyes had been fixed on him. Returning with the photographs he gave them to Schwab, and was on the point of leaving the room when the German bade him wait. Schwab unrolled the papers and spread them before his guest.

"Zere! Vat you zink of zat? Zose I took at ze battle of Liao-yang. Ach! zat,

mein frient, vas a fearful time. You vere not zere? No—you are a man of beace; ve gorresbondents are men of var. Picture ze hill of Shu-shan, schrapnel burst here, zere, everyvere; ze bullet fall zick as leaves of Vallombrosa. Zat hill, mein frient, vas target for hundert fifty guns. Zere am I, at ze top, fixing ze Japanese batteries in my focus. Danger! Donnerwetter! It vas truly bandemonium. But vy am I zere? Duty, mein frient, calls me; business are business; my duty, I am baid to do it; but not enough, no, certainly not enough. Vy, I write zis mail to Düsseldorf and say I can no longer encounter such danger for ze brice. I muss haf increase of screw. Boy, fetch ze camera."

Jack laid it on the table.

"See, mein frient," continued Schwab. "Gontemblate zat hole! Schrapnel! Anozer inch, or inch and half—ach! it is all ofer viz Hildebrand Schwab. Ze var gorresbondent run colossal risk, true; but ze var gorresbondent vat is also var photographer—vy, his risk is—vat shall I say? it is schrecklich, furchtbar!"

Jack was aghast at Schwab's magnificent assurance. If he had been alone with the Pole, that would have been another matter; but to dilate upon his exploits in the presence of one who knew exactly what heroic part he had played was astounding. Jack reflected, however, that he was merely a Chinese servant, and as such of no importance.

Finding that his invention was more than equal to the strain, Schwab proceeded with even greater confidence.

"Look at zis, mein frient. Here ve haf terrible scene of carnage in a Russian trench, a whole gombany is viped out by vun shell." Herr Schwab handed his guest the photograph of soldiers sleeping in the ditch near the Moukden railway-station. "And zis—vat zink you of zis?" He picked out the snap-shot of Siberian infantry before the blazing pawn-shop. "Here, mein frient, ve see Russian infantry vat make nightattack on village near Yentai: zey set on fire house full of Japanese."

"Ver' good, ver' good," remarked the Pole with an acid smile—"for a photograph made by night."

Schwab shot a suspicious glance at his guest.

"Ja!" he said, "it is vonderful. Zese vill abbear in ze bages of my baber, ze *Illustrirte Vaterland und Colonien*, zey vill give true account, shpeaking better zan volumes of gorresbondence, of ze horrible scenes vat zeir rebresentative haf beheld at ze bost of danger."

Sowinski's attention had been flagging; perhaps his intuition had detected the artistic temperament. At any rate Jack felt that his eyes were once more fixed on the silent Chinese boy—fixed in a puzzled, scrutinizing gaze. The epic of the camera being completed, and Schwab turning the conversation once more to business, Jack took the opportunity of slipping away. Hi Lo remained in the

room to replenish the glasses. When Jack's back was turned, Sowinski, as Hi Lo reported later, leant forward and asked quietly:

"Tell me, where did you get your boy?"

"Vich? Sin Foo? Oh! I tell you. I got him to carry ze camera. Ach! zese Chinamen! Zey are above all zinks suberstitious. Zey zink ze camera hold tousand defils; not one haf ze gourage to undertake it till I abbly to ze gompradore of a Mr. Brown, for whom I had a letter. Mr. Brown is a bad lot; he is gone, none knows vere—ze Russians haf him put out of sight for because he haf betrayed zem to ze Japanese. Perhaps you know him, mein frient? Vell, ze gompradore recommend me zis boy, Sin Foo, vat haf some intelligence and do not fear ze defils. He is of use—yes, of use; he is not afraid to follow me in ze zick of ze battle. Vere ze gombat rage, zere is Schwab and his camera. It is in ze blood. My ancestor Hildebrand Suobensius vas a great fighter—a Landsknecht. I vill tell you his history——"

Hi Lo's report made Jack uneasy. Sowinski was evidently suspicious. If his suspicions took definite form, it was scarcely likely that a man of his rancorous disposition would leave things as they were. In the dusk of the evening Jack hurried to his friend the compradore; he felt that at this critical moment he needed advice from a Chinaman of experience. When Hi An heard what had happened, he said at once that it would be madness for Jack to remain longer in Moukden. Sowinski would certainly seek a resolution of his doubts; he would in any case have Jack arrested; and being in disguise, Jack would in all probability, if arrested, meet the fate of a spy.

While they were talking, Hi Lo came in hurriedly to report that one of Sowinski's servants was hanging about Schwab's house, apparently on the watch. That clinched the matter. Jack must make himself scarce, and as speedily as possible. Where was he to go? In the confused state of the country he might easily disappear; he could become a camp-follower, or mafoo to some European. But this would have its dangers; a Chinaman, as he had already proved, would soon penetrate his disguise; with a definite purpose before him, he did not care to be the sport of chance. He might take refuge for a time with Wang Shih's people; but it was not improbable that search would be made for him there, and he did not wish to involve them in the escape of a spy. There was his friend Ah Lum; he remembered the chief's invitation, and bethought himself that the Chunchuses, moving constantly about the country, enjoyed the best opportunities of learning his father's whereabouts. His mind was made up; he would join the brigands.

But unluckily the city gates were now shut. Since the war had come nearer to the walls, the entrances had been guarded more strictly. No one was allowed to go in or out after nightfall unless he wore a uniform or had a pass. The inner wall was too high to climb over; if by any chance he could slip through the gates,

traverse the suburbs, and climb the outer wall, he might be shot; if he waited till morning, he ran the risk of arrest. Yet, all things considered, it seemed better to wait. Sowinski was apparently not quite sure of his ground. Then, to ensure his escape, a pony was needed; and he would have to enquire of Ah Lum's agent in the city, from whom alone could he learn the present whereabouts of the band. Finally, he was disinclined to leave Schwab without personally informing him of his approaching departure. This was perhaps in the circumstances a small matter, but it had more weight with Jack than he was probably aware of.

Taking leave of Hi An, he set off to return to Schwab's house. Hi Lo had preceded him. As he walked he felt that he was being dogged. He did not care to assure himself by looking back; but he took the first opportunity of slipping into a side street, and hurrying to his destination by a short cut. Schwab was writing, alone.

"My velly solly, masta," said Jack, kowtowing with even more than usual humility. "My wantchee wailo."

"Vat you say? Already vant holiday? No, no, boy. You haf been viz me not yet vun monce. I do not gif holidays so soon."

"My no wantchee holiday; my wantchee wailo allo-time; no come back; hab catchee muchee plenty leason."

"Donnerwetter! Vat is zat for a kind of business? Zat is desertion; infamous! Who zen vill carry ze camera? No, I cannot let you go; no, I refuse, I vill bay you no vages."

"My velly solly. My likee masta first-chop; wantchee wailo all-same. Masta no say Sin Foo belongey tellum what-time he wantchee go. Masta no wantchee pay-lo wages? all-same; my no makee bobbely. Suttinly my wailo chop-chop."

"Ach! Zat is ever so; ze goot servant cut his shtick; ze bad servant shtick fast. Vell, if I say no, vizout doubt you vill run avay?"

"No fea'."

"Vell zen, I let you go. You haf done me vell; zat is ze truth. But business are business; you haf served me vun monce less two days. I bay you zen fifteen dollar less ze vorth of two days. Vat is zat?"

"My no savvy, masta; my no hab catchee t'ings so-fashion China-side."

"Vell, I vill gif you fifteen dollar, and zay nozink about vat you owe me. Vere you go?"

"My go look-see flend long long wailo."

"So! I tell you zis; if again you gome back to Moukden vile Hildebrand Schwab is var gorresbondent, he alvays gif you job."

"Masta too muchee velly kind. My tinkee Toitsche genelum numpa one chappee, galaw! My say-lo by-by, masta; so long!"

The farewell interview had taken longer than Jack anticipated. He was

anxious to be gone, feeling insecure in Schwab's house. Giving the hard-earned dollars to Hi Lo, he hastened back by side streets to the compradore, with a suspicion that he was watched as he left the house by two Chinamen whom he caught sight of on the other side of the road. He peeped back at the first corner, and saw that one of the men was coming in his direction; the other had disappeared. On reaching Hi An's house he found that the man was absent; he had spoken of making enquiries of Ah Lum's agent. Jack waited rather anxiously. Twenty minutes passed, then the compradore came in very hurriedly.

"Sowinski is coming with Russian soldiers!" he gasped. "They will be here in five minutes. I found Ah Lum's man, Me Hong; he will send a guide to Hsien-chia-kou, ten miles away. You must not go near Me Hong. But how to get away!"

Jack fortunately could keep his head. He had but a few minutes to decide on a course, and he made the most of them. If he went into the street he would be at once seen; probably there were already men on the watch at each end. The only other way out was by the back. The compradore peered out; as Jack expected, he saw several figures lurking in the shade of the wall. Jack remembered that in the fence separating the compradore's garden from Mr. Brown's there was a narrow gap through which Hi Lo had been wont to creep as a short cut to the house. Between the fence and the house there was a line of shrubs about two and a half feet high. It was growing dark; if he could creep away under cover of the bushes to the hole in the fence he might gain his father's house. There he would in truth be in the enemy's country; but the attention of the watchers would probably be engrossed by the soldiers whose tramp was now heard approaching, and his own house would be the last that Sowinski would suspect as the fugitive's hiding-place. What the next step might be Jack could not imagine; the first was risky, but he saw no other. In a word he told the compradore of his intention. The man gasped; then with a rapid movement took a revolver from a shelf and pressed it into his young master's hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Hi! I will let you know. Don't forget Father."

He slipped to the back door, dropped on all-fours, and wriggled along the ground close to the line of shrubs. He had barely started when he heard Sowinski loudly summoning Hi An to open the door. The compradore made some reply, apparently temporizing; the answer was an angry shout, followed by a soothing response from the faithful servant. Jack heard no more; in another moment he reached the gap in the fence. He wriggled through; the garden had been neglected since Mr. Brown's arrest, and the undergrowth was rank; this was fortunate, for only a few feet away he saw, leaning on the fence, the form of a Russian soldier, and a yard or two beyond him another. They were talking together, or they might have heard the rustle as Jack squeezed through the hole and made for the house.

In these few moments he had been rapidly thinking. He could not hope

to hide in the house, but he might pass through it, gain the front door, and escape by the street. Naturally he was so familiar with the house that there was no danger of his going astray. But, slipping in by the back door and turning into the passage leading to the front, his hope was suddenly dashed. Three Chinamen stood at the open door, completely barring his egress. They were talking excitedly and in loud tones. Jack overheard one of them say that the Russians were arresting a supposed Chinaman, actually an Englishman who had come to spy for the Japanese, the very man who had been living in Hi An's house behind, and whose illness had given them such concern. Evidently they were servants of the Pole, stationed at the door to keep watch. The three men blocked up the doorway and stood facing the street.

Jack noiselessly slipped into the dining-room, lit by a single lamp. He felt like a fox in a hole, with dogs all round ready to snap him up if he showed his nose. He looked round the familiar room with a curious sense of aloofness. Had this been for so long his home? It was the same room, the same furniture—a table, a few chairs, engravings on the walls, the large oaken press; but a different air seemed to pervade it now. For a moment he thought of hiding in the press until dead of night, and then slipping away. He opened the door; the lock had been forced; the press was empty save for a few bottles of wine. Clearly this would not be a secure refuge; a bottle might be required at any moment. What else could he do? He could open the window—the only glass one in the house—and drop into the street; but he would certainly be seen by the men at the door or by a casual passer-by, though there were few people about at that hour of the evening. Yet no other course suggested itself, and he was moving towards the window when he heard soft footsteps in the passage outside. Quick as thought he sprang behind the open door, listening with thumping heart.

One of the servants passed by on the way to the kitchen. He had left the others at the door to keep watch while he prepared his master's supper. The cloth, Jack noticed, had been left on the table. In a minute or two the man would come into this very room, and Jack must be seen. With nerves tingling he waited, setting his lips as a plan of action was suggested to him by the emergency. Soon he heard the clink of glass. The servant was returning. He came from the kitchen carrying a tray with a glass jug, a tumbler, and a plate. He entered the room, walked to the table, and set the tray upon it. At that moment Jack stepped quietly up to him from behind, brought one arm round over his mouth to stifle any cry, and with the other held the cold barrel of his pistol to the man's temple.

"Keep silent, for your life!" he whispered.

The Chinaman, with fear in his eyes, made no sound or movement, but stood as still as his trembling limbs allowed. Still keeping the pistol pointed at the man's head, Jack quietly closed the door. Then he said:

”I will do you no injury, but your safety and mine require that you should be out of harm’s way for a time. I have business with your master. Go into that press. So long as you are quiet and do what you are told, you have nothing to fear. But if you make the slightest sound, that moment will be your last. You understand me?”

He spoke very low and rapidly, but distinctly. The man nodded; there was no mistaking the grim meaning with which this tall foreigner who spoke Chinese fingered the trigger of his revolver. Crossing the room to the press, the Chinaman stepped into it, and Jack closed the door.

He wondered if he could slip out of the house before Sowinski returned. Before long the Pole must discover that the bird had flown; he would realize the hopelessness of searching the whole of Moukden at night for a man disguised as a Chinaman, and, furious as he might be, he would doubtless accept the situation for the moment, and return to his evening meal. Once more Jack was making towards the window when he heard footsteps again, this time approaching from the back of the house; not the shuffling felt soles of Chinese, but the tramp of heavy European boots. At the same moment there came from the street the clatter of several feet marching in time. Jack stepped back from the window. He heard a gruff voice, the voice of Sowinski, say in Russian:

”Sergeant, there is no more to be done. The spy has got away. Inform the sentinels at the gates. He cannot leave the city to-night; we may trap him yet. Report to General Bekovitch; I will see him in the morning. Good-night!”

The sergeant responded, and marched his squad away.

”Where is Ming Fo?” demanded Sowinski of the servants at the door. ”Why is he not watching with you?”

”He is preparing your supper, master; we are keeping watch for him.”

”You have seen no one pass?”

”No one.”

”Very well. Go and get your supper.”

Then Jack heard Sowinski’s footsteps approaching the room and the two Chinamen shuffling along behind towards the kitchen. His chest heaved; the crisis was at hand.

CHAPTER XIV
A Night with Sowinski

Sowinski's Visitor

Sowinski's Visitor

Jack had intended to deal with the Pole as he had dealt with his servant; but the fact of the two other Chinamen passing the door of the room close on his heels had thrown out his calculations. He could not afford to run the risk of the slightest struggle; it would certainly be heard. He had but an instant to decide on his course.

Behind the door was a chair. To this Jack tiptoed, and he had just seated himself when Sowinski opened the door. The Pole flung his hat on a chair, and moved towards the press, doubtless with the intention of getting a bottle of wine. He almost had his hand on the knob when he became aware, rather by instinct than by perception, of a movement behind him. Jack with his foot had gently swung the door to. Turning sharply round, Sowinski saw the red light of the shaded lamp reflected from the barrel of a pistol in the hand of a young Chinaman seated composedly within five feet of him. For a moment he was motionless; he was too much surprised for speech; a second glance showed him who his visitor was, and Jack, watching him keenly, saw his face go pale. He stood irresolute; the ominous pistol, not held rigidly, but moving gently from side to side, seemed to hold him spell-bound, as the swaying head of a snake fascinates a hare.

"Yes, Mr. Sowinski," said Jack quietly, though his pulse was galloping; "yes, it is I, Jack Brown. You were looking for me? Speak low, or the pistol may go off."

"You would be arrested at once," said the Pole in a hard whisper.

"Possibly, but that would not help you. You would be dead."

Sowinski ground his teeth. Rage and fear struggled for the mastery; but fear, as Jack had calculated, was the stronger. The man's eye never left the barrel.

"First, Mr. Sowinski," continued Jack, rising, and now pointing the revolver steadily at his head; "first, I wish to know where my father is."

"Your father? How should I know? Am I your father's keeper? He was deported."

"You lie!" said Jack, his voice vibrant with anger. "Come, your reply; your life depends on it."

Visibly cowed by Jack's menacing look and tone, the Pole replied sullenly:

"Well, it is true; he was taken to Harbin, to be delivered to General Kriloff."

"And where is he now?"

"I do not know. I swear that is the truth. General Bekovitch——"

"Does he know?"

"I cannot say. I do not know what message he sent to General Kriloff. I have heard nothing of your father since he went away."

"He went in chains; did you know that?"

"Yes," replied the Pole hesitatingly.

"Then where is he? You know that; you know more; a man is sent away in chains, herded with foul criminals; it is your doing; what have you done with him?"

"I don't know; may I never speak again if that is not true. He is probably in the mines."

As he said this, even the imminent pistol could not prevent Sowinski from betraying his rancorous satisfaction in a mocking curl of the lip and a half-suppressed chuckle. Yet Jack felt intuitively that in this case the man was speaking the truth; that he really did not know what had become of his victim after he had seen him safely wedged in the cattle-truck. There was scorn as well as a white heat of anger in Jack's reply.

"You infamous scoundrel! You would be justly served if I shot you where you stand, and for my own part the satisfaction would be worth the risk. But I can't kill even such vermin as you in cold blood; and if I spare you, be sure the day of reckoning is only deferred. There are a thousand Poles waiting to kill the traitor Ladislas Streleszki at sight."

The amazed and wretched man swayed as he stood; his hue turned still more ashen than before; his whole body seemed to shrink together with craven fear.

"Now, choose," continued Jack after a pause. "The pistol, or instant compliance with my demands.—Silence!" He heard the two Chinamen approach the door, and noticed a twitching of the Pole's mouth suggesting a cry for help. The impulse, if impulse it was, was immediately checked by Jack's stern command.

"Send them home."

Sowinski called to the men that they might go; he would require them no more that night.

"Now close the shutters. Thank you! I see pen, ink, and paper on yonder shelf. Seat yourself at the table and write in Russian from my dictation."

The Pole moved mechanically, under the spell of the covering revolver.

"'To Lieutenant-Colonel Gudriloff,'" dictated Jack. "'Please supply bearer, Chang Sin Foo, with a pass for the gates, and two good ponies; debit the charge to my account.' Now sign your name—your present name. That is right. Now, Mr. Sowinski, you have been so obliging that I trust you will excuse what must seem a poor return for your complaisance. But my position in your—that is to say, my father's house, being somewhat delicate, I have no alternative."

The two Chinamen having gone away, Jack no longer subdued his tone. He had the whip hand. Still keeping the revolver steadily pointed at the scowling Pole's head, he stepped to the press and, Sowinski looking on in amazement, called to the Chinese servant to come out. The man was as pale as his master; he

was stricken with the very ague of fear.

"You have nothing to fear," said Jack, pitying the fellow. "Do what I tell you quickly. Tear up that cloth." He pointed to the none too clean cover on the table. "Tear it into six strips."

The man tried, but the material was too tough, or his hands too much enfeebled from fright.

"Take the knife, but remember, at the first movement in this direction I will shoot you."

With some difficulty the man did as he was bid.

"Now bind your master's legs—first round the ankles. Quick!"—as the man recoiled before the glare in Sowinski's eyes. Jack jerked up his pistol, and the trembling wretch hastened to obey. The Pole made no resistance; but if looks could have slain, both Jack and the Chinaman would have been killed on the spot.

"Now the arms," said Jack, when, under his supervision, Sowinski's legs had been securely trussed. "No, behind him—not in front: that is right. Now the knees. Now tie the wrists to the ankles. Now a gag; that fur cap will do. We are going to place your master in the press. You take the head; I will take the feet."

Jack felt that he was giving the Chinaman a bare chance to close with him; but the man seeming so cowed, he took the risk, careful, however, to keep the revolver conspicuous. As they lifted the Pole they saw his face distorted with rage and hate. They stood him upright in the press, and closed the door, leaving sufficient space between it and the sides to admit air. Then with a feeling of relief after the tension of his perilous situation, Jack took up the order signed by Sowinski, and was wondering how to dispose of the Chinaman, when there was a loud knock at the outer door, followed immediately by footsteps in the passage. Jack's heart beat violently; he caught a malicious look of triumph in the servant's eyes. But he recovered his *sang-froid*, and at the same moment made his decision. A voice in Russian was calling for Sowinski; just as the footsteps approached the inner door Jack pushed the Chinaman in front of him.

"Send him away," he whispered. "Remember the pistol."

He had no time for more. The visitor was at the door. It opened.

"Ha, Sowinski!—" said the new-comer, a captain of Cossacks. Then he paused, seeing only two Chinese servants.

"Where is your master?"

"He is away, Excellency," faltered the man; "not at home; he will not be back for some hours." Jack touched his heel to quicken his invention. He continued: "He said he was going first to the Green Dragon, then to the railway-station. He expected to meet a friend. Can I give him any message?"

"It is very annoying," said the officer. "I must see him to-night. The Green

Dragon, you say? I will see whether he is there. If he returns, say that Captain Sinetsky called, and that he is to come and see me at my quarters at once."

He turned on his heel and left the house. The tension was relaxed. The immediate danger was past, but Jack saw that his escape was still to be deferred. The captain's look and tone of vexation showed that his business with Sowinski was important. Failing to find the Pole at the hotel he might return himself or send a messenger, and then, if Jack were absent, the prisoner would be discovered and released, and the hue and cry after the disguised Englishman would be hot before he could get his pass and be clear of the city. The gates would not be opened before daybreak. It would hardly be safe to leave the house much earlier. He made up his mind to wait.

Creaking and groaning, the massive gates barring the eastern entrance to Moukden swung back on their hinges; the squatting crowd patiently awaiting the opening awoke to sudden activity; there was a general movement of foot-passengers, chairs, and carts towards the archway. In a moment the rush was checked: a Cossack officer with a dozen sturdy troopers barred the way—one man only might pass at a time, and that after careful scrutiny.

When some two or three score had run the gauntlet, the officer, whose patience seemed to be sorely tried, permitted himself a hearty Russian oath, and growled to the sergeant at his side.

"These Chinese are all alike. What the goodness is the use of asking us to stop—what is it?"—he glanced at a paper in his hand—"'a young Englishman, tall, slim, cleverly disguised as a native'? It's absurd—it's a job for a Chinaman, not for us."

"But, little father, it must be quite easy to recognize an Englishman. They are all red-faced, with long noses, and big teeth, and side whiskers—I have seen pictures of them in the papers in Petersburg. They are ugly, the English—one would know them anywhere."

Captain Vassily Nikolaeitch Kargopol, his feelings relieved by his brief outburst, smiled condescendingly. He recognized the sergeant's description of the familiar continental caricature of John Bull; but as the crowd surged through he had no time for correcting his subordinate's impressions. An old man, riding one pony and leading another, dismounted at the gate as the crowd thinned, and with elaborate kowtows presented his pass. The shadow of a wide-brimmed hat seemed to deepen the wrinkles of his parchment skin; but there was an alert look in the eye, and a nervous energy in the carriage, that told of a spirit still young.

"Pass the bearer, Chang Sin Foo, and two ponies. Gudriloff—Lieutenant-Colonel." The captain read out the instructions, handed back the document, and signed to the Chinaman to proceed. Leading his ponies through the gate, the old man mounted, and rode slowly on. A mile out he quickened his pace, and struck

off into a side track winding towards the hills that bounded the horizon north, south, and east. As he left the main road, the more rapid movement jolted a pistol from the folds of his voluminous garments. He glanced back and saw it lying on the track, but did not check his pace, though an odd smile disturbed the wrinkles of his mouth.

"It's a good job," he muttered in unmistakable English—"a jolly good job, Sowinski didn't know it wasn't loaded!"

CHAPTER XV
Cossack and Chunchuse

The Road in China—A Change of View—Looking Ahead—A Cold Welcome—Beleaguered—The Part of Prudence—Smoke—Beaten Back—The Water Supply—An Inspiration—Ch'hoy!

At Hsien-chia-kou the strangely young old man with the two ponies met not only the guide punctually furnished by Ah Lum's agent, but also Mr. Hi and his son. The compradore explained that after what had happened he no longer felt safe in his little cottage, and had made up his mind to join his brother in Harbin and do what he could there to further the enquiries for Mr. Brown. As for Hi Lo, the boy had for the first time shown a most reprehensible and unfilial spirit of disobedience. He had declared that the Toitsche genelum's service, now that Sin Foo had left, had no further attraction for him. If he must serve someone, it should be Mr. Chack Blown; and he would much rather serve Mr. Chack Blown than accompany his father to Harbin, for he did not like his Aunt Feng.

Jack laughed.

"Let him come with me, Mr. Hi. He saved those papers so cleverly that I think a great deal of him, and I'll really be glad to have him with me."

The compradore would not oppose his young master's express wish; accordingly, Jack, when he rode off, had two companions.

Jack had learnt from his guide that Ah Lum's camp was situated in the hills south of Kirin, at a point many miles due north of the spot where he had left the chief. He had before him, therefore, a journey of nearly three hundred miles. Fortunately the rainy season was past; a few days of brilliant sunshine and bustling winds had worked a marvellous transformation. The road that only

recently had been a pulp of liquid mud was now thick with soft brown blinding dust, clouds of which were blown by the north-easter full in the travellers' faces, covering them from head to foot. Unpleasant as this was, it was less troublesome than the continual assaults of midges which Jack had suffered on his previous journey. The autumn air, already nipping out of the sunshine, had annihilated these pests, and the only trouble of a similar kind that Jack experienced was from some black ants whose nest his pony disturbed, and which bit with terrible ferocity.

For more than a week the three riders pursued their journey almost without incident. After the first few days they came into a country of hill and forest, broken by richly cultivated valleys and large swift streams. They had to climb ridges, to cross ravines, to ford rivers, sometimes fording the same river a score of times, so serpentine were its windings. Here and there were settlers' huts, where they found scanty accommodation, but a warm welcome; here and there also a hillside inn, at which they spent the night on the floor of a tiny room, with perhaps a dozen Chinamen packed like sardines in a box on the k'ang above them.

During these days and nights Jack had many opportunities of thinking over his position. He wondered sometimes whether the course he had decided on was the best he could have taken; but his ponderings always converged to the same point—that his only chance of obtaining news of his father and procuring his liberation lay in remaining in Russian or Russo-Chinese territory. For himself, hunted and outlawed as he was, capture might well mean death, and nowhere was he so likely to be safe as among the Chunchuses. But he saw that in seeking an asylum among them he was in a sense casting in his lot with the enemies of Russia and espousing their quarrel. That consideration gave him food for thought. He had no concern with the great struggle then in progress. It was nothing to him whether Manchuria became the spoil of either Russia or Japan. Up to the time of his father's arrest, indeed, his sympathies had inclined to the Russian side. He had made many friends among the Russians during his stay in Moukden, especially among the engineers and officials connected with the railway. He had found them amiable, courteous, and singularly free from what, for want of a better word, the Englishman calls "side". Of the Japanese, on the other hand, he knew almost nothing. His impressions of the few he had met in the course of business were not wholly favourable, which was perhaps little to be wondered at, for the trading classes of Japan, with whom alone Mr. Brown had had relations, were only just beginning to emerge from the condition of a despised and, it must be admitted, despicable caste. Japanese of the Samurai class looked down on a merchant with far more disdain than an English aristocrat shows towards a petty tradesman; and it would have seemed incredible to them that an English

marquis should become a coal merchant or a dairyman. It was natural enough that a class thus despised should not be greatly hampered with self-respect; and their business methods did not commend themselves to Mr. Brown, with whom, as with every British merchant, his word was as good as his bond.

But the black sheep whom Jack had come across recently had brought about a change in his feeling towards the Russians generally. He saw them now as grasping adventurers, and the Chunchuses as patriots waging a lawful warfare against invasion and oppression. He had no very kindly feeling for the men who were treating his father with such abominable injustice. He did not disguise from himself that in joining the Chunchuses he could not remain a passive spectator of the struggle. He must be prepared to identify himself completely with the fortunes of Ah Lum's band, and become to all intents and purposes as lawless a brigand as themselves, But he hoped it would not be for long. If the tide of success upon which the Japanese arms had been borne from victory to victory did not turn, the Russian domination must ere long be shattered, and in some vague undefined way he felt that the fortunes of his quest were bound up with the discomfiture of the Russians. But in thus throwing in his lot with their enemies he reserved one point: he would steadily refuse to have any part in such excesses as were from time to time reported of the Chunchuses. It was likely enough that as a very unimportant individual, incurably a "foreign devil", he would be laughed to scorn for his scruples by Ah Lum. The custom of torturing prisoners was so deeply rooted in Chinese methods of warfare that Ah Lum, even if he so desired, might be unable to control his followers and prevent atrocity when they were not under his immediate observation. This would make it difficult for Jack to remain with them; but he put the matter from his thoughts: he would not meet difficulties half-way.

Now and again, as with his guide and Hi Lo he passed through isolated villages, he heard of small bodies of Cossacks having been seen in their vicinity. From the general talk at inns and farmhouses he gathered that the Russians, alarmed for their communications after the battle of Liao-yang, were about to make a serious attempt to deal with Ah Lum and one or two other Chunchuse chiefs who threatened the railway between Harbin and Vladivostok. The Cossack parties whose movements the villagers reported, were presumably scouting to ascertain the exact position of Ah Lum's band preparatory to a concerted attempt to entrap him.

One afternoon, as they climbed a rugged slope towards a village nestling among trees at the top, the travellers heard the rattle of musketry in the distance, and saw a couple of Russian horsemen riding away in the direction whence the sound came. At first Jack thought of avoiding the village altogether, and making a detour; but he had been riding since early morning over difficult country, the

sun had been hot, and he was very hungry; so that after consulting with his guide he decided to go on, the man thinking there was as great a risk of encountering Russians the one way as the other. They proceeded, therefore, but cautiously, keeping a sharp look-out. The guide knew the headman of the village; if he could get speech with him they might obtain useful information.

Firing could still be heard fitfully; it was impossible to tell how far away, but it seemed at a considerable distance from the village. When they entered the street, they came upon a knot of villagers in voluble discussion. They were instantly the object of a narrow scrutiny; but the guide had already marked his friend the headman among the group, and called him by name. The man came forward to meet the riders; the guide explained in a sentence that he wished to have some private talk with him, and he at once led the way to his house.

Thinking that frankness was here the best policy, Jack asked his guide to explain briefly who he was and what had brought him to the village. The headman was perturbed, almost incensed, when he heard the story. He had suffered already from depredations by the brigands; if the Russians knew that he had harboured a fugitive, he could only expect to suffer even more seriously at their hands. And there was great danger that they would discover the new-comers' presence. A squadron of Cossacks about two hundred strong was at that moment besieging some fifty Chunchuses in a farm three miles away. The brigands had been shut in for three days, and it was expected that they must yield shortly, perhaps before another day was past. The owner of the farm had come into the village when the Chunchuses appeared. He said that there was plenty of grain in his barns; the brigands could not be starved; but the water supply was likely to give out. The farm being situated less than half a mile from a river, the store of water kept in it was only sufficient for his family and servants, and could not meet the requirements of the company of Chunchuses, to say nothing of their horses. Behind the walls they might succeed in keeping the Russians at bay unless artillery were brought against them; but lack of water must inevitably cause them to surrender. They had made a good fight; the besiegers had lost a good many men; two Cossacks had come into the village only a short time before Jack's arrival, with orders to the headman to prepare quarters for the wounded. But they so greatly outnumbered the defenders that they could afford to lose heavily without seriously reducing the odds in their favour; and, taught by experience, they would probably not attempt to storm the place, but would sit down and leave its reduction to the work of time.

These explanations were given by the headman, who concluded by earnestly entreating Jack and his companions to depart. If the Cossacks suspected that any of the villagers had been in relations with the brigands they would certainly burn every house in the place, and in all likelihood slaughter the

inhabitants. Jack sympathized with the man in his terror; he said at once that the village should suffer no harm through him; and after buying a little food to carry him to the next stage, he rode out with his two companions.

But the news he had just heard was not of a kind to pass unconsidered. He was on his way to join Ah Lum's band; it was a part of that band that was now in such desperate straits, and he felt a personal interest in their fate. Word had been sent to Ah Lum, as the headman had informed him; but Ah Lum was at least two days' march away, and another two days must pass before help could come from him, even if he found himself in a position to send assistance. If this siege of the farm were a part of an organized movement against the Chunchuses, it was not unlikely that Ah Lum himself was hard pressed.

Jack was in a quandary. Prudence bade him press on without delay; the convoy with the Russian wounded was no doubt already on the way to the village, and might meet him or cross his path at any moment. But he felt an overpowering curiosity, natural in one of his active spirit, to see for himself the place where the brigands were so stoutly keeping up a fight against odds; and his curiosity was reinforced by another motive: the desire to see whether there was any possibility of their escaping from their peril. He felt the natural impulse of youth to "do something", even though he recognized how hopeless it was to imagine that he, with but two companions, could intervene between the Chunchuses and their fate. Still, the impulse was overmastering; he must see with his own eyes how they were situated; and having availed himself of Ah Lum's protection in placing himself in the hands of his agent, he thought it his duty not to leave the neighbourhood without at least assuring himself that rescue was out of the question.

He announced his intention of riding to the farm. His guide vigorously protested; it was absurd, he said, to go into the very jaws of danger; much better hurry on and reach safety with the chief.

"And what would Mr. Ah think of you if he heard that?"

"But I don't know the way, master."

"No matter. The firing was to our right; we saw the way the Cossacks went; no doubt the wounded will come the same way, so we must avoid that; but if we work round gradually under cover of that copse yonder, we shall be going in the right direction. They're firing again. You will come with me," he added sternly, divining an inclination to bolt, "or you will no longer be Mr. Ah's man, and you know what that means."

The three turned off to the right, skirting the beech plantation of which Jack had spoken, the guide resigned but sullen. It was now about five o'clock in the afternoon; in an hour and a half it would be dark. Riding cautiously, keeping a keen look-out on all sides for signs of the Russians, they gradually made their

way across country, guided by the firing that was still heard at intervals. They were crossing a hilltop some three miles from the village they had left behind, when Hi Lo suddenly declared that he saw smoke in the distance.

"You have sharp eyes," said Jack. "We had better dismount. Being on the sky-line we shall be easily seen if the Russians look this way. Let us hope they are giving their whole attention to the farm."

They tied up their ponies to trees some distance from the hill-path they had been following. Jack wished to leave Hi Lo in charge of the animals, but the boy pleaded hard to be allowed to accompany his master.

"Masta say-lo my hab plenty good look-see. My walkee long-side masta; plaps my can helpum masta."

"Very well. Now show me where you saw the smoke."

The boy pointed to a hollow nearly a mile away, where at first Jack could see nothing but fields of hay and over-ripe kowliang. The smoke of course had now disappeared; but, following Hi Lo's finger, Jack presently saw the dull mud-coloured walls of a farm enclosure, barely distinguishable from the brownish vegetation around. A moment later Hi Lo's keen glance lighted upon the low shelter-tents of the Russian encampment, some distance to the left of the farm, apparently situated in a field, recently cropped, near the bank of the river, of which a few yards could be seen. Not a man was in sight; but beyond the camp was a clump of brushwood, at the edge of which Jack fancied he saw the black forms of two or three horses. Probably the rest were tethered in the copse.

As Jack and his two companions, standing motionless on the hilltop, looked across the valley they suddenly saw a score of men rush out from the tall kowliang in which they had been concealed, and dash forward against the far corner of the wall surrounding the farm. At the same moment, from the fields around puffs of smoke were seen rising in the air, and a few moments later the sharp rattle of musketry, like the sudden shooting of pebbles from a cart, reached their ears. But the defenders had not been caught napping. A withering fire met the Russians as they charged up the slight slope leading to the farm; only a few gained the crest, and these fell to the Chunchuses, who all at once appeared as by magic in the courtyard. The survivors hesitated for a moment; then they turned and plunged into cover of the long grass and kowliang. In a few seconds every man had disappeared from view; peace reigned over the scene; there was nothing to show that the farm was the centre of a bitter struggle.

But for the scarcity of water Jack had little doubt from what he had seen that the Chunchuses would be able to hold their own indefinitely against the Cossacks, unless siege operations of a regular kind were adopted. He could see no trace of trenches, such as, with their numerical advantage, the besiegers could easily have constructed if they had been so minded and possessed the requisite

knowledge. But they were a mounted force, unused, no doubt, to any tactics but the simple Cossack evolutions. The average Russian soldier has little adaptability. The construction of trenches is not a horseman's business; it would not enter the head of a Cossack captain to employ a device so far removed from his routine. Yet with the aid of a trench the besiegers could make short work of the Chunchuse defences, which consisted simply of the mud wall surrounding the farm, and the farm itself—a thatched cottage with byres and pig-sties adjacent, flimsy structures at the best.

Under cover of the tall shrubs that crowned the hill, Jack looked long and searchingly at the beleaguered farm. He tried to picture the defenders within the walls, hoping for relief, watching the inch-fall of their water supply, tantalized by the sight of the full stream flowing so near, and yet as distant as though it were in another continent. To Jack it appeared that there was no chance whatever of doing anything to assist the Chunchuses, among whom doubtless were men whom he had seen in Ah Lum's camp. He asked the guide whether he could suggest a way. The man replied that the only course was to hurry on and inform Ah Lum of the desperate position of his men. Inasmuch as a messenger had gone on the same errand two days before, the guide's suggestion was not very helpful. And Jack was possessed of the feeling that to act thus would be equivalent to leaving the trapped band in the lurch, a thing that went very much against the grain. Yet what else could he do? If he could give no help in the actual, pressing emergency, there was nothing to gain by remaining on the scene—not only nothing to gain but everything to lose, for he would run the risk of being snapped up by the Cossacks.

"There's no help for it, I suppose," he said half-aloud. Very unwillingly he turned his back on the farm, and retraced his steps down the hillside towards the copse where the ponies were tethered. Just before the farm was wholly shut from his sight by the crest of the hill, he turned again and swept the country with his eye, as though to take a last look at the scene of an approaching tragedy. It happened that in his movements upon the hill he had reached a point where a somewhat different view was obtainable, and he now noticed for the first time, half a mile away to his left, an open space in which a group of men, Russians no doubt, were busy around a number of tripods with big cauldrons suspended. Smoke was rising from one or two; the men were evidently lighting fires to prepare their evening meal.

"Strange," thought Jack, "that the cooking place should be so far from the shelter-tents and horses. It must be nearly half a mile from the farm. Do the troops march to the food, I wonder, or is the food carried to the troops? Probably the former. But why so far away?"

Even as the question occurred to him the answer flashed upon his mind—

and not only the answer, but a possible means of doing what he so much longed to do. Was it possible? He felt his pulse quicken at the mere thought. The dusk was fast gathering over the scene; the farm and its surroundings must soon be shut altogether from his gaze; before that came about, he must take one more look. Bidding Hi Lo and the guide remain where they were, he went back to his former post of observation, moving very carefully so as not to be seen from the quarter where he had not previously suspected the presence of an enemy. Once more he scanned the landscape; then he returned to the two Chinese, who looked at him questioningly, wondering at the change of expression on his face.

"Back to the ponies!" he said briefly. As they went they saw the glow of the Russians' fires in the glooming sky. The sight brought a smile to Jack's lips, but he said nothing to his expectant companions. They found the ponies where they had left them; they took from the saddles the food brought from the village—a little rice, some bean sprouts, and a small heap of monkey-nuts, all that they had been able to get at short notice. As they munched their frugal meal Jack could not but wish for five minutes by the steaming cooking-pots on the other side of the hill. When their hunger was satisfied, and the dusk had deepened into night, Jack suddenly looked up from the brown study in which he had appeared to be absorbed and said:

"Now, listen to me."

His two companions listened with all their ears; Hi Lo soon became restless with excitement; the guide, though his Chinese stolidity was not so easily broken through, at length gave utterance to the exclamation "Ch'hoy!" which signifies approbation or disdain, pleasure or misgiving, according to the inflection of the voice. What Jack had to say took some time; it was quite dark when he finished; then he got up.

"Remember," he said, "not a movement nor a sound. Do exactly as I have told you; then make for this spot again."

Then he slipped away into the darkness.

Slowly, with infinite caution, he crossed the brow of the hill, struck off towards the right, and descended the slope on the opposite side. It was so dark that he had no fear of being seen; but, his view of the camp fires being intercepted by the hill, he could not make sure of his direction, and knew that at any moment he might stumble upon a sentry. The only chance of escape for the Chunchuses being to take advantage of the darkness, he had no doubt that the Russians would keep the strictest watch at night. He had to guess his way; he was going to the

farm.

CHAPTER XVI
Fire Panic

Sentry-go—Beneath the Wall—An Old Friend—Thirst—A Way Out—Three Shots—The Signal—The Reply—A Countryside in Flames—At Full Gallop—Alarms—Stampede—Chow-chow

At the most, the distance Jack had to traverse was but a short mile, yet so slow was his progress that nearly two hours had elapsed before, from the vantage-ground of a hillock a few feet above the surrounding fields, he caught a dim glimpse in the starlight of the farm buildings looming a short distance in front of him. His intent ears had already caught the measured tread of a sentry just ahead; stealing along for another few yards he could now see his head and shoulders and the end of a carbine projecting above the high grass. Jack stopped and watched. The sentry's beat seemed to be about thirty yards; to his right Jack could hear the hum of several low voices, no doubt from a picket. He had taken the precaution of approaching the farm at the point farthest from the main gate. The Chunchuses, if they made a sally, would not leave their horses behind, for on foot they would be at the mercy of their enemy. Since they could not leap their steeds over the wall, they were bound to issue from the gate if at all; the exit, therefore, was sure to be closely guarded, though no doubt there were sentries all round the farm.

To the left of the sentry Jack had first seen there was another, whose beat met that of his comrade. Jack could barely discern him in the darkness, but he fancied that the man, on reaching the nearer end of his beat, awaited the arrival of the other before turning. That would evidently be the best point at which to attempt the passage to the farm; and the best time would be a second or two after they had turned their backs upon one another, when any slight noise Jack might make would almost certainly be attributed by each man to his comrade. Jack went down on hands and knees and crawled very slowly to within a few paces of the meeting-place. Then he lay still, hoping that he had not miscalculated and that there was no danger beyond. He listened intently; on both sides he heard the men approaching; to the left the sound was fainter; the beats were evidently of unequal length. One man came to a halt; in a few seconds he was joined by

the other; they exchanged a remark in a low tone, then separated and tramped in opposite directions. Instantly Jack glided across their trail, and, still on hands and knees, crept towards the farm, which he distinguished as a blacker patch against the sky perhaps a hundred yards away.

He soon found that between him and the wall lay a stretch of almost bare ground, no doubt made by the traffic around the farm. How was he to cross this? He might be seen by both Cossacks and Chunchuses, and if seen he would be the target for perhaps scores of rifles.

All was still within the farm; from the distance came faint sounds—voices from the Russian camp; behind he heard the tramp of sentries. Flat on the ground, already cold with the autumn night frost, he eagerly scanned the prospect for some cover by favour of which he could creep across to the wall. His heart gave a jump as he noticed, a few feet to his right, what appeared to be a ditch running from the wall across the bare patch and into the fields. Crawling noiselessly to it, he found that it was a shallow cutting, intended, as he judged by the smell, to carry off the drainage from the courtyard. There was no help for it; he sidled into the channel, luckily dry, and wormed his way along it until he came to within a few feet of the wall. As he expected, the drain passed through a hole in the wall, sufficiently deep for a man to crawl through.

But the wall gave him pause. He dared not creep through; he would be taken for an enemy and shot. He must seek a means of communicating with the garrison without drawing their fire. He crawled to the hole, hesitated for a moment, then, making a bell of his hands, sent through the shallow tunnel a low hiss, loud enough to awaken attention; soft enough, he hoped, not to create alarm. Breathlessly he waited; there was no response. Again he hissed; this time somewhat louder. There was a quick footstep within; then silence. A third time; he heard a foot strike against the wall, and next moment became conscious that someone was looking down at him over the wall. He lifted his head.

"I am a friend," he said in deliberate clear-cut Chinese. "I have news for your captain."

The man uttered an exclamation under his breath; then bade him remain perfectly still or he would shoot him. In a low tone he summoned a comrade and sent him for the commander. Jack heard a little bustle within, not loud enough to catch the attention of the sentries. A few minutes later a second voice spoke from the top of the wall.

"Come through."

Jack wriggled through the narrow opening. Only his head projected within the wall when he was told to stop.

"Who are you?"

"Mr. Wang, is that you?"

"Ch'hoy! It is Mr. Chack Blown. Rise, sir!"

All bemired and dishevelled, Jack sprang to his feet. The Chinaman kow-towed, uttering an incoherent welcome; then led the way to the farmhouse.

"That's the most ticklish half-hour I ever spent in my life," said Jack, when he was seated opposite to Wang Shih on the k'ang in the living-room. "And I'm pretty hungry. I've had nothing but rice-cakes and monkey-nuts since morning. Have you got anything to eat?"

"Plenty, sir; it is water we are in straits for. I will get you something."

In a few minutes a hot dish of boiled chicken and rice, with a couple of clean chop-sticks, lay before Jack. He ate the meal with keen relish, while Wang Shih at his request gave a rapid narrative of the events that had led to his present predicament. With a small force he was beating up recruits in the district when he suddenly came upon a troop of Cossacks outnumbering him by two to one. Knowing the country so well, he could easily have got away, but unluckily he was sighted by a second troop, which cut across his line of retreat so rapidly that he had only time to throw himself and his handful of men into the farm before the two hostile bands united and closed upon him. He had kept them off for three days; there was food enough to last another week, but his ammunition was running short, and, worst of all, the water supply had almost given out. His men had been put upon the smallest possible allowance, but in spite of their care and self-denial there was barely enough left to last for another twenty-four hours, and the horses were already suffering terribly. He had been hoping that Ah Lum would send a force to relieve him; but the chief was moving northward when he last saw him, and he doubted whether the man he had sent could reach him in time. In default of relief, his only course when the water failed would be to make a sortie by night; but the odds against him were so heavy that very few of his men could possibly escape.

"That is why I am here," said Jack. "I was on my way to join Mr. Ah—the reason I will tell you presently—when I heard of your plight, in the village yonder. I came to see for myself how you were placed; your danger had not been exaggerated; and I was on the point of going off in despair when I had a sudden idea; it was suggested by something I saw in the enemy's camp. I think there is a bare chance of escape if you will act on my plan."

There was a look of mingled eagerness and anxiety on Wang Shih's face as he begged Jack to tell him what he had in mind.

"I am not alone," continued Jack. "I came up with a guide given me by Mr. Ah's agent Me Hong in Moukden, and Hi Lo, our compradore's son, you remember. They are waiting on the hill less than a mile away. When I was looking out over the country I saw the Russians light fires for cooking their supper, and at first wondered why their kitchen was so far away from the farm. But I saw

the reason. As you know, there's a strong north-easter blowing; the smoke from their fires floated this way, towards the farm. They had been prudent in selecting a spot away from the fields, for a spark in the long grass might start a blaze, and, spreading through the kowliang, it would destroy their cover and make them easy targets for your marksmen. What would happen if the grass chanced to burn in the night, eh?"

The Chinaman's expression changed; his chest heaved.

"We have tried to fire the grass more than once, but they always stamped it out. Go on, sir," he said.

"Well, you see, if a match were put to the grass to windward of the farm, in several places, and if the wind held, the flames would sweep upon the Russians in a very few minutes. Their horses would stampede; the men would be so startled that probably they would be quite unable to think of anything but their own safety; and while they were scattered and disorganized, you could sally out of the gate and get so good a start that, even if they caught their horses, you would be out of harm's way before they could pursue."

"But the flames would set fire to the farm. We should be burnt alive; our horses would be frightened too, and we could never get them to face the fire and smoke."

"I had thought of that. The thatch will probably catch fire; but the open space outside the wall will prevent the flames from actually touching the wall, and that will serve as a partial protection. Then you can blindfold the horses so that they don't see the glare; they'll have to risk suffocation by the smoke, but the men can avoid that by lying flat on their faces and holding wet rags to their mouths. If I'm right, the crops will burn very quickly and not smoulder; you must, of course, wait until the fire has swept by the farm; but then dash out without losing a minute. I think you can rely on the Russians getting a terrible fright, and that will be your opportunity."

"But how is the fire to be lighted at the right place, and how are we to know when it will be done?"

"I left instructions with my guide. If he hears three rifle-shots in succession at noon to-morrow he is to creep down with Hi Lo at dusk and choose two spots about half a mile apart, just beyond where the Cossacks' horses are picketed. They will set fire to the grass where it is thickest, then run towards each other and fire it in two other places, and make their way as rapidly as possible back to the copse where our ponies are. The only risk is that they may be discovered before they can complete their work; but it's to their own interest to be careful, and I think I can trust Hi Lo, at any rate, to outwit any Russian."

Wang Shih was convinced. Greatly impressed by the care with which Jack had thought out the details of the stratagem, he smiled and rubbed his hands

together with gleeful satisfaction. Suddenly he checked these signs of pleasure; he rose from the seat, pressed his closed fists to his breast, and bent over until his brow all but touched the ground.

"I thank you, sir," he said. "I am grateful; Mr. Ah will be grateful; you have risked your life for us, and we Chinamen never forget a benefit."

"You saved me from death, Mr. Wang; look at it as an acknowledgment if you like. Besides, we are not out of the wood yet; the farm may be stormed to-morrow before the time for trying our little plan."

The Chinaman scoffed; he had held the Russians off for three days, and it was not to be supposed that, with an additional motive for a stout resistance, his men would fail at the last.

"But what if the wind drops? We require the wind to make the blaze a short and merry one."

"No, no, sir. At this time of year the wind when it sets from the north-east blows for weeks at a time——"

"Bringing snow as often as not. A snow-storm would spoil it all."

Wang Shih's face fell; he looked so much distressed that Jack laughed.

"I was only imagining the worst, Mr. Wang. The sky is clear and the air as dry as a bone. Barring an accident, or some very sudden and unlikely change in the weather, there will be a pretty bonfire to-morrow night."

"Shall I tell the men to-night, sir?"

"On no account. Let them sleep. The place is carefully watched, of course?"

"Yes. Six men are on duty for two hours at a time; the watches are carefully arranged."

"That's all right, then. Now I'm pretty tired; this k'ang is very warm and cosy, and if you don't mind I'll coil myself up on it and go to sleep. Don't wake me unless anything happens."

Jack slept like a top till ten next morning. It was bright and clear, and he was delighted to find that the wind had increased in force. Wang Shih had been self-restrained enough to withhold the details of Jack's plan from his men, curious as they were to learn what had brought the Englishman into their midst at such risk to himself. They had merely been told that there was a prospect of escape. At noon the three shots arranged as a signal were fired by Wang Shih himself. The Russians took no notice of them. Hidden by the kowliang they were content to wait, knowing that the water supply must ere long fail. In the afternoon the men were informed of the scheme and given their instructions. They became voluble as they discussed the plan among themselves. There is a bed-rock of stoicism in the Chinese character; these brigands were not given to a facile display of emotion; they showed little surprise, little pleasure, but talked over the approaching event almost dispassionately, as if it had been an academic

problem. They prepared material for blindfolding the horses, and rags to steep in the last inch of turbid water in the tank; then the most of them settled down to beguile the remaining hours with fan-tan.

Jack could not achieve such composure of mind. He gave no outward sign of his feelings; but as the hours passed and the time drew near for the execution of his plan he began to feel restless and impatient. He was amused at himself, remembering how his father had been wont to poke fun at him for this very characteristic. "It's only in the Arabian Nights that an acorn becomes an oak in a moment," Mr. Brown once said. But though he could smile at himself he did not become less impatient as the day wore on. As the sun crept round towards the west, and sank over the purple hills, he looked anxiously from a secure corner of the wall towards the spot whence he expected the flames to spring. The twilight thickened; there was no sign. All at once he thought he saw an object moving down the opposite hillside. Surely the guide could not be so arrantly stupid as to approach in full view of the camp! In a few moments Jack's anxiety was relieved, and at the same time increased, when he found that the moving object was a Cossack slowly riding towards the farm. He was a messenger, perhaps; probably his approach had delayed the execution of the scheme; Jack could only hope that this would not be frustrated entirely. The rider came nearer and nearer; he might discover the man and the boy lurking in the long grass, for he was approaching the very spot that Jack had pointed out as an excellent place for the first match to be struck. An intervening hillock now hid the Cossack from view; Jack waited; it was growing darker; would the expected flame never spring up? The minutes passed, lingeringly; all was quiet; nothing could be heard but the rustle and clash of the grass and stalks as the wind struck their tops together.

Suddenly, from a spot somewhat to the right of the place where the Cossack had disappeared, a thin spiral of smoke shot up into the indigo sky. Almost simultaneously another appeared, far to the left; in the dark they could scarcely be detected except by eyes so intently looking for them as Jack's. They grew in volume; other spirals rose between them; fanned by the steady wind they swelled into a bank of smoke, through which Jack's anxious gaze now discerned tongues of flame.

"Now!" he cried to Wang Shih at his elbow.

The word was given to the men; in a few seconds the horses were blindfolded; and by the time the rags were steeped a vast blaze illuminated the sky; the four fires, spreading with amazing rapidity, were sweeping towards the farm at the rate of a trotting horse. Shouts broke the stillness; amid the crackling of the flames the clatter of metal, the shrill whinnies of terrified horses, then the thunder of hoofs. From the fields men ran helter-skelter, some attempting to catch their horses, others in their confusion rushing towards the open space before the

farm, careless whether the rifles of the Chunchuses marked them down. Onward came the dense volume of smoke bellying towards the farm. Jack already felt the heat; above his head red wisps of grass were streaking the sky; one fell upon the thatch, extinct; another followed, dying before it could kindle the straw; the next was larger, burned more brightly; it held; the thatch was alight.

The men were prone upon the ground, pressing wet rags to their mouths. Their horses were snorting, whinnying, straining on their halters; one had broken loose, and was madly dashing round the courtyard when Jack seized it by the broken halter and endeavoured to soothe it. The mud wall beat off the flames; but the smoke enveloped the whole farm in a dense cloud, pungent, spark-laden, becoming every moment more stifling. Jack was forced to earth; he could not breathe; still clutching the halter he crept under the lee of the wall, and there lay fighting for breath. The thatched roof was now ablaze; the fields were a mass of fire; would the smoke never pass and leave a passage for the almost suffocated men?

A red glare lit up the farmyard. The flames had devoured the thatch, and were licking the joists. Jack glanced round the scene, his eyes smarting so keenly that he could scarcely see. The horses were shivering with terror; two or three of the men, braving the smoke, were endeavouring to calm them; the rest of the Chunchuses were still flat on the ground. But to the north-east the smoke was thinning. Jack rose to his feet and looked over the wall. The fields between the farm and the river were black, with here and there a smouldering stalk. On the other side the flames were still raging; there was nothing to check their fury. The passage from the gateway was now open; the ground indeed was very hot; but it would be folly to wait for it to cool. Jack called for Wang Shih.

"Now is the time," he said.

Wang Shih gave the word; the men sprang to their feet and vaulted into the saddle; the bar across the gate was let down; and then, tearing the bandages from their horses' eyes, the men dashed out at a furious gallop across the still scorching soil. Jack, mounted on a spare horse, led the way towards the river, making for the bridle path which must have been followed by the Cossack just before the match was struck. For the first half-mile it was a terrible race; sparks and smoke flew up as the horses stirred the smouldering embers; the poor beasts screamed with pain as their unshod hoofs felt the heat; the men breathed stertorously, half-choked by the acrid fumes. Then, in an instant as it seemed, they passed from an inferno into the elysian fields. They had reached the limit of the burnt grass, the keen cold wind struck their faces; men and animals took deep breaths; they were free, and in the pure air again. Floundering through the fresh-ploughed field where the Russians had left their cooking-pots, they came to the river. For one moment they halted to allow men and horses to slake their thirst; then they

pushed on, up the northern slope, in the direction of the place where Jack hoped to find Hi Lo and the guide.

On the crest of the slope he reined up for a moment and looked to the left. The sheet of fire was still sweeping on towards a plantation on the south-west side. It seemed that the whole country in that direction must be devastated; nothing could stop the flames but the bare rocky ridge a mile or more away. Faint shouts came from the distance; then a fitful succession of shots scarcely audible through the crackle and roar. Who could be firing? Jack was puzzled to account for the sounds until he guessed that the Cossacks in their headlong flight had flung away their loaded carbines, and that, as the fire swept over them, these were exploded by the heat.

With a glow of content at the success of his scheme, Jack hastened on after the brigands, now walking their horses towards the uplands. There was no fear of pursuit; the Russians were far too much demoralized, and their horses were gone, none knew whither. When Jack overtook the band, Wang Shih suggested that they should follow up their advantage and destroy the enemy. But from this Jack dissuaded him; there were probably other detachments of Cossacks in the neighbourhood; it was best to let well alone, and rejoin his chief as soon as possible. Ah Lum might himself be hard pressed by the encircling movement which the Russians had apparently begun. The Chunchuses therefore rode on, still at a walking pace.

The moon was rising, throwing her silvery mantle over the quiet country. Skirting a black clump of trees the riders were startled to hear the distant clatter of a large body of horses galloping towards them. Moment by moment the sound grew louder. Had another troop of the enemy learnt of what had happened and started on their tracks? Wang Shih looked anxiously around; nothing could be seen, but the sound appeared to come from beyond a stretch of rolling country to the left of their line of march. Giving a brief word of command, Wang Shih wheeled his horse towards the copse; and his band following him at a quick trot, they were soon in the cover of the leafless trees, waiting in anxious silence for the appearance of the enemy.

Nearer and nearer came the thud of hundreds of hoofs. Wang Shih ordered his men to maintain absolute silence; he hoped that the enemy, unaware of his proximity, would pass by and give him the opportunity to slip away undetected. A few minutes passed; Jack was wondering why he could not hear the rattle of sword-cases on the horses' flanks, when on the crest of the low ridge opposite appeared the head of the column, and the earth seemed to shake as score after score of dark forms swept forward towards the path the Chunchuses had so lately left. The brigands had much ado to quiet their ponies, which were pricking their ears and snuffing with distended nostrils in restless excitement. Then, as the

moonlight fell upon the advancing mass, every man in the copse heaved a sigh of relief—and something more. Their pursuers were not horsemen, but horses, every one of them riderless—clearly the stampeded horses of the enemy, rushing blindly into the night, the fire panic at their heels.

"We ought to catch them," said Jack to Wang Shih as they thundered past.

The Chinaman smacked his lips with approval. Such a capture would be a turning of the tables indeed. But how was it to be done? One of his men, knowing in the ways of horses, proposed a plan. The principal thing was to prevent the fugitives from heading back towards the Cossacks. Let the brigands then extend on a wide front and follow; the runagates would keep together, and by and by, when their flight was past, come to a halt. Adopting the suggestion, Wang Shih led his men at a smart trot up the slope. For a long time the beat of the runaways' hoofs could be heard in the night air—the more clearly because they were to windward. Then the sound gradually died away. Wang Shih was anxious not to outrun them in the darkness; the country was uneven, with patches of timber here and there, and the animals if they stopped in the shelter of the hills might easily be passed. But with the number of men at his command it would not be difficult to find the most of them, at any rate, with the morning light. He pushed on, therefore, until he reached the spot where Hi Lo and the guide were eagerly awaiting Jack's arrival. There the band off-saddled, and, worn out with fatigue and excitement, the men flung themselves down on the leaf-strewn ground and sought their much-needed rest.

Jack did not fail to bestow warm praise upon the man and the boy who had so faithfully and cleverly carried out their part of the scheme. Hi Lo had been just on the point of striking his match when the Cossack messenger whom Jack had seen came riding behind him. The boy had barely time to slip into the tall kowliang, whence he had watched the unsuspecting horseman ride past.

"You did very well," said Jack. "Your father will be pleased when I tell him."

Hi Lo beamed with delight.

"My hab makee velly big fire; my look-see allo-piecee Lusski man belongey velly muchee 'flaid; my walkee long-side chow-chow pots; catchee plenty muchee bellyful, that-time lun wailo."

Jack laughed, and bade the boy make a pillow of his pony's saddle and go to sleep.

Next morning the stampeded horses were discovered peacefully cropping the grass in a narrow valley about a mile from the Chunchuses' bivouac. They allowed themselves to be caught easily; and with the booty of nearly two hundred

Transbaikal ponies in excellent condition Wang Shih pursued his march.

CHAPTER XVII
The War Game

An Offer—Conditions—The Sweep of the Net—Military Instructor—The Spur of Competition—Birds of a Feather—Short Commons—A Trap—More Cossacks—Ah Lum in Danger—Initiative—A Race for Position—Sword and Pistol—Driven Off

For four days Wang Shih and his band marched through the hills without hearing anything of Ah Lum. Their progress was somewhat hampered by the additional horses, and Wang Shih chose devious and difficult paths in order to evade scouting parties of Cossacks; for he had little doubt that when the news of the recent incident reached the Russian general in charge of the lines of communication, he would issue orders to his lieutenants to hasten their movements against their daring and elusive enemy. On the fifth day it was reported by a peasant that Ah Lum, after a continuous march northward, was now turning south before formidable Russian forces that were threatening to enclose him. He had felt their strength in one or two slight engagements, and found that they greatly outnumbered him; but, owing to his superior mobility and his knowledge of the country, he had been able to escape without serious loss.

Next day, as the band was threading a defile leading to a well-watered valley, there was a sudden stoppage of the column. It turned out that the advanced patrol had been halted by Ah Lum's scouts, who, however, as soon as they learned the identity of the new-comers, allowed them to pass. The Chunchuse chief was found to have encamped by the river-side, in the valley, the three exits to it being carefully guarded. When he learnt that Wang Shih had returned, with a welcome supply of remounts, he rode forward to meet his lieutenant. Great was his amazement to find among the band the young Englishman who had served as unpaid tutor to his son. His surprise was greater still when Wang Shih recounted the part Jack had played; and the narrative did not minimize his achievement; Wang Shih declared plainly that but for Jack's timely arrival, quick wit, and fearlessness of character, the band must inevitably have been wiped out. Ah Lum made no effort to conceal his pleasure. He had the soldier's delight in a brilliant feat;

the brigand's delight in a good haul; and the mere man's delight in the chance of again securing tutorial services for nothing. He warmly congratulated Jack, and insisted on knowing all the circumstances that had led up to the great event. When the story was fully told, his little black eyes gleamed through his goggles with undisguised satisfaction.

"Irresistible destiny has fulfilled her own decree," he said. "All events are separately fated before they happen. I repeat the offer I made to you on the eve of your departure. If there be no faith in our words, of what use are they? I will give you a command in my army; you will come next to my trusty lieutenant, Mr. Wang; he has muscle, you have mind: both inestimable qualities in a warrior. Did not the poet Wang Wei write in his *Essay on Military Matters*:

"'Know then the Proof: that Leader is most fit
Who Thought to Valour joins, and Strength to Wit'?"

"Thank you!" said Jack gravely; "I accept your kind offer; but, to be frank, there

are one or two points I think I ought to mention. As I said, our compradore has gone to Harbin to make enquiries for my father; if I hear from him, I may have to leave at any moment."

"That is understood. The son that forgetteth his father, shall he not die childless?"

"And there is another point. As you know, Mr. Ah, it is not the English custom—nor indeed the custom of any western nation—to torture prisoners. I have heard that the ways of Chinese warriors are not like ours in that respect. You will pardon me if I say that it will be difficult for me to take service in a force to whom such excesses are permitted."

Somewhat to Jack's surprise the chief did not take offence.

"In that also," he said, "my mind is equally yoked with yours. As Confucius says, 'The intelligence of the superior man is deep'; the wise man is he that is ever learning. I have watched this war; I see that the Japanese have won their successes by adopting the red man's methods. I will make a decree that no prisoner shall suffer inordinate correction. But I must beg you to be patient. When water has once flowed over, it cannot easily be restored; when the passions have once been indulged, they cannot easily be restrained. Water must be kept in by dykes, the passions must be regulated by the laws of propriety. I will impress these laws on my men; they shall know what is right; and I will make them understand that knowing what is right without practising it denotes a want of proper resolution."

"Thank you, Mr. Ah! that is a relief. For myself, I can only say that I will do my best to be worthy of your confidence."

"Now, is it not written, 'He that gives willingly is himself worthy of gifts'? I beg of you a favour in return; it is that you will continue to give my son lessons in your honourable language. And, further, I shall be grateful if you will deign to teach me something of the barbarian's art of war, the learning of which has made the Japanese so victorious."

"I will go on with Ah Fu with pleasure," said Jack, adding with a smile: "but I'm afraid I can't do anything in the other line. I have made no study of warfare; my father has trained me to a commercial career."

"But you have seen the barbarian armies at their exercise?"

"I admit that."

"Well, I am sure you can be of great service to me if it is your august pleasure."

"I will do what I can, Mr. Ah,—if your men will carry out instructions. I'm a 'foreign devil', after all."

"'In the world there are many men, but few heroes', as the proverb says. I know your worth; do I not remember the boar, and the saving of my son's life? surely it would ill become me to forget; and this late employment of fire against our enemies? Modesty is attended with profit; whereas arrogance courts destruction. My men, those that I place under you, will obey you. I will see to that."

Jack thus found himself lieutenant in a regiment of some twelve hundred men, armed for the most part with Mausers, and well mounted. Except for a wholesome dread of their chief, however, they had very little discipline, and but scant military cohesion. Although there was no lack of arms and ammunition, Ah Lum was not too well provisioned. He had been driven by the encircling Russian movement into a somewhat poor district, the hills being more fruitful in forest trees than in grain. The valley of his encampment was fertile enough, but its products would soon be exhausted, and it was separated from the grain-bearing plains to the west by a chain of barren heights. The bandits were being driven farther and farther into the mountainous regions, where it would become increasingly difficult to feed so large a force. Messengers had recently come in, reporting that Russian troops operating on the northern frontier of Korea were pushing reconnoitring parties into the hills in their rear with the object of locating them. There were many smaller parties of Chunchuses scattered over the country, but Ah Lum's was the only considerable band left in the angle between the two railway lines connecting Harbin with Kirin and Vladivostok respectively. The lull after the battle of Liao-yang had enabled the Russians to devote more attention than heretofore to clearing their flanks of these troublesome irregulars. Ah Lum was well served by scouts, the country people being anxious to purchase immunity by giving such information as they could without risk; and from them

the chief had learnt that the largest force opposed to him was at this time about two marches away. Some days would probably pass before they came on his trail. It had been throughout the war the Russians' experience that the Chinese were very reluctant to give them news of any kind, and this reluctance had been still more marked since the unbroken success of the Japanese had become common knowledge through the country.

Day after day passed, and the bandits were still left unmolested. Jack, settling down to his new position, had his hands fully occupied. He gave Ah Fu lessons in English daily, to his father's great delight. But he had wider scope for his tutorial faculty. He had felt a little natural amusement at the idea of being placed—he, a civilian, with just as much military experience as his school drill-ground and some practice at the butts afforded—in command of a troop of warriors—a motley horde, indeed, but all seasoned, determined, fearless fellows. But, as was inevitable in a force indiscriminately recruited and entirely lacking in regular training, the men had much to learn; and Jack had not made a wholehearted study of the Boer war without feeling that, civilian though he was, he was better acquainted with the general principles of warfare than possibly any other member of the band. The Chunchuses were little accustomed to organized movements on any considerable scale; they were most adept in sniping at single travellers or small bodies whom they could attack unawares from the vantage of cover. Something more was required if they were to defeat the serious attempts now being made to crush them, and Jack was determined to show himself worthy of Ah Lum's confidence by his manner of handling his own division of two hundred and fifty men.

Marksmanship and cover: these he took to be the principal factors in modern warfare. So far as the use of cover was concerned, he found that his men had little to learn; several months of hard fighting against troops carrying arms of precision had enforced the value of cover in the most practical way. In each engagement the Russians had taken toll of those who failed to recognize its importance: their bodies lay among the hills from the Yalu to the Sungari. But in marksmanship the Chunchuses were not so efficient. A large proportion of them had never handled, perhaps never even seen, a rifle until they joined the band. Without definite instruction they were apt to blaze away at their own will and pleasure, absolutely reckless of the wastage of ammunition, which had hitherto, owing to one or two lucky raids, been plentiful. Jack suspected that the proportion of hits to misses was woefully small. He therefore set earnestly to work to effect an improvement in this respect. He rigged up butts, put every man in his command through a course, and, taking advantage of the Chinaman's love of competitive examination, started a shooting competition, with badges of different form and colour for the prizes. This especially pleased Ah Lum; it aroused a

keen spirit among his men; the example of Jack's division was soon followed by the rest, and the general proficiency was very largely increased.

Among Jack's men were the greater part of the company he had rescued. One of them was Hu Hang, the ex-constable. This man showed extraordinary skill with the rifle. As Hi Lo said:

"Policeyman he can shootee allo plopa first-chop what-time no piecee man he shootee back."

This was a somewhat caustic remark; but Hi Lo had no love for the constable, who indeed was not popular among the band. His comrades would have been hardly human if they had not made the most of their opportunities of paying off against Hu Hang the scores that many of them owed to members of his hated class. He kept a good deal apart, finding a congenial soul only in C'hu Tan, the former second in command, who had been deposed for grave neglect of duty, and replaced by Wang Shih. The two malcontents were often together, condoling with each other on their wrongs; and their animus against Wang Shih extended to Jack, who struck them as an additional supplanter, the more hateful from being a foreigner. Jack knew nothing of this himself; but it did not escape the shrewd eyes of Hi Lo, who kept quiet and unobtrusive watch upon C'hu Tan, dogging him at every turn.

After a fortnight's steady practice Jack felt that the fighting value of his little force was well-nigh doubled. But at the end of that time Ah Lum suddenly ordered the rifle practice to be stopped. A scout had reported that the Russians had approached within striking distance, and the chief feared lest the sound of the firing should betray his whereabouts.

At last one morning, after hearing a messenger who came in faint and gasping after a long night's ride, Ah Lum felt that the coil was being drawn too tightly around him. He gave a sudden order to decamp; the band quitted the valley that had sheltered them so long, and set off into the hills. Lack of provisions was beginning to be felt. The ponies, hardy little animals, were able to pick up a subsistence on the hillsides, sparse though the grazing was at this time of year; and for them stalks of kowliang could always be obtained as a last resource. But the supply of rice and buckwheat, on which the men depended, was running short. Ah Lum somewhat dismally told Jack that it would now be necessary to reduce the rations. He confessed that he was in a tighter place than ever before. At no time previously had the Russians made such determined efforts to crush him. In addition to the Korean frontier force far to his rear, which for the present need not be reckoned with, there were, as he had learnt, three large forces of Cossacks, each stronger than his own band, converging upon him from north, east, and west. General Kuropatkin had hitherto been able to make little use of these characteristic cavalry of the Russian army, so that they were available for the less

dignified but very necessary work of bandit-hunting. The three forces directed against Ah Lum were still a considerable distance apart from one another, but it was clear to him that in a few days he would have to try conclusions with one of them before they got into touch. He had only escaped this necessity so long because the Cossacks were unaccustomed to hill work. Matchless in rapid furious charges on the plain, they had shown little capacity for mountain fighting or even for scouting; and, as Jack learnt afterwards, they were desperately chagrined at their hard luck in having so few chances of the kind of work that suited them.

The Chunchuses marched for several days into the hills, their condition going from bad to worse. The rations were verging on exhaustion. The Cossacks were no doubt well supplied, and Ah Lum felt that the moment had come for an attack on one of their forces. The nearest was only a long march distant. Breaking up his camp early one morning, when the night's frost lay white on the ground, he led his men across the hills northward, and, proceeding with great caution, located the enemy late in the afternoon. Throwing out scouts in advance—men intimately acquainted with the country—he sighted the Cossacks before they sighted him, and at once fell back behind a forest-clad ridge so that his presence might not be discovered that day. During the night his scouts reported, apparently by a calculation from the enemy's watch-fires, that the Cossacks were at least a thousand strong, and thus about equal numerically to Ah Lum's effective force, with the advantage of better discipline and training. But the chief, in common with all his countrymen, had shrewdly studied the invaders; he had not been blind to the Cossacks' failure in the war, and he was hardly the kind of man to allow himself to be terrorized by the mere name of Cossack, the effect of which was due merely to the memory of past exploits when the conditions of warfare were different.

An hour or two before they sighted the Russians, the bandits had advanced through a narrow pass, enclosed between steep and rugged bluffs. Upon this pass Ah Lum decided to fall back; it offered every advantage for an ambuscade. Withdrawing thither during the hours of darkness, he allowed his men a brief spell of sleep; then, while the dawn was yet but a glimmer, he set them to fell trees in the copses that crowned the hills, and to pile them across the pathway at the far end. It was still early when he placed half his men in cover upon the heights overlooking the track; the rest, consisting of the divisions of Wang Shih and Jack, were sent to threaten the Russian rear. A mist hung over the hills; it was bitterly cold, and the ponies often slipped on the frosty ground. Luckily Wang Shih had with him a peasant of the neighbourhood who acted as guide. But for him the Chunchuses could hardly have found their way.

It was but an hour after daybreak when they found themselves on the right

rear of the Russians about two miles from the latter's camp. Wang Shih's orders were to wait until the Cossacks had advanced to the end of the pass and been checked by the ambuscade there. Then, before the enemy could recover from the confusion into which they would be thrown, he was to follow up rapidly in the hope that a movement seeming to threaten their line of retreat might complete their disorder. He therefore waited until, from a secure hiding-place, he saw them quit their camp and march out. Then he moved his men with Jack's down the hill somewhat closer to the enemy's line of march, and awaited the sound of firing in the distance that would announce the beginning of the fight at the ambuscade.

Meanwhile Jack narrowly scanned the surrounding country. The mist had cleared away, and a bright cold October sun was painting the distant hills with various charming tints. Suddenly Jack's attention was attracted by a dark, narrow, tape-like something moving down a slope far to the north-west. Before many seconds were past he was convinced that it was a body of horsemen. The question was, what horsemen? In the distance their character could not be distinguished; the one thing certain was that they were not Japanese, for their clothes were very dark; the Japanese were wearing khaki. They were scarcely likely to be Chunchuses; from their regular even progress Jack concluded that they could not be native carriers; surely they must be a second body of Cossacks who had advanced by forced marches to co-operate with those now approaching the ambush.

Jack had moved some little distance in advance of his troop. What he had seen sent him in haste to rejoin Wang Shih.

"We must get our men under cover," he said. "There are Cossacks, I believe, descending the opposite hills. They may not have seen us yet."

The Chunchuses moved within cover of the nearest trees, and Wang Shih sent forward his keenest scout on foot to ascertain whether the new-comers were enemies or friends. He returned in a few minutes declaring that even at this distance he had distinguished the characteristic head-dress of the Cossacks. Wang Shih was disposed to remain in cover until the time came for him to carry out Ah Lum's orders. In his present position he ran little risk of being seen by the oncoming party, and being entirely without imagination it did not occur to him that the situation was now perhaps radically altered. But to Jack the discovery seemed to be serious. The line of advance taken by the second body of Cossacks would bring them within an hour across Ah Lum's rear. The position had been strangely reversed. While Ah Lum believed that Wang Shih was cutting off the retreat of the first body, his own rear was in process of being threatened by a force twice as numerous as the one he could dispose of. He was probably in ignorance of the danger, for the advancing Cossacks were shut from his view by the contours of the hills, and there was little likelihood now of a warning being

conveyed to him by a Chinese villager. It was impossible for a messenger to reach him from Wang Shih, for the first Russian force lay between.

Jack pointed out to Wang Shih the peril in which his chief lay. The Chunchuse admitted it, but asked what he could do. With his assistance Ah Lum might beat the first body of the enemy before the second could arrive, and then could turn his attention to it in its turn.

"But suppose the fight takes a long time? And suppose we do not succeed in beating the first Russian force? If they hold us until the second arrives, Mr. Ah's men will be attacked from the rear, and they will certainly be crushed between the two."

"It is as you say. But the chief has given me orders; he will be angry if I disobey. It is better to carry out orders."

It was evident that Wang Shih was disinclined to assume any responsibility. Jack was by no means satisfied that things must be allowed to take their course. It appeared to him of the utmost importance that the second Russian force should be held in check until the first had been disposed of. He went through the clump of bare trees until he reached the summit of the crest, and looked anxiously towards the advancing band.

About a mile away the hill path it was following disappeared in a cleft in the hills, reappearing a quarter of a mile farther on. It seemed to Jack that at this spot, resembling somewhat the position Ah Lum had taken up, it was possible to hold the Russians in check. So far as he could see, there was no better place along their route for such an attempt, and he instantly made up his mind that the attempt must be made. It was doubtful whether the Chunchuses could reach the cleft in time to occupy it before the Cossacks arrived, but there was a bare chance, and he resolved to take it.

Hastening back to Wang Shih he explained that he proposed with his own division of men to make for the cleft, leaving the rest to carry out Ah Lum's instructions. Wang Shih raised no objection; he merely stipulated that Jack should accept the full responsibility for his action. In a few minutes, therefore, Jack rode off at the head of his band; almost immediately after starting he heard the dull sound of firing in Ah Lum's direction; the fight in the pass had begun. Clearly there was no time to lose, for the same sound would certainly quicken the approach of the second body of Russians.

Keeping down the hill in order to screen his movements as long as possible from the enemy, Jack led the way at as rapid a trot as the rugged ground allowed. Only a few minutes had passed when the little force rode out on to the open hillside, where they must be seen by the Russians. Jack fancied that the enemy was at this time nearer to the cleft than his own men; but the Chunchuses were riding downhill, the Russians up, which gave room for hope that he might reach

the position first. He was helped also by the more open character of the ground on his side, and by the fact that for some time the Russians failed to recognize the object of the horsemen riding at full speed towards them. During these precious moments Jack's party gained several hundred yards. Keeping one eye on the rough ground and the other on the enemy, Jack noticed that the leading files broke from a walk into a trot and then into a headlong scramble. It was now neck or nothing. Throwing caution to the winds, he dug his spurs into his pony, and clattered at breakneck speed down the slope, the Chunchuses hard at his heels. Several ponies stumbled and came to their knees, flinging their riders; but the rest, intoxicated with the excitement of the race, rode unheeding after their leader. A dip in the ground now hid the two forces from one another; they would not again come in sight until the cleft was reached. Between the Chunchuses and the point they aimed at lay a comparatively clear space, dotted by a few single boulders without any of the smaller stones that for most of their ride had impeded their progress. Now Jack urged his panting steed to a mad gallop; the quarter-mile was covered in a few seconds; he dashed into the cleft, the foremost of his men but a length behind.

Eagerly he peered ahead through the narrow tortuous passage. None of the Cossacks was in sight. He galloped on, hoping to reach the other end before they arrived; it would be easy to hold the entrance against them. He had almost reached the farther opening when he came full tilt on the leading Russian horseman, a Transbaikal Cossack riding with loose rein, pistol in hand. He was some twenty yards in advance of the troop. In the heat of the race Jack had not anticipated the chance of a fight on horseback. Before he could draw his pistol the Russian had fired: the bullet whizzed harmlessly past Jack's head. With astonishing dexterity the Russian whipped his sword from the scabbard; by the time Jack had his pistol ready only a few yards separated the two. Then Jack fired; the Russian's uplifted sword dropped from his hand, and the ponies came together with a thud. Both riders fell to the ground, Jack being thrown lightly on the slope to the right, thus fortunately escaping the hoofs of the ponies following. He arose dazed, saw a confused mass of men in front of him, heard shouts and the crack of pistols. Pulling himself together, he ordered his men to dismount and line the sides of the gully. In an instant some scores of them were scrambling up the bluffs on both sides, leaving their ponies to be gradually passed to the rear by their comrades.

The men in front, finding themselves unsupported, began to give way, but slowly and stubbornly. As the Russians could only advance two abreast, and that with difficulty, two or three precious minutes were gained, during which the crests of the slopes on either side were manned by the Chunchuses. Now Jack gave the word to open fire. His men were breathless; their limbs were quiv-

At full Tilt

At full Tilt

ering; and their hasty ill-directed shots did little execution. But several horses and men fell in the Russian van; the pressure on the mounted Chunchuses who were stemming the Russian advance was reduced; and then, as the marksmen steadied and took deliberate aim, a hot and deadly fire was poured into the enemy's ranks. The Russians made an attempt to reply, taking advantage of cover where they could, some of them sheltering themselves behind the ponies that had fallen. But the bandits had all the advantage of position; the Cossacks, after a gallant stand, were forced to give way; and leaving more than thirty of their number on the ground they galloped back a half-mile to a shoulder of the hill, where they found protection from the rifle-fire of the Chunchuses.

CHAPTER XVIII
A Fight in the Hills

Playing the Game—A Sprint—Hit—Waiting—Across the Open—Hard Beset—Between two Fires—The Raising of the Siege—The Spoils—The Rear-Guard—The Outlook

The onfall had been so violent and the fight so brisk and rapid that Jack had had no time to form any plans or give any but the most obvious orders demanded by the exigency of the moment. He was exceedingly glad of the breathing space afforded by the withdrawal of the enemy. If he had checked them, it was only because he was able to forestall them in the cleft; the real struggle was to come.

He utilized the pause to make good his position in the pass. The narrow path was strewn with boulders. With these each bandit made his own little fort, so arranging them, when they were not too heavy to be moved, as to give the maximum of cover against the enemy's fire. Jack wondered what form the Russian attack would take. The pass was so narrow, its course so uneven, that direct fire from the farther end would not, he thought, be very effective. That he was right was soon proved. In about a quarter of an hour the Cossacks opened a spasmodic rifle-fire from the rough ground about three-quarters of a mile away. It made no impression on the Chunchuses, except that one man was shot dead by a ricochet.

Apparently convinced of the hopelessness of loosening the bandits' hold upon the pass, the Russians ceased firing. As the minutes passed in silence, Jack

wondered what their next move was to be. Faint sounds of shots came from the distance; Ah Lum's band was evidently still engaged; surely the commander of the men opposed to Jack must know that he was losing precious time, and would make some real effort to join hands with the other force. Jack could not but suspect that some movement was being developed quietly and out of sight, a suspicion strengthened when firing again broke out, intermittent, absolutely ineffective, probably designed to withdraw his attention from anything beyond his immediate front. From his position in the pass he could see nothing of the surrounding country; but about a hundred yards nearer the Russians there was a point from which he thought a good view might be obtained. To reach it, however, he would have to run the gauntlet of the Russian fire; for at least thirty yards he would be fully exposed without possibility of taking cover. Should he risk it?

For a time he hesitated. The weighty reasons against endangering his life flocked one after another through his mind; uppermost of all, the thought of his father, and of his friends at home so anxiously waiting for news of him. But he felt that having brought his men into their present hot corner it was his duty, at whatever personal risk, to get them out of it; and only by ascertaining the Russian plan of attack, if they had one, could he hope with his mere handful of men to hold his own. He hesitated no longer. Not that he was disposed to forget prudence and play the dare-devil. He would not throw away any chance. Shouting to the men nearest to him he told them what he proposed to do, and arranged that when he reached the limits of cover three of the bandits should draw the Russian fire by the old Indian trick of displaying the corner of a garment above their lurking place, as if they were exposing themselves to take aim. The trick when tried for the first time was almost certain to provoke a fusillade from the enemy, and Jack could then seize the opportunity to make a dash across the open ground. The same device could be employed again when he signalled his desire to return; but it was less likely to prove successful then, for the Russians would be on the watch, and the more intelligent of them would have seen through the ruse. Still, it would be worth the trial even in the second case. Accordingly, having arranged for the signal which should announce his return, he started to worm his way to the limit of cover.

When he arrived there he halted, turned round, and, lifting his hand to show that he was ready, braced himself for the sprint across the open. The appearance of a hat and portion of a coat above the rocks behind was followed instantly by the rattle of musketry from the Russian position. Setting his teeth, Jack sprang from cover and raced at full speed up the hill to a little knot of boulders above him. Before he had gone half the distance there was a second crash of volleying rifles; but the Russians had clearly taken very flurried aim; Jack heard

the hissing flight of the bullets, but reached the shelter of the rock without a scratch.

As soon as he had taken breath, he set himself to make a careful survey of the scene beneath him. There was a party of Cossacks, whose numbers it was impossible to estimate, more or less hidden in the rough ground immediately in front of the pass. Half a mile in their rear was another body, apparently in reserve, numbering, as he guessed, about 300. But the force he had seen an hour before, winding its way down the hillside, had consisted of more than 1000 men. Where, then, were the rest? Jack's eye travelled from the lower to the upper slopes of the hill. For a few moments he could distinguish nothing resembling a body of men; then—yes, about a mile and a half away was a dark object moving diagonally across the field of view, and this soon resolved itself into a column of horsemen. The remnant of the Cossack force, about a third of its strength, had presumably returned some distance along the path of their advance, then swept round to the right. In a few minutes they disappeared from view; Jack could hardly doubt that they intended to turn his position by following a bridle path that would probably bring them out upon his rear. He must go back and question the guide. He made the signal to his men; again they raised the garments; there was a scathing volley from the Russians, but some, not to be caught napping a second time, held their fire, and as Jack bounded forth he heard the flying bullets whistling unpleasantly around him. One tore the felt from his Chinese shoe; another stung him like a whip in the forearm; but, owing, doubtless, to the fact that he was racing downhill, and that in consequence both the range and the elevation were rapidly changing, he reached cover in safety except for these slight mishaps.

While his wound was being bound up, he questioned the man who had guided the bandits to the district. The Chinaman, on Jack explaining what he had seen, agreed that there was a path through the hills in the direction indicated. It led to a ledge of rock jutting out from a shoulder of the hill about half a mile in the rear of Jack's position. An enemy holding that narrow platform could command the southern outlet of the pass, and completely cut off the Chunchuse force. For a moment Jack thought of stealing a march on the Cossacks and occupying the ledge, but a little reflection showed how useless this would be. Not only would he weaken the body holding the pass, every man of whom would be required when the serious attack was delivered, but the ledge itself and the path in its neighbourhood were scarcely tenable against a force so largely outnumbering his own.

Another move that suggested itself was to abandon the pass and fight a rearguard action as he retraced his steps towards Ah Lum's position. But to do this would be, he felt, to abandon his whole object, which was to relieve Ah Lum as long as possible of pressure from the second Russian force. After taking

anxious thought, he decided that he must stick to the pass if the chief was to have any chance of escaping the net now closing around him. So long as there was a fighting force in the pass the Russians would not venture to attack Ah Lum, for they could not spare enough men to bottle up Jack's division and at the same time strike an effective blow at the chief so strongly placed. Accordingly Jack withdrew his men from the section of the pass likely to be covered by the flanking force, and settled down to await developments. Sounds of firing still came across the hills in the rear, showing that Ah Lum, and possibly by this time Wang Shih also, were at grips with the first Russian column.

Fronting the southern end of the pass was a small clump of trees that would give the Russians ample cover if they could reach it. But in order to reach it they would have to cross a quarter of a mile of comparatively level ground, affording little cover, and exposed to the direct fire of the defenders. For a moment Jack was tempted to occupy the clump; but that would involve the splitting of his force, and any detachment he might send to hold the position would be completely cut off from support except by rifle-fire. Fortunately the clump was not approachable from the rear; the attempt would involve a laborious climb uphill, the climbers all the time exposed to fire from the mouth of the pass. This end being less defensible than the northern, Jack had already placed the greater number of his men in cover here in anticipation of the arrival of the Russian turning column.

Some twenty minutes passed, during which Jack impressed upon his men the necessity of husbanding their ammunition. They had but a small supply, with no reserve to draw upon; it was imperative that they should not reply to the Russian fire until they could see their enemy distinctly. The near approach of the Cossacks was heralded by a sudden hail of bullets falling upon the rocks on either side of the pass. This was the signal for a warm fusillade from the original point of attack. To neither was any reply made by the Chunchuses, among whom not a man was touched. After a few minutes there was a sudden lull in the firing; it had become evident to the Russians that unless they rushed the clump of trees they could make no impression on an enemy so well protected. Intuitively Jack knew what was impending; he called to his men to be on the alert; and scarcely had he spoken when forty or fifty big horsemen, in open order, dashed across the open space towards the trees. Then Jack gave the word. The Cossacks had covered but a few yards when a terrible fire was poured upon them from the pass. Here a man dropped from his saddle; there a horse rolled over; but with the fine courage that had distinguished the Russian soldier throughout the war, the others held on in their terrible race with death. As they galloped forward man after man fell; only a gallant remnant reached the clump, and with it comparative safety. Scarcely a third of the troop gained the shelter of the trees, but tactically the movement was worth the sacrifice. There was silence for a brief space; then the men in the

clump opened fire. From their new position they were able to enfilade a considerable section of the pass. One by one Jack's men began to fall; then there was a second rush from the Cossack main body to reinforce the men in the copse; and the defenders of the pass, enfiladed as they were, were unable to stop it. Most of the Russians got across; and with the reinforcements they had received, the men in the clump poured a still more damaging fire into the Chunchuses, only half-concealed now by rocks and boulders, and hampered by the necessity of sparing their ammunition. The Russians, feeling that they had the upper hand, began to expose themselves both in the copse and on the rough ground whence their rushes had been made; and the bandits, with the fear of their cartridges running short, durst not take full advantage of their opportunities of picking off incautious individuals among the enemy; they had to content themselves with firing whenever a group of two or more presented a broad target, and directing occasional close volleys into the copse. Still, the distance separating the combatants was so short—barely three hundred yards—that even in the comparative shelter of the trees the Russians suffered heavily; every now and then their fire slackened, and it was necessary to reinforce them by further detachments from the main column.

While the battle was thus waged at the south of the pass, there had been constant firing at the other end. Hi Lo went backwards and forwards between the two divisions of Jack's band, with news of the enemy's movements and the progress of the fight—a duty involving considerable risk; but the boy could make use of rocks and inequalities of the ground that would not have sheltered a grown man, and he was indeed exceedingly proud of being selected to assist in this way.

He reported now that the enfilading fire of the Russians in the copse at the south had driven the Chunchuses from the western face of the pass at the north end, allowing the Cossacks to creep round the hillside on the north-east of the entrance, and gain a position from which they were able to inflict serious loss on the defenders. Jack felt that the coils were gradually being drawn around him; and when a number of men, covered by a brisk rifle-fire, dashed from the copse towards the steep hillside overlooking the pass, and in spite of the loss of several of their number began laboriously to climb the slope, he could not but recognize that the game was well-nigh up. The fight had lasted three hours. His men were worn; the strain had been very great; and they were reduced to half a dozen rounds a rifle. But they were still steady and undismayed; how much their tenacity owed to Jack's training and how much to their native courage it would be difficult to say; but two things were certain: their marksmanship was distinctly superior to that of the Cossacks, and the temptation of undisciplined troops to blaze away at random had been quite heroically resisted.

The men climbing the face of the hill soon passed out of sight; but in about

ten minutes they opened fire from a ridge high up the slope. In excellent cover themselves, they had many of the Chunchuses in full view; and the Chinamen could not move into shelter without exposing themselves to the fire of the Cossacks in the copse. Nevertheless the bandits, with the characteristic doggedness of the Chinese in face of peril, clung to their positions, flattening themselves against the rocks and boulders, which gave them less and less protection, attacked as they now were from several sides. More than once Jack made a hazardous trip to the northern end of the pass, encouraging his men; each time he noticed with a sinking heart that the number of still and prostrate forms was greater. What caused the keenest pang, it was impossible to bring the wounded to a place of safety. As soon as a man fell, he almost inevitably lost the complete protection of his boulder; a portion of his body lay outside the zone of safety, and the poor wretch thus became the mark for a score of bullets. His heart torn with pity for the men, Jack at one time thought of surrender. But then he recollected that they would merely exchange the bullet for the noose; and there was always a bare chance of relief. He himself was wounded in the shoulder; at least half his men were out of action; the Russians were gradually closing in towards both entrances of the pass; and a simultaneous rush at each end must finish the struggle. Jack wondered why such an assault had not already been made. It would entail a certain loss of life; but perhaps less in the end than would result from prolonging the struggle. Even as the thought struck him, he saw signs of the movement he so much dreaded, and hurrying back to the southern end, where the worst of the fighting must take place, he was about to urge his men to sell their lives dearly, when from the steep pathway beyond the rocky platform previously pointed out by his guide there came the discharge of half a hundred rifles. The combat in the pass ceased instantly; both sides were startled and amazed—Jack wondering whether the first Russian force had disposed of Ah Lum, and was now returning to complete the destruction of his followers; the Cossacks apparently uncertain whether the shots came from friend or foe. Another volley flashed from the height; immediately afterwards a swarm of horsemen was seen to descend. By the manner of their riding it was plain they were not Cossacks. They were making direct for the rear of the Russian force, threatening to cut off its retreat. The Cossacks beyond the copse waited no longer. In one wild rush, some throwing away their rifles in their haste, they fled towards the pathway by which they had come, hoping to reach the ponies tethered beyond the zone of fire. The men in the copse, less fortunately placed than their comrades, offered a desperate resistance to the Chunchuses now enveloping them—Jack leading some of his men in a charge from the pass, the new-comers sweeping round at headlong speed to intercept the fugitives. A few of the Cossacks, seeing their flight hopeless, surrendered; the rest died fighting; while those on the hillside, taken in reverse,

were shot down almost to a man.

Thus reinforced, Jack sent a detachment round towards the northern end of the pass, and led a strong body to make a frontal attack on the Cossacks there. But they did not await the assault. Perceiving their danger, they withdrew towards their reserve; and becoming aware within a few minutes of the Chunchuses rapidly approaching on their flank, they abandoned their position and galloped swiftly away, many of them falling to the rifles of the bandits.

The detachment which had come so providentially to Jack's relief proved to be Wang Shih's force. By the time they returned from pursuing the fleeing Russians, Ah Lum himself arrived at the pass. Jack then learnt what had happened. The first Russian force had been completely routed. They had lost heavily in the ambuscade, but had rallied and attempted to rush Ah Lum's position. Then, however, Wang Shih had come down upon their flank, and, discouraged by their heavy losses at the ambuscade, they had retreated. Closely followed up by Ah Lum, they were taken between two fires, and their retirement, at first orderly, soon became a headlong flight.

Ah Lum made the handsomest acknowledgments to Jack for the part he had played. And his was indeed a notable achievement. Though threatened by nearly thrice their numbers, his men by their gallant fight had prevented the junction of the two Cossack forces, and thus enabled Ah Lum to secure his object, and win the victory on which so much had depended. His combined force was not strong enough to follow up the advantage gained; for among the hills the Cossacks would easily find a defensible position, and if they once succeeded in checking the pursuit, the Chunchuses would soon be opposed by overwhelming numbers. But in the hastily evacuated position the victors discovered a considerable supply of food, fodder, and ammunition abandoned by the Cossacks, and this proved a welcome addition to their depleted stores.

Ah Lum had now to consider his future movements. He had learnt from a scout, who had overtaken him as he rode towards the pass, that a strong Cossack force was pushing northwards from the Korean frontier. To escape the ring-fence in which the Russians were evidently determined to enclose him, it seemed best to strike north-east, and endeavour to gain a position that had more than once been occupied by Chunchuses in their conflicts with Chinese troops. Arrangements were hastily made for the transport of the wounded, on both sides unfortunately very numerous. Mindful of his engagement with Jack, Ah Lum would not allow his men to despatch the wounded Russians, as was their wont. Forming a long column, he started on his march, leaving Jack with 300 men to watch the Cossacks and hold them at bay, should they return, until the main body had got a good start. Jack held the pass for the remainder of the day; he was glad of the rest, for it enabled him to have his injured arm bathed and dressed. Fortunately the

wounds were slight. No sign of further attack being seen, he thought it safe to follow up his chief. They joined forces within twenty-four hours of Jack's leaving the pass. Ah Lum's march had been delayed by the wounded, whom, however, he left in groups at friendly villages en route. All the wounded having been thus disposed of, the combined Chunchuse column regained its former mobility, and, marching rapidly, in three days reached the hill fastness where Ah Lum hoped to enjoy a breathing-space to rest and recruit.

In the course of the march he gathered up ample food supplies for man and beast, but was still beset by the scarcity of ammunition. A great deal had been expended in the recent fight, and the wastage was by no means made up by what had been captured from the Russians. The band, too, was constantly being recruited, mainly from men who had been wounded and left behind in the villages after previous engagements; and in spite of its recent losses it was now again fully twelve hundred strong. But when the stock of ammunition came to be examined, it was found that there scarcely remained a dozen rounds a man. Unless, therefore, a fresh supply could in some way be procured, it would be necessary to disband the force. The dilemma gave Ah Lum serious concern.

CHAPTER XIX
Captain Kargopol finds the Chunchuses

Grumbles—Pai-chi-kou—The Masterful Muscovite—A Midnight Council—The Inn—A Summons—Betrayal—Confirmation—Miss-fire—The Rounds—Ivan Ivanovitch

Captain Vassily Nikolaeitch Kargopol was not in the best of tempers. His pony, which had carried him all day over some of the worst mountain tracks in Manchuria, slipped at the frozen edge of a rut, and nearly rolled over. The rider, as a captain of Transbaikal Cossacks, was too good a horseman to be thrown; but he was severely jolted, and he brought the poor jaded beast up with a smart lash of his whip. This seemed to relieve his feelings; and further consideration, together with a comically reproachful look on the face of his companion, brought repentance. Leaning forward he patted the animal's neck.

"You needn't look at me like that, Borisoff," he said. "I know it's too bad of me to visit the sins of this accursed country on the beast. Never mind; he shall

have an extra feed of buckwheat to-night, and I'll see that he gets it."

"That's more like you, Kargopol," returned Lieutenant Casimir Andreitch Borisoff. The cloud had indeed cleared like magic from the captain's round, jovial, somewhat rubicund face; evidently he was not a man on whom ill-temper sat long or heavily.

"The truth is, I am becoming a little uneasy. Isn't there something in the Scriptures about hunting after a dead dog, after a flea? I confess I'd rather stick to our proper work, and smash Oyama instead of running after this Ah Lum and his Chunchuses."

"Yes, confound the fellow! He's as agile as the little unmentionable fellow you were beguiled into naming, though by all accounts he's more like a live lion than a dead dog. That fight of his was a masterly piece of work."

"I only wish we could get to grips with him. Here have I been for weeks—months—on the hunt, and haven't so much as sighted a bandit. Hi there! Ivan Samsonitch, ask the Chinaman how far it is to this precious village."

The trooper addressed, riding beside a burly Chinaman twenty paces ahead, translated the question into a barbarous mixture of Chinese and pidgin Russian. The Chinaman, whose legs as he bestrode his little pony almost touched the ground, bowed humbly upon the animal's neck, and barked a reply.

"He says, little father," said the sergeant, translating, "that Pai-chi-kou is about seven li farther; that is four versts; but there is a river to be forded."

"Another river! That makes a round dozen since we started. And the water's icy cold, confound it!"

The captain had drawn up to the sergeant; only to him and the Chinaman was his mild grumble audible. The sergeant was a man of responsibility with whom he could to a certain extent unbend; the men must hear no complaints. For nine hours the detachment of 150 Cossacks had marched up hill and down dale over tracks slippery with frost, wading streams that in another month would be deeply coated with ice. Their progress was hampered by the necessity of watching and assisting the heavily-laden pack-mules that formed the major part of the column. Their destination was the village of Pai-chi-kou, where they were to be joined by the larger force for which they were carrying ammunition and supplies. As verst succeeded verst, the captain thought, and said to Lieutenant Borisoff, hard things of the transport officer who had drawn out the itinerary. The want of good service maps was a terrible disadvantage. Once the detachment had lost its way altogether; and only after an hour had been spent in futile search was a countryman opportunely discovered and pressed into the service as guide. The man was very unwilling to act; he protested his wish to go in an entirely different direction, to a village where his grandfather awaited burial rites. But Captain Kargopol had had enough dealings with Chinamen to regard this grandfather

as an oriental Mrs. Harris; he turned a deaf ear to the man's protests, and was unmelted by his facile tears. Under his guidance the troops had trudged along, the men bearing the fatigues of the march with the fine cheerfulness of the Russian soldier, breaking out every now and then into song, their rich voices ringing out gloriously in the clear, frosty air.

The twelfth river was waded, only one of the mules losing its footing and submerging its load. Shortly afterwards, just as dusk was falling, the column arrived at a long, straggling village.

"This is Pai-chi-kou?" said the captain.

"Yes, little father," replied the sergeant, after questioning the guide.

"H'm! It seems very populous. Where do they stow all the people? And what is the noise about?"

The street was crowded with Chinese men, women, and children, making a terrible din with gongs, drums, and crackers. The guide explained that a great number of people had come into the village to keep the annual Dragon-boat Festival; if the Russians had arrived a little earlier they would have seen the river covered with long, narrow, gaily-painted boats paddled by crews of twenty in fantastic costumes, the banks thronged with onlookers.

"A pity we missed it, Borisoff," said the captain. "However, I'm glad we have arrived safely at last."

If Captain Kargopol had known a little more about Chinese customs, he would certainly have asked why in this village the Festival—a summer festival held on the fifth day of the fifth moon—was being celebrated four months after the proper time. Moreover, it is only celebrated where the rivers are broad; on a hill stream the procession of boats must be a mere travesty. But the captain could hardly be expected to know that.

The captain rode up to the only inn, where the one habitable room was crammed with Chinamen. After a short colloquy with the innkeeper these natives were unceremoniously bundled out into the courtyard; the captain had declared his intention of occupying the room with Lieutenant Borisoff for the night. He then sent his sergeant to find quarters for the troopers in the village. The man reported that every house was full up.

"Then we must empty them," said the captain, who was tired and grumpy. "Make the Chinese turn out. The men have more need of rest than they."

This was unanswerable, if illogical. The sergeant went to do his bidding, and soon the street was noisier than ever, the dispossessed Chinamen in scattered knots cackling away in their high-pitched voices, some of them weeping, and crowding to suffocation the few houses that were not required by these masterful foreign devils.

With military punctiliousness Captain Kargopol set a strong guard at each

end of the village, arranged for the single street to be patrolled, and the inn to be watched by a sentry; then threw himself on the k'ang with a weary sigh, and prepared to eat, if not digest, the meal which the innkeeper soon had ready for his guests. It was quite clear that, though the Chinamen had all been turned out, some had ventured to creep back into the passage and a sort of shanty adjoining the room. The innkeeper kow-towed and apologized; he hoped the honourable officer would not object to the men occupying this shelter for the night; they had paid their scot in advance, and if he did not give them house-room he would have to refund the money and pay compensation in addition.

"Poor wretches!" said the captain to Borisoff. "We're pretty hard on them at the best. They won't interfere with us, I suppose, unless they snore; and even then, I fancy I'm so dead beat I could sleep through anything."

When the officers had finished their supper, they wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and lay, Captain Kargopol on the k'ang, the lieutenant on the floor. Though the inn was now quiet, and the troopers were no doubt sleeping as soundly as their superiors, it was evident from the sounds proceeding from the houses that the Chinese were wakeful, possibly through the excitement of their festival.

Towards midnight, under the shelter of a low shed not far from the inn, where they crouched for protection from a biting north wind, two Chinamen were talking in low tones. One was the guide who had so reluctantly accompanied the Russians; the other a much younger man. All at once, out of the darkness crept a short Chinese boy, looking fatter than he was by reason of his thickly wadded clothes. He came to the younger of the two men, and addressed him in an excited whisper. To anyone who overheard him it would have been clear that he had been hiding, according to instructions, in the inn. He said that he had overheard a conversation between Hu Hang and C'hu Tan, who were among the Chinamen in the shanty. He had seemingly heard more than was expected. The ex-constable and Ah Lum's ex-lieutenant were going to seize and gag the innkeeper, and then to waken the Russian officers and give them an important piece of information. The howl of a dog outside the village was to be the signal for carrying this plan into effect. They had said that between the first howl and the second there would be plenty of time for what they meant to do.

"Hai-yah!" growled the larger of the two listeners, following up the exclamation with an oath. The other made no comment on the news he had just heard, but, turning to the boy, he said rapidly:

"Run and tell Pai Ting there are to be two howls, not three. What was to have been the first will now be the second. The signal will be given as soon as the moon goes down behind yonder clump of trees. You understand?"

The boy nodded, and without a word crept away, wriggling down a narrow

passage between the shed and the next house towards the outskirts of the village.

As soon as he had gone, the two men rose quietly and went into the street. Dodging the patrol, they hurried to the inn, passed to the rear, and cautiously made their way into the shanty or lean-to. There were several Chinamen in the stuffy den, to all seeming fast asleep; but a close observer might have noticed that the entrance of the new-comers was at once remarked, and that, as they passed by or actually stepped over the recumbent forms, they were the object of a keen scrutiny. The inspection appeared to satisfy the men, for they at once resumed their attitude of complete repose.

To any but ears keenly alert the progress of the two men would have been inaudible; for there was a constant noise from the courtyard and a large open space behind the inn, where the greater number of the ponies of the convoy were picketed under a Cossack guard. A Cossack was also doing sentry-go in front of the inn, but approaching from the back the two Chinamen had avoided him.

When they came in sight of the main room they exercised the extremest caution. The door was but half-closed, and through the opening came the faint yellow light of a small oil-lamp. Coming to a spot whence they could see the greater part of the interior, they halted, and peeped within. Near the door they could just make out the forms of three Chinamen huddled on the floor—doubtless the innkeeper, and the two men whose little plot the boy had overheard and reported. The Russian officers had apparently been too much fatigued to resent this invasion of their privacy.

Waiting merely to get a mental photograph of the position in the room, the younger of the two Chinamen moved gently backward, and, touching one of the dormant figures on the shoulder, beckoned him towards the back door. Then he whispered an instruction. The man was to enter the room, boldly but not aggressively, and summon the innkeeper to join Wang Shih at the house of the village headman. This was but a move in the game shortly to be played out. The two conspirators would doubtless be relieved to find themselves—by a lucky accident, they would suppose—free from the presence of the innkeeper; it would no longer be necessary to dispose of him; at the same time they would be reassured as to the whereabouts of Wang Shih. The man crept in as directed. His entrance caused the captain to stir.

"What is it?" he growled.

The innkeeper explained as well as he could that he was called away.

"Out with you, then, and tell the sentry to allow no one else in. I want to sleep."

He then turned over, and was instantly oblivious. The innkeeper, coming out, was surprised to find Wang Shih at the door, but was warned by that burly man's younger companion not to open his lips.

He had scarcely left the room before one of the two Chinamen lying within the room began to wriggle towards the officers. The other man, none other than Hu Hang, once a constable, now a disappointed Chunchuse, bent forward, intent upon his companion's progress. At a hint from the younger of the two watchers, the elder, Wang Shih himself, slipped into the room and stood silent and unnoticed behind Hu Hang.

The creeping Chinaman came first to Lieutenant Borisoff, stretched on the floor. He nudged him; the Russian grunted. A second gentle nudge provoked another grunt. Then the officer awoke with a start, and seeing by the dim light a Chinaman bending over him, he instinctively felt for and grasped the revolver beneath the cloak that formed his pillow. The Chinaman held up his hands to show that he wras unarmed.

"What do you want, confound you?" asked Borisoff in pidgin Russian.

"Ss-s-h!" was the answer. "Listen quietly, honourable nobility. There is danger."

"What is it?" asked the lieutenant, raising himself on his elbow. "Tell me quickly, and be sure you tell me the truth, or——"

There was an ominous movement of the revolver. He touched Captain Kargopol's foot, and that officer, awake in an instant, sat up on the k'ang and looked about him.

"This village is not Pai-chi-kou, honourable nobility. It is Ta-kang-tzü. The Chinamen here are all Chunchuses. Very soon honourable master will hear the howl of a dog. It will not be the voice of a dog, but of a man. It is a signal. Ah Lum's men are outside. At the signal they will surround the village."

Both officers were now on their feet, gripping their revolvers.

"Afterwards another howl," continued the informer. "The Chunchuses in the village will seize rifles and pistols hidden in the gardens and pig-sties. Afterwards a third signal; every house with Russians in it will be attacked, every honourable soldier captured or killed."

The captain rapped out an oath. The Chinaman, still on his knees, lifted up his hands and spoke earnestly.

"I can show the honourable nobility how to cheat them; honourable master will reward his humble slave. Is it not so?"

The captain, none too quick-witted, nodded to the man to proceed. The Chinaman stood erect.

"At the first howl, master will cut a hole in the window—quickly, so that the men in the passage hear nothing; they are all Chunchuses. He will whisper to the sentry outside; the soldier will warn the patrol, and they will in haste make the round of the houses where soldiers are. Before the second signal is given, honourable master's men will be ready; they can shoot down the Chunchuses in the

village, and Ah Lum will have to retreat, for honourable nobility's countrymen are only ten miles away."

For a moment the captain gazed doubtfully at the man.

"Do you think it a trap?" he asked Borisoff.

The long-drawn howl of a dog as if baying the moon rose and died away at some distance from the village. The officers started.

"Trap or not, we can't go far wrong in doing what he says. Even if he is lying we are no worse off."

"Honourable nobility's servant asks fifty ounces of silver for——"

"By and by, by and by. Your story must be proved. It sounds likely enough——"

"You are quite right, your nobility," said another voice in good Russian. "It is more than likely; it is literally true."

As the figure of a young Chinaman advanced from a dark part of the room, the startled officers backed and cocked their revolvers; the informer, turning a sickly green under his yellow skin, stared mouth agape at the speaker; while, from the corner where the man's fellow-conspirator had been waiting, the sound of a choking gurgle showed that Wang Shih was busy with his old friend the constable.

The scene in the dimly-lit room was one not likely to be soon forgotten by the actors in the drama.

While the two officers stood fingering their weapons in amazed irresolution, and the wretched traitor leant for support against the k'ang, the new-comer continued:

"What this man says, gentlemen, is perfectly true, so far as he knows. But he doesn't know all. Before you do anything rash allow me to explain. The howl you have just heard was the second, not the first signal. Ah Lum's men have already surrounded the village, and eighty men inside are prepared to rush the quarters occupied by your troops. The inn is watched; the slightest commotion here will be the third signal."

The news was in itself sufficient to provoke the deepest wrath, but the coolness with which the explanation was given enraged the captain beyond all bounds. Springing forward with an oath he cried, "I will risk it!" and snapped his revolver within a foot of the Chinaman's head.

There was no report.

"It is fortunate for you, sir, that we drew the charges while you slept. But for that, your fate and that of your men would have been sealed. If you will give me your word of honour not to make a sound, I will give you ocular proof of what I have said. Believe me, it is only to save your detachment from annihilation. But you shall judge."

The officer, pale and quivering with rage and chagrin rather than fear, threw a glance at Lieutenant Borisoff, who nodded.

"Agreed," said Kargopol fiercely.

Going to the door, the Chinaman said a few words to those outside. They rose and stood, fully armed, in the passage.

"They are Chunchuses, you observe, sir; not peaceful countrymen, as you believed, but the men you are hunting. We will pass outside. Be careful not to alarm your Cossacks."

They passed by the row of silent Chinamen out into the street. The officers were saluted by the sentry, who supposed them to be making the rounds. They came to the largest house in the village. In front, on the street, nothing was to be seen. But at the back, and in a dark passage-way at the side, were at least twenty dim figures, armed at all points with rifle, pistol, and dagger. The silent group passed to another house, and to yet another; at each, cunningly placed out of sight of the patrol, Chunchuses lurked, awaiting the signal for the terrible work of the night.

"We have but a few minutes, gentlemen, before the signal. Are you satisfied? Nothing stands between your men and extermination, save yourselves. What is your decision?"

The captain bit his moustache.

"Let things take their course," said Borisoff quietly. "We had better die fighting than be tortured to death after surrender."

"I can promise you and your men good treatment as prisoners of war—always supposing your general is willing to exchange you for our men, and does not hang any more of ours in the meantime. You need not fear torture."

The Russians laughed grimly.

"What are your assurances worth—you, a Chunchuse?"

"A Chunchuse—yes, Captain, but in this case also an Englishman."

"An Englishman!" cried Kargopol with a start of surprise. Borisoff stepped nearer to Jack and peered into his face.

"An Englishman, sir."

"And a Chunchuse?"

"A Chunchuse, by compulsion of your countrymen. But, gentlemen, we waste precious time. In a few seconds the matter will be beyond your discretion—or mine."

The captain stopped and faced the speaker. Borisoff's face wore a look of perplexity.

"You give me your word?" said Kargopol after a moment.

"Yes."

"As an Englishman?"

"As an Englishman."

"Then I surrender."

"Believe me, sir, it is the wisest, the most humane course."

"Your name is Brown?" said Borisoff suddenly.

"Ivan Ivanovitch Brown, Lieutenant Borisoff."

"Batiushki! I was puzzled by something familiar in your voice. What in the world——"

"Pardon me, the situation is still full of danger, a spark may fire the train. I will explain everything afterwards."

Peering into the dark, Jack in a moment beckoned to a small figure crouching under the shelter of a wall. Hi Lo came bounding up, and to him Jack gave a rapid order. The boy sped away at full speed.

"I have told him that the third signal is not to be given. I hope he may be in time."

CHAPTER XX
The Battle of Moukden

Reservations—The Cupboard—Perfidious—"The Little More"—Winter Quarters—More Perfidy—Russians Concentrating—Captured Maxims—A Missing Messenger—The Battle Ground—Nogi dashes North—Hemmed In—Nogi cuts the Railway—The North Road—A Carnival of Blood

"You have sold us completely, Ivan Ivanovitch," said Borisoff as they walked back towards the inn. "I suppose that rascally guide of ours led us into this trap."

"All's fair in war, you know. He is Wang Shih, Ah Lum's principal lieutenant."

"He deserves to be hanged!" growled the captain. "So do you, Mr. Brown."

"We seldom get our deserts, Captain. But I think Lieutenant Borisoff had better make a round of the houses and tell your men of the surrender. I will send word to our man outside bidding him keep his Chunchuses in hand for the present. In a few minutes I will rejoin you at the inn."

As the lieutenant visited house after house he recognized how hopeless resistance would have been. At the given signal every dwelling would have been rushed, and before the Cossacks could have realized what was happening they

must have fallen to a man. The crestfallen troops were paraded and disarmed in the street; then by the light of flares the convoy was got ready, and an hour and a half later it set off from the village up the hillside, escorted by the Chunchuses, to join Ah Lum some fifteen miles away. Jack stood at the door of the inn beside Captain Kargopol as the convoy and prisoners filed past. Nearly a hundred pack-mules heavily laden with ammunition, winter clothing, and provisions, and a hundred and fifty Cossacks, formed the prize of his ingenuity.

Several mules and their loads were left behind for the benefit of the villagers who had assisted in the plot.

"You had better hide them," said Jack to the headman. "There is a large Cossack force only ten miles away: they may be down upon you at any moment."

He learnt later that hardly were the last of the ponies and their loads secured in caves and hollows among the hills when, shortly after dawn, a squadron of Cossacks galloped up—the advance guard of the twelve hundred men whom Captain Kargopol was to have joined with his convoy. The commander was furious when he heard the news, told him with much sympathy by the headman, who reserved none of the details save only the participation of the villagers. Finding the track followed by the Chunchuses, the commander sent a galloper back with the news and himself pushed on in pursuit. But after three hours' hard riding his squadron was effectually checked by a handful of men in a defile, and by the time he had received sufficient support to force the pass the convoy had reached Ah Lum's encampment, and nothing but a battle could recover it.

During the northward march Jack rode between Captain Kargopol and Lieutenant Borisoff. They were eager for the promised explanation of his partnership with brigands. Jack had already made up his mind to be chary of details. He would give no hostages to fortune in the shape of information that might be used against him later; nor would he say anything about the friends whose assistance had been so valuable to him. Of Gabriele Walewska and the missionary, of Herr Schwab and the compradore's brother, he therefore said never a word. The gist of his explanation was that, being uncertain and suspicious in regard to his father's fate, he had resolved to stay in the country, and found that he could only do so safely in disguise. This being penetrated by Sowinski's acuteness, he had perforce taken refuge with Ah Lum, one of whose lieutenants was an old friend of his.

"That rascally guide of ours, I suppose," said Borisoff. "Well, it happens that I can give you a little information——"

"About my father?'

"No, I know nothing about him. A few weeks ago a curious thing happened to that fellow Sowinski, a man I loathe. Kuropatkin received a telegram from Petersburg asking for particulars of the charges brought against your father, and

for information as to his whereabouts. Your Foreign Office had apparently been making enquiries. Kuropatkin knew nothing about it, of course; after some delay he discovered that Bekovitch had dealt with the matter. Bekovitch produced a number of letters found in your father's office conclusively showing that he had been in treasonable correspondence with the Japanese——"

"That's a lie!" said Jack.

"Well, there were the letters," said Borisoff with a shrug. "Kuropatkin asked if there was any independent evidence. Bekovitch at once sent Sinetsky for Sowinski. He couldn't find the man, and though he left an urgent message he didn't turn up. So he went to his house again early next morning. There was nobody about, the door was wide open, and he walked in. The house was empty, but he thought he heard a strange rustling in a big press in the dining-room; Sowinski had appropriated your house, by the way. He opened the door, and there was the Pole, gagged, tied hand and foot, and nearly dead from exhaustion. Sinetsky cut him loose; the poor wretch couldn't speak for half an hour, his tongue was so much swollen. He'd been tied up by a Chinese servant, it appeared, though the job must have taken more than one man."

"Yes—I was the other."

"You!" The officers laughed heartily. "You're a perfect demon of ingenuity, Ivan Ivanovitch. Why didn't he say it was you?"

"He had his reasons, I suppose. What happened then?"

"He went to Kuropatkin and swore to all manner of things against your father. The information was telegraphed to Petersburg, and that's all I know about it."

"But where is my father?"

"I don't know. Bekovitch didn't know, or professed he didn't. I fancy he had taken care not to know, in case any unpleasant questions were asked."

"But someone must know. Confound it, Lieutenant, is the whole Staft a conspiracy of silence?"

"It appears that Bekovitch sent your father to Kriloff, and Kriloff is dead. I suppose enquiries were made, but so far as I know nothing has come to light."

"I never heard of such villainy!" said Jack, his indignation getting the better of him. "I had always believed the Russian officer was a gentleman."

"Oh, come now!" said Captain Kargopol, "you English haven't a monopoly of the virtues. You can't throw stones, after the dirty trick your government has played us."

"What do you mean?"

"You haven't heard? I forgot: I suppose your Ah Lum doesn't subscribe to the *Manchurian Army Gazette*. The Baltic Fleet was attacked by British torpedo-boats in the North Sea; Admiral Rozhdestvenski very properly fired and sank one

or two. Some trawlers got in the way and were rather knocked about: unfortunately a few men were killed, and your canting press of course set up a howl and clamoured for war. But it's we who are the injured party: you may be the ally of Japan, but that's no excuse for an unprovoked attack on our fleet."

"Really, Captain, pardon me, but the story's absurd. When did this torpedo attack take place?"

"At night, of course; you don't suppose they'd dare to attack battleships in broad daylight."

"Then depend upon it there was a mistake. Someone was scared by the sight of a trawler. It's ridiculous to suppose that our government sent torpedo-boats on such a silly errand as that."

"Well, they might have hired Scandinavian boats, to save their face."

Jack repressed a smile. It was evidently of no use to argue with the captain.

"Time will show," he said. "By the way, Mr. Wang," he added, seeing the Chunchuse a few paces away, "what did you do with Hu Hang?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Wang Shih with a look of sincere penitence. "It was quite a mistake—I was excited, and I squeezed too hard."

"You strangled him?"

"Yes. It is a pity—a great waste. I fear the chief will be angry. Hu was a strong man—he would have lasted for days."

"Oh!"

Understanding what he meant, Jack thought it just as well. He doubted whether his influence with Ah Lum and the band would have been enough to preserve the informer from the most gruesome and lingering tortures Chinese inventiveness could devise.

"And what became of Ch'u Tan?"

"He stabbed himself."

"Anticipating a worse fate," Jack explained to the officers.

"We are aware of our good fortune in falling into your hands, Ivan Ivanovitch," said Borisoff gravely; "and if, when we are rescued, I can do anything——"

"Thanks, Lieutenant! I don't owe much to the Russians," he added bitterly, "my father less. When he is righted I shall hope perhaps to pick up my old friendships again."

Towards the close of the day the convoy reached Ah Lum's mountain fastness. The chief's little eyes gleamed when he saw the great haul made by his son's tutor.

"You are bold enough to stroke a tiger's beard," he said. "Where there is musk, there will of course be perfume."

The supplies captured were very welcome. Ah Lum had found it necessary

to lie low, to avoid the forces on the hunt for him. But after a few days he learnt that the troops from the Korean frontier had been recalled, and the only Russian column now in the mountains was nearly a hundred miles away. He could therefore afford to live on his gains for a time.

The band settled down to a period of quiet camp life. The Cossacks were distributed over the settlement and carefully guarded. Jack proceeded with the education of Ah Fu, and the further training of his men. There was considerable competition among the Chunchuses for enrolment in his corps; he was looked upon as lucky, a special favourite of heaven. For himself, he regarded his position differently. Harassed with anxiety as to his father's fate; among uncongenial surroundings; an exile, without anyone to confide in as a friend; he felt anything but lucky. As week after week passed he grew terribly weary of his life; winter had settled down upon the hills; the snow lay inches thick, and even the warm clothing captured from the Cossacks—the fur caps, thick gray overcoats, felt-lined boots, ear gloves, and what not—proved but insufficient protection against the intense cold. He volunteered for what active work was going; but there was little, and he did not covet the command of any of the parties that went out from time to time to replenish the larder. Ah Lum was punctilious in giving receipts for the supplies he requisitioned from the country people, but Jack felt that they were little likely to be paid for: it was a mere form at the best. And the villagers could ill afford the contributions demanded, though after all they were better off than their countrymen living in the main current of the war. To all except the few merchants and contractors, who made huge profits by supplying the rival armies, the war had brought blank ruin.

Occasionally news of the progress of the war filtered through the country. Jack learnt that Admiral Alexeieff, after continual wrangling with Kuropatkin, had been recalled; that the combatants had gone into winter quarters on opposite sides of the Sha-ho, both Russians and Japanese living in dug-outs, called by the Russians *zemliankas*; that Port Arthur was still holding out, though from Chinese reports it seemed inevitable that the end must soon come; that fresh troops were continually arriving from Europe. One day a dirty copy of the *Manchurian Army Gazette* was brought into the camp; the Chinese are always loth to destroy anything written or printed. The most interesting item of news it held for Jack, and one on which he had a battle-royal of argument with the Russian officers, was the statement that the *Ocean*, a British battleship on the China station, had been sold to the Japanese, and would appear in the next naval fight as the *Yushima*, which the Russians declared had been sunk by a mine while blockading Port Arthur. Captain Kargopol stoutly maintained that this was another instance of British perfidy, and came very near to losing his temper when Jack refused to take the report seriously, and bantered him on his anti-British prejudice.

At last, one bright cold January day a Chinaman came in with the news that Port Arthur had fallen. Jack could not but sympathize with the captive officers. Personally they were the best of comrades; their distrust of England did not alloy the cordiality of their relations with Jack; and their air of hopeless dejection was distressing to one who bore neither to them nor to their nation any enduring ill-will.

A few days afterwards Ah Lum learnt that the Russian column which had been watching him had suddenly decamped. The inference was obvious. The fall of the great fortress had released a large number of Japanese troops, and Kuropatkin was concentrating against the forward movement now to be expected. This information had considerable importance for Ah Lum. He had been canvassing the desirability of moving towards Kirin, leaving only a small force in the hills to watch the Russians. Their sudden retreat, however, caused him to change his plan. He resolved to follow them. There was more chance of safety for him if he kept to the hills within a few marches of the combatant armies than if he was completely isolated and likely to be cut off by several mobile columns operating against him. It was hardly likely that the Russians would now spare any troops from the fighting line to interfere with him. He was only a mosquito after all, though his sting had more than once proved extremely irritating. His only concern was to be near enough without being too near. In the last resort he could go over to the Japanese; but he disliked the Japanese only less than the Russians, and preferred to keep aloof. It would be time enough to approach the Japanese when they were well on the road to Harbin and the area of his possible operations became more restricted.

The camp was therefore struck. By easy marches the band came to within eighty miles of Moukden. Then, having made complete arrangements for the approach of any Russian force to be signalled to him from point to point, Ah Lum encamped and awaited a favourable opportunity of cutting across the Russian line of communications.

To none was the change of scene more welcome than to Jack. He had been worrying for some time past at the absence of news from the compradore; that he had sent no message made Jack fear that the man had returned to Moukden and been made to suffer by Sowinski or General Bekovitch for his young master's escape. Growing more and more restless, disappointed also that no news of his father had been gleaned by any of Ah Lum's agents in different parts of the country, he at last made up his mind to venture once more into Moukden. It was necessary to ask leave of Ah Lum; and Jack, in his present state of mind, was not disposed to be fobbed off with maxims and proverbs.

As he expected, the chief looked very solemn and endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose.

"It is like a blind fowl picking at random after worms," he said. "It is like attempting to carry an olive on the pate of a priest. You have already had a very narrow escape. You may not be so fortunate next time."

"I must insist, Mr. Ah," said Jack. "Anything is better than suspense."

"I will send a man for you. A wise man never does himself what he can employ another to do for him."

"Yes; but if one will not enter a tiger's lair, how can he obtain her whelps?"

He cited the proverb with the utmost gravity. Ah Lum was taken aback. Were his own maxims to be turned against him? He pondered for a moment.

"All things are according to heaven," he said with a resigned air. "Still, I will send a man with you; let him go before you into Moukden; then you must act as you think best on receipt of information. To die or to live is according to fate."

When it became known in the camp that Jack, or Sin Foo as he was there known, was about to leave, many of the Chunchuses were eager to accompany him. He found his popularity, and the extraordinary belief in his luck, rather embarrassing. He thanked these willing volunteers, but declined their company: Hi Lo and the man selected by Ah Lum were to be his only attendants.

Soon after dark on a bitter February night Jack, with his two companions, rode up to the farm of Wang Shih's people, some fifteen miles from Moukden. They were overjoyed to see him, and to hear news of their son and brother. Old Mr. Wang, when he learnt that his son was now Ah Lum's chief lieutenant, rubbed his hands with delight and foretold that he would die a mandarin. It would not be the first time in the history of China that a successful brigand had been bought back to the cause of law and order by the bribe of high official rank. Mrs. Wang was garrulous about a second visit paid them about Christmas-time by Monsieur Brin, who had consoled himself for his failures as a war correspondent by studying Chinese social arrangements at first hand. The simple folk readily agreed to put Jack up for a few days; it would have been impossible to find more comfortable quarters during his period of waiting.

Next morning Ah Lum's man went into Moukden. By mid-day he had returned. The compradore had never been seen in the city since he left for Harbin on the morning of Jack's departure. But the Chunchuse agent Me Hong had learnt one trifling fact about Mr. Brown; he was surprised that his chief was still in ignorance of it. The English merchant had been seen and recognized among a gang of convicts at Kuan-cheng-tzü. Me Hong had sent off the news at once by a messenger to Ah Lum; the runner had vanished. He had not returned to Moukden; certainly he had never reached the Chunchuse camp. Sowinski was still in the city; so, the messenger believed, was the "Toitsche war-look-see man"; but there were so many of the fraternity living in Moukden that he was not sure that his information on that point was correct.

He brought other news. Another great battle was evidently impending. The Japanese had for weeks been steadily pushing forward. They had cut the railway-line south of Moukden; two regiments of their cavalry had crept round the Russian left, and had been seen within a few miles of Harbin; and it was reported among the Chinese that Generals Nogi and Oku were preparing a great turning movement on the right. The city was full to overflowing with refugees; many were streaming northward; the Russo-Chinese bank had packed up its chests and decamped; and the Chinese viceroy was in a terrible state of anxiety for the safety of the palace and the ancient tombs of the Manchu emperors.

This news almost tempted Jack to venture again within the city. But on second thoughts he decided to run no risks of meeting Sowinski. The imminence of another great battle, however, perhaps to prove the decisive battle of the war, created a keen longing to witness the scene; and next day, taking leave of his kind hosts, he set off with Hi Lo for a little village lying between the Moukden railway-station and Sin-min-ting. Hi Lo had relatives there with whom they could safely stay.

The battle-ground was in essentials a repetition of that of Liao-yang, though on a much larger scale. The Russians had thrown up an immense line of entrenchments extending in a rough semicircle from Sin-min-ting on the north-west of the city to Ping-ling on the east, with Moukden as the centre. Comprising a range of low hills for the greater part of its course, the position was naturally strong, and it had been fortified for months with all the devices known to the military engineer—pits, abattis, barbed-wire entanglements, forts of solid masonry bristling with huge guns. Snow lay upon the ground, frozen so hard that the passage of cavalry across it raised clouds of white dust. The plain to the west and south of the city was one vast whiteness: yet that peaceful scene was the arena on which three-quarters of a million of men were preparing to spill their blood in blind obedience to duty—to contend with desperate earnestness in one of the decisive battles of the world.

The Russian right wing was composed of the Second Manchurian Army under General Kaulbars, resting on an arc between Sin-min-ting and Moukden. The centre, south of the city, was held by General Bilderling with the Third Army; the left, thrown out as far south-east as Tsin-khe-chen, was entrusted to General Linievitch and the First Army. It was here that the first attack was made. On February 19 General Kawawura threw his right flank detachment against the Russian works, and, after a fight prolonged over five days, drove the Russians back towards Fa-ling. Meanwhile General Kuroki moved forward upon Kao-tu-ling, and succeeded in forcing his way northward, and General Nodzu, from his position on the Sha-ho, opened a furious bombardment on the exact centre of the Russian lines. By these movements General Kuropatkin was led to expect that

the brunt of the fighting would fall upon his centre and left; in reality they were designed to hold his attention while more formidable operations were developed on his right.

It was on the last day of February that General Oku's army deployed between the Sha-ho and the Hun-ho, and General Nogi started with incredible rapidity on his northward march. By the time General Kuropatkin became aware of the danger threatening his communications on the right, Nogi had made such progress and so skilfully disposed his forces that to crush him was out of the question; all that Kaulbars could do was to fall back towards Moukden and oppose as stubborn a resistance as possible. The assaults of Kuroki and Nodzu on the centre were so fierce and persistent that Kuropatkin had no troops to spare for the reinforcement of his jeopardized right flank. Doggedly, intrepidly, the indomitable Japanese pressed home their attack. The Russians clung heroically to their positions, and rolled back charge after charge; but still the enemy returned, seeming to gain in vigour and enthusiasm after each repulse. They charged with bayonets, with grenades, with shovels and picks; sometimes, when they penetrated the Russian entrenchments, flinging down their weapons and going to it with their fists. The trenches were filled with corpses; the frozen ground all around was dyed red with blood; there was no respite day or night; men fell, their places were filled, and foe met foe over the bodies of the slain.

For ten days the issue was in doubt. Then, on March 5, Kuroki was across the Sha-ho; Nogi had swept through Sin-min-ting towards the railway; Marshal Oyama's huge army was flinging its octopus tentacles around the Russian position, vast as it was. Kuropatkin, most unfortunate of generals, on March 8 found it necessary to withdraw his centre and left behind the line of the Hun-ho, and collect every unit that could be spared by Kaulbars and Bilderling to stem the advance of Oku and Nogi.

Meanwhile the Russian left had opposed a bold front to Kuroki and Kawawura. Unable to make a successful offensive movement, Linievitch stubbornly retreated in good order beyond the Hun-ho, and entrenched himself in a new position there. But around Moukden the plight of the Russian army was becoming desperate. As the terrible enemy crept on towards the city from all sides save the north-east, the Russian troops, packed into a constantly diminishing space, and exposed to a converging fire, fell in thousands. More than once the Russians attempted to break through. The gallant Kuropatkin in person led a terrific attack on Oku at the head of sixty-five battalions, and his splendid men fought with such courage and determination that for a while it seemed the Japanese advance must be checked. But at this critical moment, when the Russians were at least holding their own on the right centre and left, and Oyama was concentrating to hurl them back, an event had taken place at the left cen-

tre that proved to be Fortune's cast of the die. Early on the morning of March 9, Kuropatkin received the news that Kuroki had driven a wedge between Bilderling and Linievitch. Those generals in falling back on the Hun-ho had temporarily lost touch: and the Japanese general, who had never made a mistake throughout the war, was quick to seize this opportunity of breaking the enemy's line. On the same day Nogi got across the railway between Moukden and Tieling; nothing but instant retreat could save the Second and Third Russian armies from annihilation or capture; and at nightfall on that fifteenth day of the battle the order to retreat was given.

Next day at ten in the morning the Japanese entered the city, and with their entrance burst the bubble of Russian domination in Manchuria. Scattered parties of Russians fought on for several days in the neighbouring villages; but with Nogi astride of the main line of retreat and every northern road, the Russians were forced to abandon everything and take to the hills. Two days afterwards the Japanese had chased their enemy full thirty miles to the north; Kuropatkin's great army, broken, routed, had well-nigh ceased to be.

Jack is never likely to forget that terrible fortnight. During the first few days he witnessed nothing of the fighting; he heard the reverberations of the guns, and saw crowds of natives hastening from the villages in the line of the Japanese advance, bearing with them everything portable that could be saved from the impending ruin. At night, standing on the broken mud wall, he beheld in the far distance a dull glow in the sky that told of houses burning, and thought of the untold misery inflicted upon a peaceable and industrious people by the greed of rival governments. But as the tide of battle rolled northward, and the roar of the guns grew louder, other evidences of the terrific struggle came within his ken. Ever and anon a train would rumble northward along the line, with wagon-loads of wounded. The darkness of the nights was now illuminated with bursting star-shells, and the red flare of burning villages nearer at hand. One morning, in the twilight before dawn, he saw an immense column of smoke rise over the Russian settlement by the station. It was in flames. Venturing out with Hi Lo, he soon came upon stragglers from the army, and by and by upon a huge block of horse and foot and artillery, field-telegraph wagons, mess carts, ambulances—all in inextricable confusion, jammed in their frantic efforts to escape. Trains rolled along, crowded to the roofs of the carriages, even to the engine itself, with soldiers; carts lay overturned, broken, wheelless, on the roads and fields; the air was loaded with the acrid fumes from piles of blazing goods, clothing, and forage, burnt to prevent their falling into the hands of the conquerors.

The retreat from Liao-yang had been orderly and not uncheerful; the retreat from Moukden was an orgy of riot and misery. There was no order in the ranks: the officers made no efforts—made, they would have been in vain—to

check the insubordination of their men. Some as they fled had looted the sutlers' carts and roamed at large, defenceless, intoxicated, singing wild songs, dropping to the ground, to be frozen stiff in a few minutes. Others tramped along, moody, taciturn, mad, going blindly they knew not whither, they knew not why. Here a horse's head could be seen above the crowd, its eyes bloodshot and haggard, its nostrils dilated. There a horse fell; the throng thickened around it; harsh voices were raised in imprecation; then the movement recommenced, and nothing was heard but the tramping of feet and the crunching of wheels. Wounded men dropped and froze in their blood; others staggered this way and that, having lost all power to govern their limbs; and still in the distance artillery boomed, flames crackled, and the smoke of burning homesteads rose into the sky.

Sick at heart, Jack returned to the village. That evening the Japanese entered it, bringing with them a number of Russian prisoners and wounded, these having been carefully tended by the Japanese ambulance corps. Jack lent what assistance he could in finding cottages where the more seriously injured could remain. "Strange," he thought, "that war, which brings out the worst in men, should bring out also all that is best."

CHAPTER XXI
Ah Lum at Bay

Schwab again Retreats—A Business Friend—Reinstated—A Little Light—Ah Lum Threatened—A Thousand Roubles Reward—The Lessening Circle—A Mountain Tiger—Mirage—Ah Lum's Lament—A Cossack Cloak

It was not merely curiosity that had held Jack within the area of fighting. He clung with a sort of superstition to the belief that his father's fate was inwoven with the fate of the Russian army. He had a conviction, perfectly illogical, that a victory for Japan would favour his quest. There was so much truth in this idea as that amid the disorders of a Russian retreat he might hope to pass undetected in his disguise. The Russians would be too busy to look closely into the bona-fides of a mere Chinaman, one of thousands who would be swept northwards on the tide. He could easily keep out of sight of the few who might recognize him.

He thus had a purely personal interest in the result of the battle. Convinced

that the compradore must have remained with his brother in Harbin, he had resolved to go north and learn from the man's own lips the issue of his enquiries. When the victorious army had rolled by, he set off with Hi Lo in its wake.

One day, a few miles north of Tieling, he was riding slowly along, contrasting his present position with the different circumstances under which he had made the retreat from Liao-yang, with Mr. Schwab's precious tripod in his care, when, a little ahead of him, he caught sight of a solitary figure trudging wearily along. It needed but one glance at the broad back. The tired pedestrian was Schwab himself—and he was carrying the camera.

Jack's lips twitched. To this had come the descendant of the great Hildebrand Suobensius, the itinerant representative of Germany's imperial might! There was matter for amusement in the reflection, and for sympathy too: Schwab's patriotism was genuine; his little vanities were harmless enough; and whatever else might be said of him, he was devoted to the interests of the Schlagintwert company. Jack resolved to make himself known to the correspondent, who could have no interest in betraying him to the Russians. Cantering up behind, he heard Schwab sighing and muttering under his breath.

"Excellenz," he said, "my Sin Foo——"

At the first word Schwab swung round with an alacrity that betokened as much pleasure as surprise.

"Ach!" he said, "I know you; you are imbostor. I am delighted. I abologize."

"That's very good of you, Herr Schwab, but I don't know why."

"Vy! Vy, for my vant of gombrehension, my zickness of shkull. But you did bretend; zat you muss gonfess; and I did bay you your vages, so!"

Jack smiled.

"I've nothing to complain of," he said. "To you I was a Chinese servant, and I never want a better master."

"Say you so? I vill shake hands viz you. Zere vas talk about you in Moukden; vy truly, zey gratulate me for because I haf, zey say, a so clever servant. Ach, mein freund! you see me; I am sad, I am broken; no longer am I vat I haf been."

Schwab proceeded to tell a pitiful story. He had started on the retreat in company with Sowinski, with whom he had arranged a great deal of business against the termination of the war. One night they had taken refuge in a Chinese hovel. Schwab had carefully put the satchel containing his papers and money under his head. In the night he had heard and felt a movement, and, springing up in the dark, seized and held an arm. The arm was wrenched away, then Sowinski's voice asked whether he had heard anything.

"'Yes, certainly,' I said, 'I zink zere is a zief. 'Shtrike a light!' I cry. Zere shtrikes a light; I look for my zinks; siehe da! eferyzink is gone. Against ze door had I blaced a big kettle, for to gif notice if anyvun intrude. Zere it is, in ze same

sbot. I say: 'Sowinski, you are vun big scoundrel; gif me my money!' Zen he burst into fearful bassion; he bresent me a bistol and demand instant abology. For myself, I am berfeckly cool. I egsblain I am business man; certainly it is not my business to fight, ven ze ozer man hold a revolver. I abologize; Sowinski say he is satisfied; but zen he say I had cast asbersion on his honour; no longer could he travel in my gompany; he demand me to get out. Vat could I? Ze bistol muzzle vas at my head. It is gombulsion. I vat you call clear out, viz my photographab-baratus. But my trouble only begins. My mafoo, vere is he? Vizout doubt he has abbrobriated my bony. Zere am I, zen, viz no babers, no money, no bony, nozink in ze vide vorld but my camera. I cannot send a message to ze *Illustrirte Vaterland und Colonien*: vere is ze money to gome from? Ze Kaiser,—alas! he is in Berlin. I zink vat is var gorresbondence for a kind of business? I try to sell my camera; no vun buys. Ze Russian soldier is good comrade, ver' fine fellow; for zree days I eat nozink but vat he gif me. But ze officers—ach! ven I egsblain to zem, zey are all too busy to listen; zey tell me, abbly Colonel Egoroff. But Colonel Egoroff, vere is he? Nobody know. Nobody know vere nobody is. All is gonfusion and upside-down. I never see nozink so unbusinesslike novere."

As he told his story Schwab trudged along beside Jack's pony. Jack did not interrupt him; the man's relief in finding someone to lend him a sympathizing ear was so obvious.

"You have had an uncommonly hard time," he said. "I'm very sorry. What do you think of doing?"

"Zink! I zink nozink. My brain is no more vat it vas. All I can do, you see it; I valk and valk; I beg my bread, vich is Russian biscuit. Nefer shall I see ze Vaterland no more. Hildebrand Schwab is gome to an end."

"Cheer up! What do you say to taking me on as your servant again?"

"Zat is unkind, to mock at me."

"Believe me, nothing is further from my thoughts. I mean it. There will be some risk for you and for me, but it's worth chancing. Let me explain my plan."

Jack saw in Schwab's plight a means of advancing his own quest, and at the same time doing a good turn to the unfortunate representative of the *Illustrirte Vaterland*, for whom, in spite of certain unlovely characteristics, he had a real liking. As servant of a European, far from any place where he was likely to be recognized, Jack thought he would probably reach Harbin more quickly than as a masterless Chinese fugitive. He proposed that they should make for the railway. The nearest point was Erh-shih-li-pu, the junction of the Kirin branch with the main line. It was not unlikely that if Schwab told his story there the officials would give him a passage to Harbin. The German eagerly accepted the proposal. Jack insisted on his mounting the pony; it was necessary, he explained, to keep up appearances, but his firmness on the point was really due to the quite

obvious fact that Schwab was completely worn out. At the first village both Jack and Hi Lo made a few alterations in their dress, so as to look as little like Schwab's former servants as possible; and without more than the expected difficulties and delays, the three at length reached Erh-shih-li-pu. Luckily at the station Schwab was recognized by a Russian officer, a member of Stackelberg's staff, who had once dined with the foreign correspondents at the Green Dragon in Moukden. On hearing the German's troubles he readily agreed to give him a pass to Harbin for himself and his servants, and would not allow the fares to be paid; Jack had previously pressed upon Schwab some of his rouble notes. Thus on a bright March day, when the frozen ground was sparkling in the sunshine, the three travellers arrived in Harbin. Schwab was lucky in obtaining quarters in the Oriental Hotel; Jack made his way at once with Hi Lo to the house of his uncle, the grain merchant, and there, as he had expected, found Hi An. The two brothers were delighted to see their visitors, and there was a touching scene of welcome between Hi Lo and his father.

For Jack there was but one crumb of information. Hi Feng, as he had promised, had set on foot such enquiries as seemed safe, especially along the railway line. About a fortnight after Jack left Harbin in the horse-box, a customer of Hi Feng came in with the news that he had seen a man answering to the description of Mr. Brown among a batch of prisoners at Imien-po on the Harbin-Vladivostok section. The train was apparently bound for Vladivostok, but it had remained for twenty-four hours on a siding, and the man's business had not allowed him to wait to see what became of it. Hi Feng had himself travelled to the place; the train had of course by that time departed; and the Chinese of the neighbourhood could give him no information about it; one train was to them like another, and delays at this siding were of constant occurrence.

Jack shuddered to think what his father's sufferings must have been during the protracted journey. His blood boiled when he saw Russian officers in the streets; his rage against Bekovitch poisoned his former good-will towards them. He fumed under his utter helplessness; he could do nothing. To some extent the information received narrowed the area of search. The fact of the train having been seen at Imien-po showed that the prisoners had been taken either to Eastern Siberia or to Sakhalin. Whichever it might be, Mr. Brown would be equally unable to communicate with his son, and his removal from Manchuria seemed to destroy all chance of help from the Chinese. To them Siberia and Sakhalin are foreign lands; and if Siberia was remote, Sakhalin was inaccessible. Being wholly a penal settlement, there was little chance of getting into or out of its ports undetected.

Jack remained for several weeks with Hi Feng, hoping against hope. Herr Schwab was still at the Oriental Hotel. Exposure to cold, lack of sufficient food,

and his mental anxieties had broken down the German's robust health, and for a fortnight he lay at death's door. Monsieur Brin happened to be at the same hotel; he had missed every fight, solely through his own restlessness, which sent him backwards and forwards from place to place—never the time and the place and the correspondent together. He was a good-hearted fellow, and, finding a German lying ill and not too carefully tended, he constituted himself sick nurse, and devoted himself to his self-imposed duties with unusual constancy. He had his reward in the patient's convalescence. As soon as Schwab was able to sit up and take a little nourishment, Brin undertook to prove to him that the Kaiser in Berlin was the Man of Sin, and for a good fortnight he had much the better of the argument.

One day Hi Feng learnt that a great effort was at last being made against Ah Lum. He had already been defeated by a large force of Cossacks, and driven from the neighbourhood of Kirin north-eastwards towards the Harbin-Vladivostok railway. Strong columns were hard upon his heels in pursuit. Through his position as forage contractor to the Russians, Hi Feng already knew that a large body of Cossacks was shortly to leave Harbin for a place half-way between that town and Vladivostok. Putting the two pieces of news together, and making discreet enquiries, he found that it was intended to make a sudden dash upon Ah Lum's line of retreat and dispose of him once for all. The evacuation of Moukden and the narrowing of the area of country open to the Russians in Manchuria had made the presence of a strong guerrilla force within their lines insupportable. Ah Lum must be rooted out.

Hi Feng was to deliver a large quantity of forage within ten days; it was pretty safe to infer that the expedition would start from Harbin soon afterwards. Jack felt that Ah Lum must be warned at once. Furthermore, he was much disposed to rejoin the Chunchuses. Without overrating his abilities, he knew that he had been able to do something for them, and what he had learnt about his father's treatment did not make him more friendly to the Russians or less inclined to do what he could to thwart them. If he had seen any chance of reaching or communicating with his father he might have taken a different view: having left Ah Lum with that purpose there would be no call for him to abandon his quest. But it was now clear that his enquiries must be pursued through Russian agents. He therefore decided to rejoin Ah Lum. At the same time he would let it be known that a reward of 1000 roubles should be paid to anyone giving him certain information of his father's whereabouts. This offer, judiciously circulated through Chinese channels among the officials of the railway, might bring definite news.

There was another consideration. Among the Chunchuses, so long as Ah Lum held his own, Jack would be out of reach of the Russian authorities. If he remained in Harbin, or any other Russian centre, the news of his offer would at

once put his enemies on his track. While he was in Ah Lum's camp Hi Feng or his brother the compradore could easily communicate with him if they received any information.

Once more, then, he set out to join Ah Lum, Hi Lo accompanying him. He travelled in the guise of a Chinese farmer. Each took two ponies, and they pushed on with great rapidity, riding the animals alternately. By means of the secret signs used by Ah Lum, Jack soon got upon the chief's track. Making a wide detour to avoid the Russian columns now steadily driving Ah Lum towards the point whence the Harbin force was to complete his encirclement, he came upon the Chunchuses from the east, and early one morning rode into the brigand camp.

His arrival was regarded as a favourable omen. It was likened by Ah Lum to the delightfulness of rain after long drought. Sin Foo was lucky; Fortune would now surely smile. The Chunchuses were, in fact, in a somewhat critical position. The camp, only one day old, was pitched in a valley of the Chang-ling hills some twenty miles above the Kan-hu lake—an extensive sheet of water nearly thirty miles long and of varying breadth. Fifty miles to the north lay the nearest point on the railway, about 150 miles from Harbin and twice as far from Vladivostok, the line threading a tortuous path among the hills. A considerable Russian force sent out from Kirin was known to be at Wo-ke-chan to the south-west; from this place a winter track led over the hills to the head of the La-lin-ho valley, within striking distance of Ah Lum's camp. Another column, at O-mu-so to the south, commanded the upper valley of the Mu-tan-chiang, and while cutting off access to Ah Lum's old quarters on the upper Sungari, threatened his left flank by the high-road to Ninguta. At that place, some eighty miles from O-mu-so, a third column covered the passes into the Lao-ling mountains on the east. The bandits were thus in a ring-fence. Only the north was open, and Jack's news confirmed the wary chief's suspicions that the apparent gap in the north had been left with the sole object of tempting him into the neighbourhood of the railway, on which an overwhelming force was held in readiness.

The confirmation of his suspicions roused the chief from the dejection into which the gradual tightening of the coils had thrown him. From an attitude almost of despair he now rose to a spirit of sullen determination. The Russians were gradually closing around him; they would drive him to bay.

"The tiger comes to eat the fly," he said. "Wah! he may prove a wooden tiger. The Russians shall see what it is to draw a badger. I own, honoured sir, I thought once of disbanding my force. But on reflection I have come to another mind. The very villagers who have been most willing to help me would probably turn against me retreating, and sell me to the Russians. He who advances may fight, but he who retreats must take care of himself. It is better to die fighting. Adversity is necessary to the development of men's virtues. I will choose a strong

position and await the flood. It will not be long in coming. The Russians, I doubt not, when their arrangements along the railway are complete, will advance at the same time from east, west, and south, driving me against the spears of the Cossacks hiding behind the railway to the north. I have only 600 men left. There has been much fighting since you left, honoured sir; my men are exhausted with constant marching and insufficient food. It is not easy to stop the fire when water is at a distance."

Jack found that the Russian prisoners were no longer with the Chunchuses. Ah Lum had been glad to exchange them against as many of his band captured during the recent fight. But for this exchange his force would have been even smaller than it was. He was hopelessly outnumbered by the Russians, each of whose columns was about 1200 strong. Their horses were in good condition; and the work of chasing the Chunchuses having devolved on one only of the columns at a time, the Cossacks were not so much worn out as their quarry, who had been kept moving constantly.

Ah Lum and Jack discussed the situation in great detail. There seemed indeed no way out. To fight or to disband: those were the alternatives, each fraught with peril if not disaster. Another fight would probably be the last, for the Russians would hardly make a serious attack until they had the wily brigand who had given them so much trouble completely surrounded. With perhaps 5000 men engaged on one side and only 600 on the other there was but one result to be expected.

If the gap to the north had really been a gap—if the Russians had been as stupid as they wished Ah Lum to believe—there would still have been a chance. The chief explained that far to the north, in the high hills above the lower valley of the Mu-tan-chiang, he might hope to elude pursuit for an indefinite period. It was a wild, mountainous, almost uninhabited country, in which the only difficulty would be that of subsistence, not of hiding. But a Chunchuse can live on much less than a Cossack, little though the latter requires. If only Ah Lum could have gained those hills, he could have shown a clean pair of heels to his pursuers.

Regrets, however, were useless. "It is no good climbing a tree to hunt for fish." The appearance of the Chunchuses within twenty miles of the railway would be the signal for a simultaneous movement of squadron upon squadron of Cossacks from east and west, while the three columns now closing upon them would seize the opportunity of occupying the passes in their rear, hemming them within a small circle where they would soon be annihilated.

"No," said Ah Lum, "I can only eat my three meals in the day and look forward to sleeping at night. It is impossible to stand on two ships at once. I shall stay here, occupy the approaches on each side, and fight to the last gasp. Death has no terror for me. I can eat my rice looking towards heaven. My only

trouble is my son, my only son Ah Fu. If I die, he will die; who then will do honour to my bones? True, I shall be remembered; as the scream of the eagle is heard when she has passed over, so a man's name remains after his death. But my cooking-range will go to a stranger; the ancestral tablets of my family will be broken; there will be none to sacrifice to my manes. And the boy: why should he be cut off? The growth of a mulberry-tree corresponds with its early bent. Ah Fu is a good boy, as you know, honoured sir. He is brave; I love him, and have been liberal in punishment, as the sage advises; his intelligence, though but a grain of millet, will in due time grow green to the height of a horse's head. I looked for him to endure the nine days' examination and write verses worthy of high office. Ai! ai!"

Through the scholar's pedantries Jack saw the man's heart throbbing. He expressed his sympathy.

"Wah!" returned Ah Lum. "Calamity comes from heaven. After the pig has been killed it is useless to speak of the price. I have done all I can. The one thing remaining is to meet the inevitable end with dignity. But as for you, honoured sir, you have done enough. I do not ask you to stay. You have your own quest to follow. Let every man sweep the snow from before his own doors, and not heed the frost on his neighbour's tiles."

"You are right, chief," said Jack. "But it has not come to that yet. There may be a way out even yet, and you have been so kind to me that I should not think of leaving you while there is any hope at all."

Ah Lum's remark about the possibility of evading pursuit if he could reach the farther side of the railway had set Jack thinking. Was there no way out of his strait? Could the Russians, he wondered, be led off the scent, thus gaining time for the band to make a dash across the line? In the privacy of his little hut of kowliang stalks Jack pondered the problem long. But the more he thought, the less feasible the thing appeared. The railway gave the Russians so great a mobility: they could move troops so quickly up and down it, and now that the main armies were for the time quiescent, they had so many men available, that with only 600 Chunchuses there seemed no hope of such a dash being successful. He racked his brains far into the night. As the hours drew on, it became very cold; the north wind struck keenly. Looking around for an additional garment, Jack saw a military cloak, part of the stock of clothing captured from the Cossacks. He put it on, and tramped up and down, thinking and thinking again. The fur-lined cloak warmed him, by and by he became hot with the excitement of an idea. He rolled himself up in the cloak and tried to sleep, but his eyes were still unclosed when the chill dawn stole over the mountains. With racking head he sought an interview with the chief. For some hours they remained in earnest consultation. When the talk was ended Ah Lum rubbed his hands together and said:

"If you succeed, honoured friend, we shall certainly escape the net. The task you have set yourself is difficult. It is like feeling after a pin on the bottom of the ocean. But whether you succeed or not, we shall owe you an unfathomable debt of gratitude. Choose what men you need; all will be proud to serve under you."

Then, weary but light of heart, Jack returned to his hut and slept.

CHAPTER XXII
Capturing a Locomotive

Overdue—A Special—The Vladivostok Train—The Sound of a Whistle—An Interrupted Message—A Correction—Bound East

"The fair at Wu-chi-mi will be well attended this month. I have not had so many bookings for a long time."

The station-master at Mao-shan looked appreciatively at the motley gathering. With true oriental patience they had come at least an hour before the train was due, and in Manchuria that was probably two hours before it would arrive. Flanked by the enormous bundles and parcels that in the East represent personal luggage, they were squatting on rugs and mats under the station shed, waiting for the gates leading on to the platform to be opened.

"I only hope there'll be room for them all. But it's wonderful how tight these Chinamen can pack. And they haven't far to go. The long-distance passengers will grumble."

The waiting crowd was not really large, but the station was small. There might be seventy or eighty in all—men, women, and children. Some of them were chattering volubly in their high-pitched voices; others were stolidly smoking or doing nothing at all. One big, burly fellow was joining in a game of knuckle-stones with a bright-looking boy, the man playing with the deepest solemnity, the child bubbling with merriment as he got the better of his elder. All were protected from the cold by garments so thickly wadded that the heads of the people looked entirely out of proportion to their bulk of body.

"It's extraordinary," continued the station-master, who was doing the most of the talking, his companion, a tall captain of Cossacks wearing long felt boots, a

large fur hat, and a fur-lined cloak up to his ears, interjecting only an occasional brief word—"it's extraordinary, your nobility, how the Chinese have taken to the railway. When I came here four years ago, the most of them looked on it with suspicion, even dread; now they use it as freely as the folk in Moscow or Petersburg. But this is a poor district hereabouts, and they can't afford to travel much, though it's cheap enough, goodness knows."

"She's late, is she not?" enquired the captain, breaking into the official's monologue. "It's past eight"—glancing at the station clock.

"True, little father. Half an hour late at Hsiao-ten-shan-ling, and that's less than usual. She may make up five or ten minutes; it is downhill on the whole. But the government is keeping a sharp eye on the fuel. They won't burn extra to make up lost time; and for the matter of that, there's no need. The only train that mattered ran through two hours ago."

"Ah! a special?"

The station-master dropped his voice, as if fearful of being heard by the Chinese outside the barrier.

"Yes, a special. We were warned by telegraph not to let the news spread among the natives. But seeing you are an officer, there's no harm in mentioning there were three hundred of your own men—Cossacks, and a sprinkling of Siberian Rifles. I suppose you are going on the same errand?"

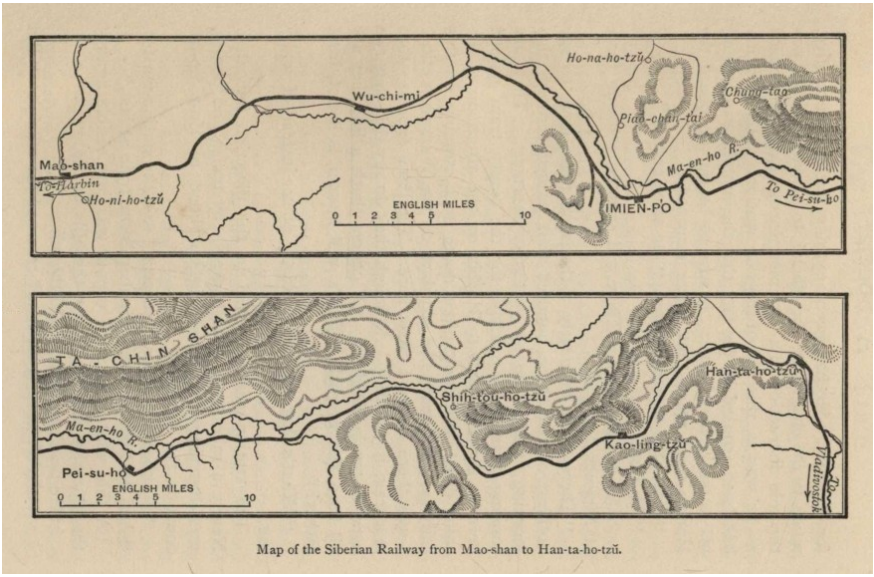
There was much curiosity in the station-master's voice. He was himself a soldier, and keenly interested in military matters, in which, indeed, he was more at home than in the routine of railway work. A green-coated railway sentinel passed and saluted. The captain, who was unknown to the station-master, had ridden in from Ho-ni-ho-tzü an hour before, and purchased a ticket for Hailin, the station for Ninguta. He had been anything but communicative, much to the chagrin of the official, to whom a gossip was the sole distraction in a very monotonous existence, exiled as he was in this out-of-the-way station. His curiosity had been aroused by the fact that the captain was leaving his horse in his charge. It was to be put on board the Harbin train when that officer returned.

"Yes," the captain replied, "the same errand."

"Ah Lum?"

"Da, da! Ah Lum. There will soon be a strong force at Ninguta."

"There must be nearly a thousand there now, to say nothing of the three hundred that passed through this morning, and as many yesterday morning. They are running them very quickly, for the empty train passed here on the way back to Harbin on the afternoon of the same day. We don't often make such running on this railway. It's more like old days on the Warsaw section. I was there before I came here. The Paris express—that is a train if you like. Although they do say that they run even faster in England. Of course that's a lie; they are



Map of the Siberian Railway from Mao-shan to Han-ta-ho-tzü.

all liars, the English. That's well known, is it not, little father?"

"What's that yonder?" said the officer instead of replying.

The station-master looked in the direction indicated. Nearly a mile away a cart, drawn by mules and ponies, was hurrying from the neighbourhood of Ho-ni-ho-tzü towards the station.

"Another passenger, I suspect," said the station-master. "And he'd better hurry, for there's the train at last."

A thin white riband of vapour was just visible against the blue sky, floating above the hills to the west.

"He won't catch it," said the officer.

"I sha'n't keep it for him," returned the official. "But he may just do it. He's cut it rather fine for a Chinaman. The train's late as it is; should have been half-way to Wu-chi-mi by this time."

As he spoke, the engine came in sight round a curve of the hilly track. The Chinamen in waiting rose to their feet, grasped their bundles, and closed up against the barrier. Three riflemen emerged from their little blockhouse and began to patrol the platform; two or three station attendants appeared. A few seconds later the huge train, looking far too large for the station, rumbled in and

came to a stop. It consisted of several old and shaky carriages already well filled with passengers, and one saloon in the centre. The few passengers for Mao-shan alighted and passed through the barrier; then the waiting crowd surged through and hurried along the platform in search of vacant places, which seemed hard to find.

A train attendant handed an official-looking paper to the station-master, who passed with it into his office; there was a signature to affix. Two of the Chinese passengers followed him as he left the platform; two others halted near the attendant. There were cries from the officials to the Chinamen to take their seats. Meanwhile the Cossack captain had sauntered into the room of the telegraph operator, and half a dozen Chinamen, having, it seemed, failed to discover vacant places in the forward carriages, were moving on towards the engine, followed by the voluble protest of one of the riflemen, who hurried after them to bring them back. Two or three, among them the big man and the boy who had been playing knuckle-stones, were peering in at the windows of the saloon carriage, apparently in great curiosity to see the occupants.

By this time the rest of the passengers had squeezed themselves into the already crowded compartments. Faces were pressed against all the windows; there was much speculation as to the chance of the belated passenger in the cart catching the train, its progress being eagerly watched, and the Chinamen in the carriages betting freely on the event.

Suddenly a shrill whistle rang out from the room of the telegraph operator. There was an instant change of scene. Here and there along the platform, groups of Chinamen, who a moment before had all the guise of peaceable passengers, threw themselves with startling rapidity upon the officials and the riflemen. There was a series of brief swift struggles; a revolver shot was heard; but that was all. Inside and outside of the train the guard and attendants were in a few seconds bound and helpless; the men who had gone forward to the engine grappled with the driver and fireman; the station-master was tied up in his own office. The passengers, alarmed and apprehensive, were staring open-mouthed at the proceedings. The door of the saloon carriage was thrown open, and there appeared at it two men, one a tall long-bearded Russian officer, whose uniform betokened high rank, the other a fair hook-nosed civilian, who stared round the other's shoulder.

"What is this, what is this?" cried the officer, stepping out of the train revolver in hand.

The last word was hardly out of his mouth when the burly Chinaman hurled himself at the Russian's knees from behind; he fell backwards; the revolver was wrenched from his hand, and the Chinaman held him pinned to the platform. His companion meanwhile had run back into the saloon; before he

could slam the door the Chinese boy interposed, flinging himself flat on the floor of the doorway. Two Chinamen forced their way in, and did not reappear.

The prostrate officer was now trussed up. His captor had given a brief order to the rest of the assailants, now ranged along the platform awaiting instructions. At once they boarded the train, and peremptorily ordered the passengers to alight. Then the Chinamen found their tongues; there was a great hubbub and commotion among them; their first hesitation was quickly overcome by the pistol butts of the bandits, who hastened their exit by ruthless and well-directed kicks and buffets. One of the passengers, a heavy man, roared an imprecation and showed fight; but he was matched in size by the big fellow who had tackled the officer, and who now, his work with him being finished, seized the protester and flung him out on to the platform. Bruised and shaken, he rolled over and squatted on his hams; there was no more fight in him.

As soon as the train came to a standstill the Cossack officer had entered the little room of the telegraphist, and at a sign from him the Chinaman close behind him blew the shrill blast on a whistle that had been the signal for the attack.

"Excuse me," said the captain, "I have a message to send."

The operator, interrupted in the midst of a message, was startled by the abrupt entrance of the soldier, the sudden whistle, and the sharp crack of a revolver immediately following. He looked round, half-rising from his chair, his hand still on the key of the instrument.

"Finish your message," said the officer quietly. His uniform, his calm air of authority, impressed the man. Dropping back into his seat he ticked off the remainder of his message: it was merely a service intimation of the arrival of the train. The sounds of commotion on the platform were increasing; when the operator had finished he said:

"Is there a fight, your nobility? Perhaps I ought to assist. We are a small staff."

"No. Stay where you are. It is all over. Now please, my message. To Wu-chi-mi——"

"But, your nobility, if you will write the despatch out—we are not allowed——"

"There is no time for that. At once, if you please."

The man still hesitated: the officer sternly continued:

"My business will not admit of a moment's delay. You can attend to formalities afterwards."

"Well, your nobility, if you insist—— But you will take the responsibility?"

"Certainly. Call up Wu-chi-mi, if you please."

The man ticked off the call. There was an immediate reply.

"Say this: 'Station on fire'——"

The operator almost sprang from his stool; his eyes were wide with alarm.

"But——"

"You heard what I said. 'Station on fire!'"

A pistol's cold muzzle at the man's ear sent him cowering to his post. Pale to the lips, with trembling fingers he ticked off the words. It was clear that the officer could follow his rapid movements, for he suddenly pointed the pistol full at his brow, saying:

"That is enough: recall your last word; another mistake of the kind may cost you your life."

"Recall your last word!"

"Recall your last word!"

Seeing that his attempt to warn the operator at the other end had been

detected, the man corrected the word.

"Now add: 'Vladivostok train can get through; expect temporary cessation of messages: will try to save instruments'. That will do."

The man sank back, and wiped his clammy brow. The officer turned to the Chinaman, beckoning him forward. In his arms he bore a bulky parcel. At a sign from the captain he placed the bundle beneath the operator's desk; opening it, he disclosed a heap of greasy shavings. He struck a match and set light to the pile; the man sprang from his chair and made for the door, but was caught and held by the Chinaman. Dismantling the apparatus, the officer gave it into the free hand of his follower; then, the room being full of smoke, he hurried out to the platform, the cowed and bewildered official being pushed along in front.

Only a few minutes had elapsed since the train came to a stop at the platform. As the captain emerged, the cart which had been sighted in the distance had just arrived. While twenty men stood with levelled revolvers overawing the crowd, a dozen muscular bandits hauled crowbars, spades, and long spanners from the cart across the platform into the brake-van, and the noticeably big man carefully carried a small box to the saloon carriage. At a sign from the captain, a gang of the Chinamen had hurried up the line some distance from the station and were now cutting the wires in two places a hundred yards apart. Breaking open the store-room, yet another group found what they were evidently in search of: a reserve instrument and a heavy coil of wire. These, with the wire cut from the line, with which the other men came hastening up, were bundled into the train; and within a quarter of an hour from the beginning of the attack the brigands were aboard, the Cossack captain was in the cab of the locomotive, and, watched by the ejected passengers in silent amazement, the train rumbled slowly out of the station.

CHAPTER XXIII
From Mao-shan to Imien-po

Wrecking a Bridge—Through Wu-chi-mi—More Dynamite—At Imien-po—Clearing the Line—Pelion upon Ossa—A Puff of Smoke—Two Minutes' Grace

Jack felt an extraordinary sense of exhilaration as the train, gathering speed,

rolled eastward over the single track towards Wu-chi-mi. The country was hilly. The line at this point is some 900 feet above sea-level, but although there are steep gradients the main altitude for a considerable distance varies little. Jack was satisfied at first with a speed of about thirty miles an hour—a speed indeed rarely exceeded on the railway—for the curves are at times very sharp, and not knowing the line he felt that there was some risk of running the train off the metals. More than once, keeping a sharp look-out, he had to shut off steam and apply the brakes at a particularly ugly corner. His hobnobbing with railwaymen during the construction of the line was now bearing fruit; and he remembered with a curious pleasure, even while he kept his hand on the regulator handle and his eye on the gauges, a saying of his father's: "Never lose a chance of picking up odd bits of information: you never know when they may come in handy". He had not actually driven a locomotive before, but he had often ridden in the cab, and watched the driver, so that he felt no nervousness at having the Alexander the Second under his control.

As the train rattled past the block-houses of the railway guard, placed at every tenth verst along the line, the men stared to see it make such unusual speed; but no doubts troubled their sluggish minds, for they caught sight of the well-known caftan and head-dress of the Cossacks at every window. In their innocent-looking bundles the Chunchuses had carried the uniforms captured with Captain Kargopol's convoy, and they had donned them as soon as the train started.

Though he gave close attention to the engine, and saw that from time to time the furnace and boiler were replenished with fuel and water, Jack was keeping a sharp look-out for a spot at which he could do sufficient damage to the line to check a pursuing train. That he would be pursued he had no doubt; he only wondered how long it would be before news of his escapade reached the nearest point whence a train could be despatched after him. Mile after mile was passed, without his seeing works of any importance. The culverts were small, the water-courses only a few feet broad, until, about twelve miles out, the train approached a stream of some size spanned by a small bridge. At this point a special guard of three riflemen was stationed. The train slowed down, ran a few yards past the bridge, and came to a stand. At a word from Jack a dozen men leapt from the carriages on to the track, and before the astonished guards, deceived by the Cossack uniform, knew what was happening, they were seized, disarmed, and stretched bound upon the embankment.

The bridge was of brick, and consisted of two small arches, the central buttress sunk in the stream, which here ran only a few feet deep. Jack sent three men into the water above and below the bridge, each party armed with a large hand drill. The water was bitterly cold, but the men set to work quickly, both parties simultaneously attacking the buttress near the water-line. Fortunately

the brickwork was soft; Jack was glad that his father had not had the contract for it, for then their labours might have been indefinitely prolonged. By a system of relief gangs a fair-sized hole was drilled at each end of the buttress in the course of twenty minutes. Then Wang Shih brought from the saloon two articles from the box he had so carefully carried from the cart. They were dynamite cartridges, part of the spoil of a Russian convoy. One was placed in each aperture, and in a few seconds two muffled explosions sent rumbling reverberations as of distant thunder among the hills. Jack hoped the noise would not be heard at Wu-chi-mi, about six miles off; it could not escape the ears of the guards in the intervening block-houses, and it would probably carry much farther. But the true explanation was not likely to occur to the staff at Wu-chi-mi, who in any case would be quite unable to verify any suspicions they might have.

The result of the explosions was the collapse of the middle portion of the bridge, only the jagged foundations of the central buttress appearing above the water. Followed by his men, Jack ran at once to the train, which had been taken two hundred yards away, out of reach of harm, and started the engine full speed ahead. Although twenty minutes had been spent at the bridge, the rate of progress from Mao-shan had been so much above the average that the lost time might almost be made up before the train arrived at Wu-chi-mi.

The general trend of the line from this point was downhill, and the train tore along at furious speed over the six or seven miles into Wu-chi-mi. Slackening speed slightly during the last mile, it rattled at about forty miles an hour through the station. Jack noticed that the staff was collected on the platform, excited probably by the noise of the explosions, and by the reported fire at Mao-shan. They evidently expected the train to stop. But any hopes they may have formed of authentic information were disappointed. Sounding the whistle, Jack ran the train through the station, and it was soon lost to sight. But he could not afford to take any risks. If the suspicions of the Wu-chi-mi men were aroused, it was certain that they would warn Imien-po, the next station, some twenty miles distant. In that case he would probably be stopped at the points and questioned. About a mile beyond Wu-chi-mi, therefore, he stopped the train and sent half a dozen men to cut the telegraph wire, hoping that the officials at the station behind would be still discussing the unexpected passing of the train instead of instantly sending a message ahead of him.

The bare hills had now given place to wooded slopes, the trees standing gaunt and brown, awaiting the touch of spring. The line crossed several small water-courses and irrigation ditches. Though he grudged the loss of time Jack decided to pull up at one of the smaller culverts and expend his last two dynamite cartridges in completing the work of destruction begun at the bridge beyond Wu-chi-mi. Although the explosions raised a huge cloud of dust the actual damage

was not great. But as he was about to start the train, Jack hit upon an idea for supplementing the work done by the cartridges and at the same time lightening the load upon his engine. Quickly uncoupling the third carriage from the rear, he sprang into the cab and threw over the reversing lever, setting the train in motion backwards. When it had gained sufficient momentum, he brought the engine to a stop; the three rear carriages rushed down the incline and dashed with tremendous force into the wreckage. Then, relieved of nearly half its load, the engine again started eastward. The cutting ran parallel with the Ma-en-ho, a wide stream flowing northwards into the Sungari. Glancing at the map of the railway which had been found in the saloon carriage, he saw that within a few miles he would come to a short stretch of line branching off on the right, but apparently leading to no village, and having no station at its end. It seemed probable that it was a light line connected with a mine. At first he thought that the junction would be a good place to lift a few rails. But seeing at a second glance that the station of Imien-po was not far beyond, he dared not run the double risk of another delay. On went the train, then, past the junction, where the single pointsman looked amazed at the speed with which it thundered by. Passing a brief instruction along the train, Jack shut off steam and drew up sharply at the Imien-po station. It was time, he thought, to reassure the railway officials ahead.

On entering the station he noticed that an empty goods train bound west stood on a siding waiting for the passenger train to pass. Obviously he must not leave this intact behind him. Imien-po was a place of some size; for all he knew, it might contain Russian troops sufficient in number to deal with his handful of Chunchuses; and the goods train, being empty, could soon be manned and sent after him in hot pursuit. But what could he do with it? At first sight only two courses seemed open to him: either to take the engine with him, or to destroy some of its working parts. Coupled to his own train, the engine would probably be only an encumbrance, and he had almost decided to adopt the second alternative, when, just as he drew up at the platform, a third course suggested itself. Bidding Wang Shih take half a dozen men and secure the personnel of the goods train, he leapt on to the platform and accosted the station-master.

"You will please give orders to preserve quietness. General Bekovitch, who is in the saloon, is indisposed." The general was in fact lying bound hand and foot on one of the luxurious divans, just able to see Sowinski in a similar plight at the opposite side. "Be so good as to wire down the line to shunt all traffic. We are already late; the train has been shortened to lighten us; and it is imperative that the lost time be made up. The service, you understand. The general"—here he became confidential—"is in charge of the operations against the brigand Ah Lum."

The station-master looked duly interested and impressed, and was about

to speak when Jack moved towards the telegraph office, saying:

"Follow me, if you please."

Wondering what this young Cossack officer of the authoritative manner wished to do, the station-master, a burly little man, toddled at Jack's heels. The other officials had watched the short colloquy, and were now approaching the carriages, surprised that none of the train attendants had yet appeared. Meanwhile the station-master had himself ticked off the brief message to the next station. The instant it was complete Jack stepped to the door of the office and held up his hand. A dozen men in Cossack uniform sprang from the nearest carriage.

"Now, sir, you have been very obliging, and I am sorry that you and your clerk must consider yourselves my prisoners."

The station-master stared in stupefaction. Before his slow tongue could find words two of the bandits ran into the room, and while their comrades outside were dealing with the other officials, the poor man and his equally amazed clerk were securely tied up. At the same time Wang Shih and his men, slipping out of the opposite side of the train, had swarmed on to the goods train and surprised the driver and fireman, the only men to be found on it, relieving them of their coats and caps, and tying the men up. The garments were afterwards donned by two of the bandits who rode beside Jack on the engine. Leaving his men to destroy the telegraphic fittings, Jack hurried to the newly-captured engine. He released the brakes, then opened the regulator valve to its full extent. The train began to move westwards; Jack jumped to the ground, and a few seconds brought him to his own train. Glancing down the platform to see that all his men were on board, he started the engine, and it snorted out of the station just as one or two railway officials and the guard of the goods train came running up from an outbuilding where it is to be supposed they had been beguiling the time with vodka.

There was a grim smile on Jack's face as, leaning from the cab, he watched the tail of the empty goods train rapidly dwindling as it raced away on its uncontrolled journey westward. In a few minutes it would crash into the ruins of the bridge and the wreckage of the carriages already cut off from his own train. The resultant block would tax all the ingenuity of the railwaymen to clear away in time to get on Ah Lum's track, if the chief succeeded in reaching the appointed spot at the appointed time.

Jack examined his stock of fuel and the water in the tender tank. There was enough wood to serve for an hour's run, he thought; but he would require to water in half that time at the most. This was a necessity he had foreseen: how to surmount it must perforce be left to the chances of the journey. He could only face each difficulty as it arose. The pressing matter at present was to guard against an attempt to stop him at Pei-su-ho. Two miles from the station he had just left he

stopped the train at a bridge. The half-dozen watchmen at this point were easily overpowered, though not before one of Jack's men was wounded; the telegraph wire was cut, and the rifles of the Russians were added to the stock. With those already captured the little party of Chunchuses had now some twenty Mausers and a fair supply of ammunition.

The pause offered another opportunity for bridge destruction, but the supply of dynamite cartridges was exhausted, and after what had been done it was not worth while to expend precious time; there was still ample work to do in providing against a dash of the Russians from the neighbourhood of Ninguta. The train once again started on its adventures, the line still clinging to the valley of the Ma-en-ho; a gradual ascent of some thirty miles, up which the engine snorted furiously, leading to one of the highest points touched by the railway in this district—a spur of the Chang-ling hills some 1200 feet above the sea.

Five minutes after the journey was resumed, Hi Lo, who was on the railed-in space on the right of the engine, drew Jack's attention to a small white puff of smoke in the direction of Imien-po, apparently no more than two or three miles behind, and easily visible from the higher position now attained. Jack started, swung out on the foot-board, and gazed intently down the hill.

"They are after us!" he ejaculated. "But how in the world did they manage it? They can never have got over the wreckage."

He looked long and earnestly. Then he turned to Hi Lo.

"What is it, boy?"

"Tlain, masta, no-fea'," he replied without hesitation.

There was no room for doubt. The Russians were on his track. Springing back into the cab, Jack ordered the man acting as fireman to put more fuel into the furnace, and opened the regulator valve to its full extent. Dense spark-laden smoke poured from the wide funnel; the pistons flew backward and forward; the great locomotive seemed to leap over the line, and Jack wondered whether the roughly-laid track would hold together. But, looking anxiously back, he found in a few moments that the pursuing train had appreciably gained. It must be either lighter or better engined, or had still the advantage of the momentum acquired before it had been discovered.

Danger acted on Jack like a tonic. He instantly grasped the situation and braced himself to cope with the peril. Shouting to Wang Shih to tear up the rails behind the train as soon as it came to a stop, he shut off steam and applied the brakes hard, bringing the engine with a jolt and a screech to a stand-still. Instantly the men told off leapt on to the line; with feverish energy they loosened the fish-plates, forced up with crowbars the spikes holding the rails to the sleepers, and threw the lifted rails over the embankment. Glancing anxiously back along the track Jack, though the pursuing train was as yet invisible, saw its

smoke growing larger and larger in volume over the hills. At last the train itself came into view. Jack saw with surprise that the engine was at the other end of it; could the goods train, he wondered, have been stopped in some inexplicable way and started back after him? In two minutes it would be upon him. He waited for one minute; then, seeing that a gap of some fifteen or twenty yards had been made in the track, he summoned his men back to the train and pressed the regulator handle. To his eager impatience it seemed that the engine would never get under way. The wheels slipped on the rails; he had pushed the regulator too far; he drew it back, the wheels held, and, gathering speed every moment, the locomotive raced on once more.

The thunder of the pursuing train was roaring in Jack's ears. It seemed to him, looking back, that the foremost carriage was charging at the gap. He hoped the work of destruction had not been perceived; but in this he was disappointed, for when the rear of his own train was barely two hundred yards from the break, steam was shut off on the engine of the pursuer, and, helped by the rising gradient, it succeeded in coming to a stand-still just as the buffers of the foremost carriage were within half a dozen yards of the gap.

CHAPTER XXIV
Lieutenant Potugin in Pursuit

From a Hilltop—Mystified—In Full Chase—A Runaway—In Sight—A Railway Duel

"Those Cossacks are taking their time, Akim Akimitch."

"Yes, little father; 'tis to be hoped Ah Lum has not swallowed them."

Lieutenant Potugin smiled.

"Ah Lum has been a bogey to them, truly, ever since Captain Kargopol walked into his trap. But I think we'll run the fox to earth this time. General Bekovitch will soon start the rounding up; and 'tis high time."

A half-company of Siberian infantry, including a few engineers, were seated on the rocks in the hills above the Ma-en-ho, engaged in a meagre luncheon of black bread and vodka. They had arrived early that morning by special troop train, in company with a sotnia of Cossacks, from Harbin. Their errand was to establish a temporary signal-station on a convenient hilltop. The hole for

the signal-pole had been dug, not without difficulty, in the hard and frozen soil, and before the completion of the job was taken in hand, Lieutenant Potugin, in command of the working party, was allowing his men a short respite for rest and food. The Cossacks meanwhile were scouting in the hills beyond—a task they were by no means fond of,—and seeking a suitable place for the erection of a corresponding signal some miles distant, whence communication could be established with the height now occupied by the infantry.

Lieutenant Potugin was very popular with his men, largely because he never overworked them and was quite content when on duty to share their humble rations. He was seated now beside the sergeant, in the midst of the circle, munching his bread, and every now and then raising his field-glass to scan the surrounding heights. It was a fine morning; a breath of spring was already in the air, even in these heights; the atmosphere was clear, and the outlines of the country were sharply defined against the unclouded sky.

Over the shoulder of a low hill beneath him he could just see a stretch of the main railway line, some three miles away. The little branch line along which his train had come that morning was out of sight immediately below; but he expected every moment to see the empty train reappear on the main line. It was to return to Harbin; rolling stock was urgently needed on all parts of the system; and when his work was done Lieutenant Potugin was to report himself to General Bekovitch and join that officer's carefully-planned expedition against the Chunchuses. The branch line ended at a disused quarry which had been largely drawn upon when the main railway was under construction; and there was no telegraphic communication between the main line and the terminus of the branch—if, indeed, the latter could be said to have a terminus: it simply left off. The empty troop train would doubtless remain at the junction until it was signalled by trolley-car from Imien-po to proceed.

The sergeant, a famous raconteur, was telling a story, long-winded, not at all humorous, yet received by the men with shouts of laughter. Lieutenant Potugin smiled good-humouredly at the naïve amusement of the honest fellows, and once more idly scanned the panorama beneath him. In the far distance he saw a dense line of smoke lying flat in the still air, betokening a train travelling eastward at a high speed. He watched it with languid curiosity as it appeared in the open and vanished into cuttings in the winding valley of the river. It passed the junction, slackening speed, and then, to his surprise, pulled up. Distant though it was, he could distinctly see through his powerful glass a little knot of men hurrying from the train up the line. They disappeared for a time, apparently beneath a culvert. The circumstance awakened Lieutenant Potugin's curiosity; he watched with a certain eagerness for the men to reappear; one or two small groups could be seen against the snow, but a considerable time elapsed before the most of the

men joined them and the whole party ran back to the train. Scarcely had they reached it when a cloud of dust rose high into the air above the bridge, and a few seconds later the sound of two dull explosions reached the lieutenant's ear, followed by miniature echoes from the rocks.

The lieutenant sprang up and gazed intently through his glass. The sounds had been heard by the men also; they turned their heads for a moment, but, seeing nothing, resumed their conversation. But Potugin stood as if stupefied. An attempt had been made to wreck the culvert; that was clear. But who were the wreckers? Were they Russians, cutting the railway to check pursuit by the Japanese? Surely the enemy was not already at Harbin? Accustomed as he was in this terrible war to sudden and startling movements, the lieutenant could not believe that the Japanese had made such strides. No, he thought; it was more likely to be a party of Japanese who had captured the train and were engaged on a wrecking foray. Such things had happened south of Moukden; a flying squadron might have evaded the Cossacks and made a daring attack on some inadequately protected train.

The train was moving forward. But what is that? It has stopped again; it is running back towards the stream. The madmen! Are they going to hurl themselves to destruction on the ruins of the culvert? Potugin's gaze is fascinated. Ah! he sees through it now; three carriages have left the rest of the train, which is again at a standstill; they are rushing down the gradient, faster, faster. Good heavens! they have crashed into the culvert, piling themselves one above another, and the sound comes to him like the breaking of some giant's crockery afar.

Then Potugin found his wits. Nothing in the whole course of the war had given the Russians so much anxiety as their railway. Depending on it for the rapid transit of reinforcements and munitions of war, they were constantly in nervous dread of this their sole communication with St. Petersburg being cut by Japanese or Chunchuses. The dreaded thing had happened. Fully realizing the situation, Lieutenant Potugin was prompt to act.

"Fall in!" he shouted.

The men sprang from their seats and were aligned in a twinkling.

"Sergeant, signal the Cossacks that a train is in the hands of the enemy, and going eastward. Men, follow me."

He led the way at a breakneck pace down the hill towards the spot where they had left the empty troop train. Three minutes brought them within sight of the train; at that moment the engine whistled and began to puff along. The officer shouted, waving his hand; the engine-driver saw his urgent gesture, and shut off steam. In another ten minutes sixty breathless men, heated with their headlong scamper, were on board the train; the lieutenant was beside the driver;

and the engine was steaming as rapidly as the crazy irregular track permitted towards the main line.

Arrived at the junction, Lieutenant Potugin himself leapt down and switched the points close. The pointsman had apparently been startled by the crash and run off to inform the guardsmen at the nearest block-house. The troop in was just moving forward to cross the points when a tremendous rumbling was heard from the direction of Imien-po, moment by moment increasing. The engine of the troop train was already on the main line. But the lieutenant, standing with his hand on the switch and looking down the track, was horrified at what he saw rapidly approaching.

"Reverse the engine!" he shouted; "for God's sake reverse the engine!"

The driver with frenzied haste threw over his reversing lever and put on more steam; the engine stopped, moved slowly backward; it had reached safety by only a few inches when a goods train came thundering past at furious speed, and disappeared in the direction of the bridge. As it flashed by, Lieutenant Potugin was almost sure that the engine had neither driver nor fireman. Startled though he was by the hair's-breadth escape from destruction, he immediately recovered his presence of mind. Setting the points, he ran to his retreating train, clambered into the cab, and before the driver had pulled himself together the lieutenant seized the lever, reversed the engine, and drove the train on to the main line, then sprang down, unlocked the points, and in two minutes was running the train backward towards Imien-po.

The engine was a powerful Baldwin; the train though long was nearly empty; it gathered way, and with the regulator fully open had soon attained a high speed. But the engine was at the wrong end; it was difficult to see ahead. The lieutenant was now outside the engine, hanging on to the rail, and bending outwards in order to get a clear view down the line. Half-way to Imien-po he caught sight of a trolley approaching. He called to the driver to shut off steam and apply the brakes. The man working the trolley stopped the moment he caught sight of the train, and seemed in doubt whether to go back or to remain. The train had almost come to rest; the officer bellowed a few words to the trolley-man; he sprang to the ground, promptly tipped the trolley off the track and over the embankment, and, running to the engine, climbed up beside Potugin, the train still moving. Again the brakes were released and the regulator opened, and as the train forged ahead the trolley-man explained in a few words to the lieutenant what had occurred.

At Imien-po a few minutes' stop was made while appliances for repairing the line were hastily brought on board and a number of skilled platelayers taken up. The opportunity was taken to shunt several of the carriages on to a siding. The engine could not be transferred to the front of the train without a serious

waste of time, and every second was precious. A fresh start was made; greatly lightened, the train made fine running for some miles. Then the lieutenant, using his glass, saw the smoke of a train about five miles down the line. As he watched it, the smoke ceased; the train must have stopped, for the gradient was rising. A few minutes more and the runaway came in sight. But the fireman, stooping from his side of the engine, observed with his trained eyes that a portion of the track had been torn up, and steam was shut off and the brakes applied only just in time to avert a disaster. Jumping from the train, half a dozen platelayers hurried with their tools behind the engine, and, spurred by the voice of the officer and helped by his men, in an incredibly short space of time they had wrenched up some rails from the track already covered, and bridged the gap at the other end.

Slowly and carefully the train was run over the shaky metals only half-secured to the sleepers. When the danger point was passed, the driver opened the valve and the engine pushed along at full speed. It was to be a trial, not only of speed between the two magnificent engines, but of wits between the two leaders: between the ingenuity of the pursued in obstructing the progress of the pursuer, and of the pursuer in overcoming the obstacles raised by the pursued. It was more; it was a competition in daring and the readiness to take risks. The track was hilly, winding, roughly laid; not intended for, wholly unsuited to, great speed; with steep gradients and sharp curves never rounded by the regular drivers of the line but with caution. Over this track the two trains were leaping at a pace unknown on the Siberian railway—a pace that would have turned the chief engineer's hair white with dismay. On the one train Jack Brown, on the other Lieutenant Potugin, had to think out their decisions, or rather to flash them unthought, clinging to the outer rail of a rattling, swaying, jolting, throbbing engine threatening at any moment to jump the rails, with the noise of escaping steam, the roaring of the furnace heaped to the mouth with fuel, the whistle constantly sounding to warn off any obstruction ahead, small though the chances were that the signal, if needed, could be heard and acted on in time. Accident apart, the race would be to the coolest head and the quickest wit. On the one side the stake was life or death. Into whose hand would fortune give it?

CHAPTER XXV
The Pressure-Gauge

Timber on the Track—Fuel and Water—The Station House—A Trap—Neck or Nothing—Screwing down the Valve—A Slip Carriage—Nearing the End—Kao-ling-tzü—Indiscreet Zeal—A Lady Passenger—Traffic Suspended

Jack glanced anxiously back along the line; his engine was jolting, bumping, up the incline at the rate of forty miles an hour; steam was escaping from the safety-valves; the gauge registered over 10 atmospheres, considerably above working pressure; yet to his impatience it seemed to be moving with exasperating slowness. Dust was whirling behind; through the cloud, five minutes after he started, he saw a puff of steam in the distance; the pursuing train was again under way. Turning to see if he could put on more steam, he was dismayed to find that the water was just disappearing in the gauge glass. In a few minutes—he could not tell how few—the water would be below the level of his fire-box crown, the fusible plug would drop, and the fire would be put out by the escaping steam. This was ominous indeed.

There were, he saw, two conditions in his favour: he had a start of nearly five minutes; and he could choose his own place to obstruct the pursuer. But the other conditions were all against him. He must needs stop for water, and at the present rate of consumption for fuel also; and whenever he passed a station it would be necessary to cut the telegraph wires. Moreover, on board the pursuing train there must be men skilled in repairing the line, or the chase could not have been resumed so promptly; and Jack could not expect to do more damage in a given time than could be remedied by expert hands in the same period. Worst of all, the pursuing engine was evidently more powerful than his; and though it was somewhat handicapped by its position at the wrong end of the train, yet an experienced driver can always get more work out of his engine than a tyro,—and Jack was making his trial trip!

He cudgelled his brains for some means of checking the pursuit without bringing his own train to a stand-still. He wished that he had thought to instruct his men when tearing up the rails to lift some of the sleepers into the train; these placed on the line would prove serious obstacles. It was too late to repine; he made up his mind not to lose the chance if it should occur again. While his thoughts were still on the matter, his eye caught the balks of timber used for fuel on this part of the line. The stock in the tender was much diminished; more fuel must soon be obtained; but surely one or two might be spared for the experiment. Without delay he sent Hi Lo to the back of the tender with an order to Wang Shih to carry two of the balks through the train and to drop them on the line from the communication door at the rear of the last carriage. In a few moments the command was carried out, but Wang Shih reported that owing to the high speed

he had found it difficult to see what happened to the logs when they reached the ground. One, he thought, had remained on the inside rail; the other appeared to jump off. Narrowly watching the riband of steam from the pursuing train, Jack believed he detected a momentary diminution about the time when it should have reached the spot where the logs had been thrown out; but if there was a delay it was very brief, and a few minutes later the tail of the advancing train came into full view, the growing size of the carriage-end showing that it was making up on him.

Looking ahead with greater anxiety, Jack saw a station within a mile. This must be Pei-su-ho. He had already decided that to stop there would be absolutely necessary, and in a short colloquy with Wang Shih when he returned from throwing the logs on the track he had arranged what should be done. Immediately on the stoppage of the train twelve men were to engage the station staff and destroy the telegraphic instruments; ten were to tear up the rails behind the train, and, if possible, bring some sleepers on board; four were to cut the telegraph wire, and twenty to load wood from the station stock on to the nearest carriage. In the meanwhile he himself, with the assistance of the man acting as fireman and others riding on the engine, would take in a supply of water from the tank.

The train rattled into the station. In his anxiety Jack found that he had shut off steam too late; the engine ran some yards beyond the water-tower. As he had already found at Imien-po, it was not easy to the amateur to bring a train to a stand-still at a given spot. But although the greater part of the train had run beyond the platform, the Chunchuses, who were standing ready with the doors open, swung themselves out, and before the gaping officials were aware of what was happening they were disarmed and helpless. Not for the first time had Jack reason to be glad that his men were the pick of Ah Lum's band, and a standing proof of the efficacy of discipline with the Chinese.

While Jack was backing the engine to the tank the work of ripping up the track and demolishing the wire had already been begun, and a string of men were hauling timber into the nearest carriage. But before the supply of water was fully replenished Jack had to blow his whistle to recall the various parties; the pursuer was drawing perilously near. The train moved off before all the men were in their places; the last of them running along the platform and being helped in by his comrades. Up came the second train; again it had to halt before the gap, and the driver, being at the other end, was compelled for safety's sake to reduce speed earlier than he would have done had he been able to judge the distance more exactly. But this time the gap was shorter; the time required to restore the line would be correspondingly less. Yet Jack had gained one advantage; knowing that the enemy's water supply, like his own, must have run low, he had brought the station hose away with him, and he looked at it with grim satisfaction, lying

coiled at the rear of the tender.

As Jack's engine, Alexander the Second, gained impetus and charged up the gradient towards the hills looming in the distance, it was followed by a dropping fire from the pursuing train: some of Lieutenant Potugin's men had climbed to the roof of the stationary carriages. Whether any of the bullets struck the train was doubtful; no harm was done; and in the excitement of the moment the idea of firing rifles seemed almost as childish as shooting at the moon. Nothing less than a siege-gun would have appeared formidable in the circumstances.

The brigands' last cutting of the line and the removal of the hose had evidently gained several minutes for the fugitive, for many miles had been covered before the smoke of the pursuer was again seen. With so considerable a start Jack felt it safe to pull up once more and try a device that had occurred to him. His engine was at the summit of a long descent where the line curved. Hitherto his track-breakers had forced up both the rails, but the curve was here so sharp that he thought he might save time by having only one rail lifted, hoping that the partial gap might not be seen by the enemy until it was too late to do more than check the train, which would in all probability be derailed. An alternative plan suggested itself, only to be dismissed. It was to remove the rail, and then replace it without the bolts. The pursuer would then rush on at full speed expecting no danger; the train would be hurled from the track, and probably all on board would be killed or injured. But even in the heat of the moment, and with the knowledge that if he were caught he could expect no mercy from the Russians, Jack could not bring himself to compass such wholesale destruction. "Play the game": the phrase of the school song stuck to him. His purpose would be amply served by the mere derailment of the train, the speed of which would no doubt be sufficiently checked, when the gap was descried, to avert fatal consequences.

So confident was he of the success of his scheme that when, after the single rail was removed and flung over the embankment, he again crowded on steam, his mind was occupied rather with the question of what should be done at the next station than with the prospect of further difficulties with his dogged pursuer. He was now approaching the place in the hills to which Ah Lum was to advance by forced marches, and whence he was to be prepared to dash across the line on receiving a message that the scheme had succeeded. Jack had already selected his messenger; the man was clinging to the rail of the engine, and only awaited the word to spring during a temporary slackening of speed and plunge into the hills.

The chosen spot lay between Pei-su-ho and Kao-ling-tzü, and had been minutely described by Ah Lum. Jack was glad that his anxieties appeared to be over, for the country flashed by so rapidly that he ran the risk of over-shooting the mark unless he could keep a good look-out. He was narrowly watching for

the opening on his right when Hi Lo suddenly drew his attention westward. With greater alarm than he had yet felt, even when he first caught sight of the pursuer, he saw, scarcely a mile and a half behind him, the relentless enemy leaping along in his wake. He was half-way up a steep incline; the second train was rushing with wholly reckless speed down a steep straight gradient on which Jack, no longer fearing pursuit, had thought it desirable to clap on the brakes. All notion of going cautiously must now be abandoned. Amazed at the failure of his last effort to delay the pursuer, Jack set his men with desperate energy to pile up the furnace to its utmost capacity; and when he topped the hill, and the enemy was just beginning the ascent, he let the engine go at its own pace down the opposite side. He and his men had to hold on with both hands as they rounded another sharp curve; the wheels on the inside seemed to be raised from the track, the train keeping the rails only by the grip of the outside wheels. Jack held his breath as the panting engine plunged along; would it come safely on to the straight? Even in the excitement of the moment he solved as in a flash the mystery of the pursuers' escape from derailment, and he could have beaten his head for his thoughtlessness. The rail that had been lifted was an inside rail; rounding a curve the weight of a train going at speed is always thrown on the outer rail, which is raised above the level of the other. Either designedly or by accident the pursuing train had passed at full speed over the gap, its very speed proving its salvation.

Although there were many ups and downs, the general trend of the line was still chiefly on the up grade, and Jack found that while the enemy made as good timing as himself down the slopes, their more powerful engine gained rapidly wherever the track began to rise. As mile after mile was passed, the huts of the line guards at intervals of ten versts seeming like the milestones on an ordinary journey, the space between the two trains steadily diminished. Every now and again the pursuer was lost to view; but whenever it next came in sight it was always perceptibly nearer. The noble Alexander the Second rattled and groaned like a creature in pain; the working parts were smoking; some of the bearings were melting, and Jack dared not risk the perils of oiling. He knew that he was getting out of it every ounce of which it was capable, unless indeed he adopted the desperate expedient of screwing down the safety-valve, from which a dense cloud of steam was escaping. He glanced at the gauge—13 atmospheres; then his eye went backwards along the track—the pursuer was still gaining; he turned to look ahead, there was a long steep ascent to be climbed. The pace lessened to an alarming extent: puffing, panting, creaking, the engine toiled up a hillside on which the track could be seen rising for at least two miles. He must risk it.

Three minutes later, the valve now screwed down, he again glanced at the gauge—14 atmospheres. Bursting pressure, Jack knew, was calculated at five or six times the working pressure; but the Alexander the Second was an old engine,

he doubted whether her boilers would stand anything like this strain.

For a time Jack's train drew away; but the gain was only temporary; the pursuers, he guessed, must have adopted the same desperate expedient. Gradually they crept up, while Jack alternately watched them and the track ahead, and the gauge, which now registered 15 atmospheres—the limit which it was constructed to indicate. Beyond this point he had no means of knowing how the pressure was increasing. The rapidity of his thoughts seemed to keep pace with the tremendous speed at which he was travelling. His mind worked with marvellous clearness; the minutes seemed like hours; he even found himself speculating which of the three risks was the greatest—derailment, capture by the Russians, or the imminent explosion of the boiler.

To look for the spot chosen for the despatch of his messenger was out of the question; it had probably been already passed. Jack felt that he had no longer any alternative; he must play what seemed his last card. The pursuing train was only half a mile behind on the steep upward track when at his order Wang Shih, at the risk of his life, uncoupled the rearmost of the three carriages. For a short distance it followed the rest; then it stopped, and began to run back at a pace that threatened to telescope at least one carriage of the oncoming train. A turn in the track hid both the detached carriage and the pursuer from sight; Jack listened with a beating heart for the sound of the collision, which he felt would be audible even above the thundering roar of his own train.

Lightened of part of its load, his engine was forging its way uphill at considerably higher speed. At one moment he thought he heard the expected crash, and it seemed that the move had been successful, for when next he obtained a fair view of the line behind, the enemy was not in sight. Alternating between compunction and elation, he ventured, the line being more level, to reduce speed until it was safe to drop his messenger, who must perforce find his way to Ah Lum. But the man had barely left the track when, to Jack's amazement, the indomitable pursuer reappeared. A glance showed him that it was pushing the discarded carriage before it. His move had been detected, probably before the cast-off carriage began its backward journey; the pursuing engine had been able to reverse in time; chased and overtaken by the runaway carriage, the train had no doubt been badly bumped, but not with force enough to cause any serious damage. Now, to all appearance, it was following the quarry at the same breakneck pace as before. Jack felt a glow of admiration for the wary Russians, who showed themselves so intent to mark his every move, so quick to take measures to defeat it.

His mouth hardened as he watched the pursuer gaining upon him yard by yard. He knew that the pressure must now be enormous; would the boilers stand the strain? Yet in spite of all he was steadily being overhauled. Yard by yard

the gap lessened. Nothing but an accident could now prevent him from being overtaken; his only course seemed to be to stop before the enemy was too close, reverse his engine, and with his men take to the hills. But then he reflected with a kind of agony that the task he had set himself was even yet only half done. There was no longer, indeed, any chance of Ah Lum's retreat being cut from the west; but the Russians could still despatch a force from Ninguta in ample time to check the Chunchuses before they got across the railway; and if they were once checked, the forces behind would at once close in and crush them. While, therefore, the slightest hope remained, Jack resolved to cling to his train; but he gave his men orders to jump clear at a moment's notice. They must now be very near to Kao-ling-tzü: if they failed to cut the line there the race was clearly run, for a warning would certainly be flashed over the wire to the next station at Hanta-ho-tzü, giving ample time for preparations to be made to meet him. He was in a bath of sweat; his throat was parched; his limbs were trembling; but collecting all his forces, he watched the gauge and grasped the lever.

There remained, he clearly saw, one small chance, and only one. If there happened to be a train at Kao-ling-tzü side-tracked in obedience to his instructions, it might be possible—how long would it take?—to interpose it between himself and his pursuers. There would be a minute, nay, less than a minute, to gain possession of it and set it in motion. Could he increase the margin? Yes; by detaching the saloon, now the rearmost carriage, and crowding the whole of his men and the two prisoners into the single carriage in front. The enemy had all along shown himself so alert that he would doubtless be on the look-out for such a move; there was no longer any likelihood that it would end the chase; but at least it would check the pursuer's progress, forcing him to stop or reverse. Even if it caused the delay of only a few seconds, it was worth attempting; a few seconds might make all the difference.

The station was already in sight when, the transference of men having been quickly effected, Wang Shih broke the couplings and left the saloon solitary upon the line. Looking with blood-shot eyes ahead, Jack saw—and his labouring heart leapt at the sight—not one, as he had hoped, but two trains, one behind the other, completely filling a siding, where they were halted to allow General Bekovitch's expected train to pass.

But the same glance that gave Jack such elation showed him that he had to deal with perhaps the greatest danger he had yet encountered. He had intended to follow the same plan that had proved successful at the other stations: dispose of the officials, cut the wires, and block the line. But he saw almost with dismay that the platform here was thronged. Drawn, no doubt, by curiosity to see the train of General Bekovitch, and excited by the urgent messages received along the wire, not only the station officials were waiting, but a considerable number

of workers on the railway, Russian riflemen, and Chinese passengers. These, together with the attendants of the standing passenger train, were massed upon the platform. They formed so numerous a crowd that it would tax all the energies of the Chunchuses to deal with them; there might be a prolonged fight, and, even if it ended in a victory for the brigands, so much time would have been consumed that the pursuers must arrive before anything could be done to stop their progress. It was a moment when many a man might have despaired. But Jack was not made of the stuff that yields. As his engine plunged along towards the station he conceived an alternative plan; it would test his nerve and self-command to the uttermost; but it might succeed by its very audacity.

Passing the word to his men that they were to remain in the carriage and hold their revolvers ready in case an attack was made, he halted the engine with a jerk a yard beyond the spot where the station-master was standing. He sprang to the platform, clutched the astonished official by the arm, and dragged him along, speaking in low, rapid, urgent tones.

"Come with me. There is not a moment to lose. We are pursued by a train in the possession of the enemy. General Bekovitch is laid up. We have done our best to check the pursuit, but they'll be upon us in a few minutes. Only one thing can be done: uncouple the engine on the siding, and start it up the line. Quick! our lives depend on it. I will take the responsibility."

As Jack had hoped, the suddenness and unexpectedness of the news, and the urgency of his manner, bereft the station-master of all power of independent thought. He hurried along the platform, shoving aside all who stood in his path, every man in the crowd looking on with wonderment. He sprang on to the line, with his own hands uncoupled the engine, signalled for the points to be closed, and ordered the driver to send it ahead at full speed.

"Two minutes saved!" thought Jack, as the engine started. But he could not afford to let the flurried official regain his self-command.

"That is not enough," he said. "They will see the engine, reverse, couple it on, and come at greater speed. I've tried it already. You must empty the passenger train, and then push it along with the goods engine. It would be well to throw a carriage or two off the rails at the points. Anything to block the line."

"Certainly, your nobility," said the station-master. "It is the only way."

They were now on the track between the waiting train and Jack's. Many of the passengers had their heads out of the windows, wondering what was going on. Waving his arms, the station-master summoned them in urgent tones to alight.

"I'll now push on," said Jack. "Do your best, nichalnik; remember how much depends on you."

He walked rapidly along between the trains to reach his engine. Passen-

gers, anxious, wonder-struck, were already leaving the train. One of them, a Russian army doctor, stopped Jack and asked what was the matter.

"Train behind in possession of the enemy," returned Jack laconically.

"Bozhe moï!" ejaculated the doctor, drawing his revolver and making for the platform.

Jack passed on, not venturing to delay even long enough to assist a lady, for whom the jump from carriage to track was somewhat difficult. She sprang down unassisted.

"Monsieur Brown, Monsieur Brown!"

Jack shivered from top to toe, and never in his life felt so much inclined to take to his heels as then. He could hardly believe he had heard aright; yet amid the bustle now filling the station he had caught the whisper of his name. On a sudden impulse he swung round.

"Monsieur Brown," said Gabriele Walewska, running up to him, "I have news for you: I have something to show you."

"Come with me, Mademoiselle," said Jack instantly. "I haven't a minute to lose."

"But Masha is here; I cannot leave her."

"For heaven's sake, Mademoiselle, climb up into this carriage. I will fetch Masha."

With anxiety tearing at his heart Jack hurried back down the train. He saw Gabriele's old nurse at the door of a carriage; she was almost the only passenger who had not yet alighted.

"Spring into my arms," he said, forgetting that she knew no tongue but Polish. But his outstretched arms spoke for him. The woman jumped clumsily; but Jack kept his feet, and, straining his muscles, he carried the burden, as rapidly as he could stagger, to his own train. Gabriele's hands were ready to help the woman; with an unceremonious heave Jack pushed her into the carriage. Then he ran to his engine, swung himself up, and pressed the lever just as the empty passenger train moved off in the other direction. Before he had run a hundred yards he heard a crash behind. Glancing back, he saw that the first carriage had jumped the points, ploughed up the permanent way, and overturned. One after another the other carriages followed; and in a brief minute there was a pile of wrecked trucks and coaches in inextricable confusion across the rails.

Jack had not time to give a second thought to Gabriele. He was again urging Alexander the Second along at full speed. He must run to within a few miles of the next station, and lift enough rails to delay for some hours any train despatched from the direction of Ninguta. Twenty minutes brought him to a likely spot—a high culvert over a brawling hill stream. Employing the whole strength of his detachment in the work, he lifted fifty yards of the track and flung the rails and

sleepers into the stream's rocky bed.

"At last!" he exclaimed. The load of anxiety he had borne for over two hours was gone. From the place where he had wrecked the bridge nearly a hundred miles westward to the spot where he now stood, traffic on the Siberian railway was hopelessly blocked.

CHAPTER XXVI
A Double Quest

Gabriele's Story—A Hasty Word—Lex Talionis—Bribery and Corruption—Cause and Effect—The Natural Man—The Filial Obligation—The Choice of Routes—A Fair Pleader—In the Circumstances—Improving the Occasion

Jack's part was done. The way had been cleared for the passage of the Chunchuses across the railway, and knowing Ah Lum's rapidity of movement he felt tolerably sure that the crossing might easily be made. He could now afford to think of his own safety. He determined to run the train back as near as he dared to Pei-su-ho, then to leave it standing on the line and make off in a northerly or north-westerly direction, trusting to join hands with Ah Lum at some distance north of the line. The railway guards were amazed to see the train running swiftly backwards; but, whatever their suspicions, they were powerless. Jack came to a stop between two of the block-houses; in a few minutes his men alighted with Bekovitch and Sowinski, Gabriele, and her nurse; and then Jack abandoned the noble Alexander the Second that had served him so well, and started on his northward march. Some distance above the line he instinctively turned for a last look. There was the short train, motionless on the rails, a derelict in a vast solitude. But it represented activities that had disorganized the whole traffic of the line for a hundred miles, nullified a military scheme, and saved hundreds of lives. It was not without a certain grim amusement Jack remembered that the final card in that game had been played by the Russians themselves. "I only hope the station-master won't be cashiered," he thought, as he turned his back upon the scene.

Not till now had he an opportunity of learning what strange fate had entrusted Gabriele to his care. Some time after he had left the missionary's house

the girl, unable to endure the separation from her father, again ventured into Vladivostok. Acting on the knowledge that Jack had bribed a Russian official, she succeeded in persuading a colonist about to re-embark for Sakhalin to carry a letter from her to Count Walewski. She told him of her intentions, assuring him that in spite of her failure to gain permission to enter the island, she still meant to persevere. Several weeks later she received a reply, brought by the same man, who had crossed the sea in probably the last boat before the ports became ice-bound. It was addressed in a strange handwriting, and as she tore it open she was oppressed by the fear that her father was dead. But the first line of the letter, written in French, dispelled her anxiety. The count was ill in hospital, unable to write; but he had availed himself of the ready help of a fellow-prisoner—a political prisoner who had recently arrived in the island. He thanked his daughter for her affectionate solicitude, but pled with her to abandon her purpose: Sakhalin was no place for a woman; she would only suffer without alleviating his lot. As for himself, until the arrival of his new friend he had despaired of ever regaining his liberty. But the surprising news that the Japanese were winning victory after victory had sown a seed of hope. The prisoners on the island had been fed with lies by the officials, who reported constant victories for Russia. But the new-comer had thrown a fresh light on the war; he could not foresee its end: the Russians had still enormous powers of resistance; it was possible that the great fleet on its way eastward might break through to Vladivostok and change the aspect of things. Yet, if it should be defeated, the Japanese might capture Sakhalin; possibly the political prisoners would then be released if they had not been previously removed to the mainland. It was only a possibility, but sufficient to give new courage to a sorely-tried man.

Jack read all this himself, for Gabriele, immediately after explaining how the letter came into her possession, handed it to him. The writing was his father's. At the first moment he felt unutterable relief in finding that his father was alive; then rage burned within him as he saw before him, marching at some distance apart, each manacled to a Chunchuse, the two men whose villainy had sent Mr. Brown to the bleak "island of the dead". Gabriele noticed his look.

"I understand," she said. "But if your anger is great, how much greater is mine! Your father's persecutor is a Russian, a foreigner; my father was betrayed by one of his own countrymen,—one of his own house. The traitor there recognized me as I entered the saloon carriage; bound as he was, he shrank from me as though expecting that I would kill him."

"But he did not recognize you when he saw you at Father Mayenobe's?"

"No. But something must have put him on my track, for it is through him that I was a passenger on the train. I was arrested in Vladivostok and ordered to go back to Europe. He was with the soldiers who arrested me: in fact, he pointed

me out to them. I do not know how he came to recognize me after all."

At the moment no explanation occurred to Jack, who indeed did not give a thought to it. But later he remembered that, on the well-remembered evening in Moukden when he had got the better of Sowinski, he had mentioned the man's true name, Streleszki. This had no doubt set the Pole wondering how Jack could have learnt his name; and the chain of incidents had led him to connect the disclosure with the European girl he had met at the missionary's. So that Jack's almost inadvertent explanation had ultimately led to this meeting with Gabriele at the station, and to the end of his long search for his father's whereabouts.

The party marched as rapidly as possible, rising gradually towards the barren hills. After two hours they stopped for a brief rest, and for the first time since his capture at Mao-shan General Bekovitch was within arm's-length of the Chunchuse leader. Jack wondered whether he would be recognized; but the change of costume, the hardening of his features and the development of his physique due to his active rigorous life, made him a different being from the lad whom Bekovitch had seen for five minutes at the Moukden railway-station. And the general was certainly not in such a calm and collected mood as might quicken his memory. He was indeed in a condition of boiling rage and indignation.

"Here, you—" he cried, seeing Jack so near to him. "Do you understand Russian?"

"Moderately well, sir."

His very voice had become more manly; its deeper tones did not awaken recollection.

"Then what do you mean, confound you! by treating a Russian general officer thus? What do you mean, I say? Do you know what you are doing? Made to tramp over these hills—fettered to a filthy Chinaman—why—why——"

The general could find no further words to express his indignation.

"Is it not the Russian custom to manacle prisoners?" asked Jack quietly.

The Russian's cheeks took a purple hue.

"An officer—a general! Do you know who I am, you—you——"

"You are General Bekovitch."

"Well—well—loose me at once, then; I insist on this indignity being removed; it is monstrous!"

"Possibly; but quite Russian. You are no worse treated than you treat your prisoners. If a Chunchuse, myself for instance, had fallen into your hands, what would have been his fate?"

The mild reasonableness of the Chunchuse's reply, together with his firm attitude, seemed to suggest to the general that he should try another tack.

"Come," he said, with sudden suavity, "I know you gentlemen; I suppose it is a matter of dollars. How much will you take to let me go?"

Jack looked at him.

"Say a thousand dollars—that's a very fair sum, more than you'd get in the ordinary way of your—business. Eh?"

"Yes: our business, as you call it, is certainly not profitable, but we do make a haul at times."

The general looked furious. Jack quietly continued:

"But you are making a mistake—you are treating me as you would a Russian and an official. I am merely a brigand—but we Chunchuses have our code. Dirty though he is, General Bekovitch, the man you are bound to has cleaner hands than you: he at least is an honest man according to his lights. It is he who should complain of contamination."

Bekovitch quivered with rage, but gulping down the indiscreet words his anger prompted he returned to the point.

"I could make you a rich man. I said a thousand dollars; come, I will make it two thousand. It will buy you a pardon, and an official post as well. Batiushki! no brigand ever had such a chance."

Jack laughed.

"We have our code, General Bekovitch, I repeat. There are some things bribery cannot effect. Your release just now is one of them. But for bribery you would not be here."

The general stared.

"What do you mean?"

"It is all very simple. If the Pole Sowinski yonder had not bribed you, General Bekovitch, you would not have conspired against Mr. Brown at Moukden, and you would not have needed to deport his son. If you had not deported his son, his son would not still be in Manchuria; and if he had not been in Manchuria he could not have captured you, General Bekovitch, and you need not have attempted to bribe him."

The general stared incredulously at the speaker. Then it was as though the Cossack uniform dropped away; as though the young man before him became again the lad he had been nine months before. The Russian recognized him at last, and his jaw fell.

"You see now," pursued Jack, "the double uselessness of offering bribes to me—as the son of Mr. Brown, and as an Englishman."

"What are you going to do with me?"

All the bluster, all the silkiness, was now gone; the general was anxious, almost suppliant.

"That I cannot say. You will be delivered to my chief, Mr. Ah. It is likely that you will be detained until my father is released. But I cannot answer for Mr. Ah. He is a Chinaman, with Chinese ideas. Much may depend on how my father

has been treated."

Bekovitch became pale; his eyes looked anxiously around. Jack left him to his meditation. Passing the spot where Sowinski sat, manacled like Bekovitch, Jack noticed that the Pole's eyes met his with a hunted, terrified look. He had recognized his captor at once, and having also seen Gabriele he felt that he had to reckon with her as well; and his imagination of what he himself might do, were he in their place, shook him like the ague.

The march was resumed, and late in the day the party came in touch with Ah Lum's scouts. The meeting between Ah Lum and Jack was very warm.

"Never was captain so nobly served," said the grateful chief. "I was at my wits' end to escape the meshes of the net; and now not only have I escaped, but I hold in my power the man who was to ensnare me. Truly the poet Li T'ai-poh was right when he said, in his *Apology for Friendship*—

"'Never despair: the darkest Lot may mend;
Call no Man lost hath one faithful Friend'.

You will find the works of Li T'ai-poh worthy of perusal, my honoured friend. They have been to me as a bright star to a wanderer in a dark night."

Jack thanked him for the recommendation; then changed the topic, and asked how the crossing of the line had been effected. He learnt that a slight skirmish had taken place at the line between the Chunchuses and the energetic pursuers of the train; but the Russians, being hopelessly outnumbered, had been compelled to retire with loss. Ah Lum in his turn was informed of the discovery of Mr. Brown's whereabouts.

"Nothing proceeds from the machinations of men," he said, "but the whole of our lives is planned by destiny."

"Yes, Mr. Ah, and destiny has willed that my father's persecutor and your hunter are the same man—the Russian general there."

"Ch'hoy! May his posterity be cut off! May the five thunders strike him dead! May the village constable attend to his remains! May he be born again as a hog! When we pitch our camp, I will cut out his tongue, fry him in a caldron of oil, rip——"

"Stay, stay, Mr. Ah!" cried Jack, aghast at this unwonted fury in his scholarly friend. "You forget that he is a European, and I am an Englishman; we don't do such things in my country."

"But it is an imperative duty. Your duty to your father demands that you should heap on the villain the direst curses, and inflict on him the most terrible torture."

"No, Mr. Ah, the books of our sages teach us differently. Besides, my father

would not approve: he would most strongly disapprove."

This was a new aspect, and one that Ah Lum took time to consider.

"That alters the case," he at length reluctantly admitted. "A son may not act contrary to his father's wishes. What does the poet Tu Fu so beautifully say?—

"'Happy the Father, yea, and doubly blest,
Whose Son, though absent, doeth his Behest'.

Yes, it is a pity; but when inclination and the counsel of sages agree, there is but one course."

Considering that there would be plenty of time to levy a contribution on the settlement at Shih-tou-ho-tzü, Ah Lum sent back 200 men for the purpose of collecting supplies, and pushed on with the main body. A few hours later the detachment rejoined, with a number of carts containing useful stores of all kinds, and the march northward was resumed with all speed. One of the carts was appropriated to the use of Gabriele and her servant; but the former soon declared that she preferred to walk; the springless cart made riding anything but comfortable. The march was continued throughout the day. In the evening Ah Lum reached a spot far in the hills, where he might safely encamp.

Next morning Jack took the earliest opportunity of holding a consultation with the chief. It was his fixed intention to get if possible to Sakhalin; he knew his father was there: to rescue him ought not to be difficult. As a Chinaman Ah Lum confessed that he could not oppose an enterprise of such piety; but as a practical man he thought it his duty to mention the objections. He had never been to Sakhalin, but he understood that it was a terrible place, visited by fierce storms, buried for the greater part of the year under snow and ice, covered with thick forests, infested by wild beasts, wilder men, and even hideous dragons. By the many forms of exorcism employed for generations past in China, dragons had been driven out of the Celestial Kingdom; but they had crossed the sea and taken refuge, so Ah Lum had been informed, in the dreary wastes of Sakhalin.

Jack brushed all these objections aside. Seeing that he was firm, the chief carefully considered the best means of helping him. The strait between Siberia and Sakhalin was at this time of the year frozen over; the ice would not begin to break up for several weeks. The nearest point at which it could be crossed was at least 1500 li from the Chunchuses' present encampment, and not only would so long a journey be attended by many hardships, but Jack would be liable to arrest as soon as he came to any considerable Russian settlement. Jack at once said that he did not propose to make the long overland journey; his best plan would be to sail by junk from one of the Manchurian ports as soon as the coast was clear of ice. To go to Vladivostok was too risky; Possiet Bay was the nearest point, and

the most promising in all respects. It was some hundreds of li distant, and there were high hills to be crossed; but Ah Lum offered to send with Jack a man who knew the country, and to issue orders to the headman of every important village, instructing him under pain of his severest displeasure and drastic penalties to do all in his power to forward the journey.

This having been settled, the question of the disposal of the prisoners arose.

"I am not one to mistake a village headman for the emperor," said the chief; "but fishes, though deep in the water, may be hooked, and I know I have a valuable fish in the Russian general. How many men think you a general is worth in exchanges?"

"That's a hard question, Mr. Ah. Some less than nothing: others an infinite amount."

"Then it will be a matter of long bargaining. As for the other man, he is of little account. The mule is always attended by a flea. The two men are companions: what does that prove? When the rat and the cat sleep together, be sure that the larder will be empty in the morning. As the fishmonger throws a sprat into the scale to make the salmon appear cheap, so will I deal with the Pole when I dispose of the Russian. But there is another point, my honoured friend; what is to become of these women whom Destiny has sent to trouble me?"

"Yes, that has troubled me, too. I must go and hear what they say."

Jack found Gabriele listening gravely to Ah Fu's recitation of the "May Queen".

"Mademoiselle, may I have a little serious talk with you? The chief is sadly perturbed about your presence here."

"Well, Monsieur Brown, it was your train that brought me. Seriously, I suppose I must go back to Father Mayenobe *en route* to Sakhalin, for sooner or later I will get there—on that I am determined. They may deport me, but I shall always return.—What will you do yourself?—not remain a Chunchuse?"

"No, indeed. I am going to find my father."

"To Sakhalin?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Monsieur Brown, cannot I come too? I may never get such a chance again. My poor father! he has been there six years. Take me with you."

"But, Mademoiselle——"

"I am very strong, really I am. Did I not walk for six hours yesterday? I will not delay your march."

"But think of the difficulties—a long mountain journey to begin with, a voyage in a junk at one of the worst seasons of the year, the danger of being discovered and arrested at any moment, exposure, perhaps hunger——"

"I am not afraid. And surely it will be better for me to face these hardships

in your company than alone!"

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone! I have as strong a motive as you; my father—oh! I cannot bear to think of him ill and wretched. I shall go to Sakhalin. If you will not take me, and do not give me up to the Russians, I shall tramp to the coast and cross on the ice—alone."

Jack hardly knew whether to be amused at the absurdity of such a venture, or to be impressed with the girl's determination. That she meant what she said he had not the slightest doubt.

"But what about Masha?"

"Poor old thing! She declares she will never leave me. And she is quite strong—stronger than I am, though she is getting on in years. We shall get through somehow; the Lord God will protect us."

In face of this spirit Jack felt helpless. It was arranged that Gabriele and the nurse should accompany him. Their destination was kept secret from the band, lest by any mischance it should leak out. A week afterwards, Jack took a cordial farewell of Ah Lum, asking him, if he had any news to communicate, to write to him at the care of the Hong-Kong and Shanghai Bank at Shanghai. The leave-taking was conducted with due solemnity. There was no question as to Ah Lum's sincerity of feeling. He was unfeignedly sorry to lose the lieutenant who had done him such yeoman service. When he had exhausted the resources of his language to express his gratitude, he spent a few minutes in bestowing fatherly counsel on Jack, drawing lavishly from his well of proverbial wisdom. Jack found the draught a trifle turgid, but otherwise the quality was excellent.

"Difficulty and danger," began the chief, folding his hands and looking benignly over the rims of his spectacles—"difficulty and danger teach us to know the value of friendship; at the same time they winnow the true from the false, even as a husbandman winnows the grain from the chaff. I may never see you again; take from me a few words of counsel, learnt as well from life as from the works of the poets and sages. What says Li T'ai-poh?—'A good rule of conduct is better than stout armour or a sharp sword'. When you are most happy, you should be most ready to meet misfortune. Extreme joy is but a sign of grief to come. In security, do not forget danger. Do not consider any vice as trivial, and therefore practise it; nor any virtue as unimportant, and therefore neglect it. Let your words be few, and your companions select. Inattention to minute actions will ultimately be prejudicial to a man's virtue. Past events are as clear as a mirror; the future as obscure as lacquer; yet, gazing into that mirror, I seem to see reflected a future of great prosperity, high office, and a numerous progeny. Heaviness and care will come upon you, as upon all men; at such periods the works of Li T'ai-poh will prove a well of refreshment, a mine of solace. I have no

fears for you. As the sun's rays first gild the highest mountains, so the blessings of Heaven fall in richest measure upon the upright. You have shown yourself to be an excellent son: what says the poet Wang Wei in his *Address to Posterity*?—

> "'To him who faithfully his Father's Will obeys,
> Heaven in its Bounty grants great Wealth and Length of Days'."

CHAPTER XXVII
Sakhalin

Abundant Profits—A Hut in Sakhalin—Sowinski and Another—Sympathy—Coincidence—Blood Money—Downhill

One brilliant April morning Jack set out towards Ninguta, accompanied by Gabriele and the servant, Hi Lo, and two trusty Chunchuses. They were all dressed in Chinese garb, and since Manchurian women do not deform their feet there was no difficulty for Gabriele on that score. But they carried Russian dresses and uniforms for use if necessary. They crossed the railway safely at night half-way between two of the block-houses; and, striking into the hills, followed a path that would take them a considerable distance south of Ninguta. Their great danger lay in the chance of meeting one of the Russian columns which had been engaged in rounding up Ah Lum; but the two bandits believed that they would hear of the proximity of any such troops in good time to avoid them.

Jack had discussed with Gabriele whether they should take Father Mayenobe's mission station in passing. On all grounds they decided that it would be best to leave the good priest undisturbed. No doubt he believed that Gabriele was well on the way to Europe; it would be a pity to renew his anxieties, and possibly involve him in trouble with the Russians.

While they were laboriously making their way over the hills, another member of Ah Lum's band, posing as a lumberman, travelled by the railway, newly restored and more strictly guarded than ever, to Vladivostok. He bore a letter from Gabriele to the man by whose aid she had communicated with her father in Sakhalin. The letter stated that the receiver might earn 500 roubles if he would accompany the bearer to Possiet Bay, and there meet the writer, who would then

give him further instructions. Jack had little doubt that when they arrived they would find the man waiting. To an ex-convict of Sakhalin 500 roubles is a fortune.

The Chinese shipping interest at Possiet Bay was scandalized when it heard that Too Chin-seng was contemplating a voyage to Chifu at least three weeks before the usual season. The ice, it was true, was breaking in the harbour; but the weather was tempestuous outside; and large quantities of loose floe rendered navigation difficult and dangerous. There was much shaking of the head over the temerity of the ship-owner who was thus imperilling not only the lives of the crew but the safety of the vessel. He could easily get another crew; a vessel like the *Yu-ye* ("Abundant Profits") was more difficult to replace. She was a stout junk some sixty feet in length and fifteen in beam, built of thick wood to withstand the heavy seas of those northern latitudes, and from the Chinese point of view well found in all respects. That for the sake of a few weeks' gain in time a man should risk so valuable a craft seemed to the shipping world at Possiet Bay a wilful flying in the face of fortune, almost an insult to Ma Chu, the goddess who watched over good sailors.

Too Chin-seng went quietly about his preparations, not even swerving when his neighbours protested that by the time he returned from Chifu he would be too late for the early herring fishing off Sakhalin. One day the vessel, loaded with a cargo of rice, made her way with much creaking and groaning out of the harbour, her sides bumped and scratched by heavy ice floes. Before sailing she had undergone the usual inspection; the officials sniffed and pried, as though the dissatisfaction of the native community had infected them also; but everything was in order. The day was fine, the sea exceptionally smooth for the time of year; and when once free from the floating ice, the *Yu-ye* ran merrily before a light north-easter down the coast.

But towards evening, when off Cape Lesura, she hauled her wind and beat about as if in expectation of something. She had not long to wait. Half a dozen figures appeared on the shore; a sampan was launched from the edge of the ice and laboriously punted its way out to the junk. The passengers were got aboard with some difficulty, for the wind was rising and the sea beginning to be choppy. But, all being at length embarked, the junk clumsily beat out to sea, heading towards the coast of Yesso to the north-east.

"He can makee chop-chop sailo pidgin, lowdah?" asked Jack of Too Chin-seng at the tiller.

"My belongey numpa one junk, masta. Ping-ch'wahn no can catchee he, galaw!"

In a rough wooden hut on a hill-slope above a small lumber settlement on the south-east coast of Sakhalin two men were talking. It was nearly dark; a sputtering tallow candle threw a murky light over the room, showing up its bareness. A rickety table was the only article of furniture; a raised portion of the rugged wooden floor, covered with one or two frowsy blankets, served both for chairs and bed. On these blankets the two men were now seated.

One of them was a big, heavy-browed, uncouth fellow—a posselentsy; that is, one who having served his time in the convicts' prison, was now liberated, though not free. He could not leave the island, nor could he choose his place of residence; he was bound to live where the governor bade him live. On leaving the prison he had been furnished with implements and ordered to go and build himself a hut at the spot prescribed, and till the soil around it. For two years he had been provided with food enough to keep him from starving; after that he must keep himself by the labour of his hands—cutting wood, loading coal, mending bridges. His hut became the nucleus of a village, other convicts being sent to do as he had done. After fourteen years he might hope to be permitted to return to Siberia or Russia.

The posselentsy was sitting with his back against the log wall, taking frequent pulls at a bottle of vodka, which, though forbidden to the colonists except at the two great Russian festivals in October and January, is secretly manufactured in stills deep in the woods, and stealthily bought and sold. But this bottle was a present.

"Yes," he was saying in answer to a question; "he checks the logs loaded into store by the foremen of our artels."

"An easy job, no doubt," suggested the other man—the Pole Anton Sowinski.

"Easy! It's child's play. All he has to do is to count the logs and write the numbers in a book. Then the dirty Pole—I beg pardon; I forgot he was a countryman of yours—gives out the vouchers, and the work—work!—is done. I had the Englishman's job myself—until I made a mistake in the figures."

"A mistake!"

"Well, they said it was intended. At any rate they sent me back to the woods."

"And while this Englishman—this spy—and the other sit at their ease, you poor Russians have to do all the hard work. I suppose it *is* hard?"

"Hard! Try it, barin. Felling trees and splitting logs all day is not exactly a soft job. And to make matters worse, since this war has been going on they've set a lot of us fellows to deal with the fish—make the stinking fish manure that the Japanese used to make. The herring season is just beginning; that'll be my pleasant occupation next week."

"And that is the life you lead while the Englishman—the spy—and the other

live like barins, eh? It is shameful."

The Russian took a long pull at the bottle. It was not often he got a chance of airing his grievances and drinking vodka from the continent—a great deal more to his taste than the crude poison of local manufacture.

"You are right; it is shameful."

"I wonder you don't do something."

"Do something! What can we do? We rob them when we get the chance, but that doesn't make things easier. Besides, they are not so bad after all—the Pole and the Englishman. The Englishman taught my boy to cast accounts; he's now a clerk in the superintendent's office. And the Pole taught my girl to speak French; she's now maid to the governor's lady. It didn't cost me a kopeck: no, they're not a bad sort."

"Still, think of the injustice."

"Yes, the injustice; that's what makes my blood boil. I was a robber; I tell you straight what I was; and I killed a gorodovoi who interfered with me: that's what brought me here. But what's that to being a spy, and plotting against the Little Father's life? No, and if I had my rights——"

The drink was beginning to take effect; the posselentsy was becoming noisy.

"Yes, yes," interrupted Sowinski; "and I suppose if the Englishman were out of the way you would stand a chance of getting your old job—his job—again?"

"Perhaps—if I could bribe the governor's secretary. But what chance is there of that? His price is too high for me. And besides, the Englishman is not out of the way, nor likely to be."

"And yet it might be managed too. A determined man like you, with say a couple of hundred roubles to back you, might go far."

The Russian was not so much fuddled that he failed to understand the drift of the other's words.

"What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously. "Speak plainly," he added, bringing his huge fist down upon the table with a bang that made the Pole wince. "What is your game?—that's what I put to you. You haven't come here—a barin like you—just to see me, and listen to my grumbles; I know that. No, nor yet for love of anybody else; I'm an old bird, I am, and I see what I see, I do. If you want anything out of me, I won't say I sha'n't meet you if you make it worth my while; but you'll have to speak out, man to man, you know; beating about the bush is no good with an old bird like me, not a bit of it."

"Quite so, my friend, quite so. Indeed, that is my way: a clear understanding—nothing kept back on either side."

"Well then, speak out, can't you? What is it? What do you want me to do, and what will you pay me for it?"

"That's what I like—plain speaking. Well, it seems that the matter stands thus: here are two men between your present hard life—an atrocious life, an unendurable life, a life worse than a dog's—and an easy life, a life with little to do and any amount of time to do it. It's a strange thing, but these very two men are hated by the government. The officials don't want to do anything openly: you know their way; but if the two men were suddenly to disappear——you understand?—well, the government at Alexandrovsk wouldn't take it amiss. Of course, there would be a kind of enquiry—a formal matter; and that would be all. But the officials must not appear in it. There are reasons. That is why, as I was coming here to see about a contract for railway sleepers, the matter was mentioned to me—by a high personage, you understand. I have with me——" he corrected himself hastily—"that is to say, not here, but at the superintendent's, two hundred roubles—fifty for an immediate present when an understanding is come to, another fifty when the disappearance takes place; the rest if the disappearance is so complete that no traces of the two are found—say within a month. But of course I must know what becomes of them."

"Ah! That's the game, is it? And what's to be the story for Petersburg, eh?"

"That's an easy matter. We'll say they bought false passports—there's a manufactory of those useful documents not a hundred miles from Nikolaievsk—and smuggled themselves away in a herring boat. That'll wash, don't you think?"

"If it goes down as easy as this vodka it'll go down uncommon easy," said the man with a chuckle.

"And there's plenty more where that came from. Well, what do you say?"

"I can't do it alone. I shall want some one to help. You—" he looked critically at the Pole—"you ain't the man for such a job. I'll have to get a pal. Ten roubles, now—I suppose you won't object to pay that, supposing you don't want to lend a hand yourself?"

"That shall not stand in the way. I shall have to pay the money out of my own pocket," he added as by an artistic inspiration.

The man flashed a shrewd glance at his visitor; but though he said nothing on the point, he was apparently making a note of something in his mind.

"Well, you leave it to me, barm," he said. "When I take a job in hand, my motto's 'thorough', it is. And mind you: when I see you next, another bottle of this vodka: that won't ruin a barin with two hundred roubles at the superintendent's office and ten in his own pocket, eh?"

A few minutes later Sowinski left the hut and stumbled out into the darkness—down the hill, dotted with rude huts dimly discernible in the gloom, towards the little bay where half a dozen junks engaged in the herring fishery lay at anchor. The road was broken by ruts and pitfalls; unconsciously the Pole groped his way over or past them, busy with his thoughts, which were blacker

than the night, hurrying him to a deeper pitfall dug by himself for his own undoing.

CHAPTER XXVIII
The Empty Hut

My Son—Liberty in Sight—Au Revoir!—Suspense—The Open Door—A Footprint—The Trail

While Sowinski was making his way down the hill, a sampan with two passengers put off in dead silence from one of the junks in the roadstead. The vessel had arrived that afternoon with a small cargo of rice; she was to ship a consignment of dried fish for Chifu. The loading was to be commenced at dawn on the following day; she was not to carry a full cargo, having to fill up with coal at Alexandrovsk; by the evening it was expected that her consignment would be on board, and she would sail again next morning.

The sampan moved without a splash towards the northern end of the bay, where there were no huts. The fishing settlement extended half round the southern end, and the lumber yards occupied the rest of the southern quarter and part of the northern. It was a very solitary spot at which the passengers landed, and the sampan-man—who happened also to be the owner of the junk—steering his little craft between two rocks, where he was secure from observation, squatted motionless, apparently awaiting the return of the two men whom he had just put ashore.

Making a circuit round the lumber settlement—a somewhat difficult matter in the dark—the two passengers, one of whom evidently knew the way and walked a pace or two in advance, stopped at a hut a little larger than the majority of those they had passed, and gently tapped at the door. No light was visible; the taller of the two men cleared his throat as in nervous impatience. A step was heard within; the door was opened, and a voice asked in Russian:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, gráf," said the man who had led the way. "I have a friend with me."

"Come in, then."

The two entered; the door was gently closed behind them. The outer room was in complete darkness; but, leading the way through that, Count Walewski

opened a farther door, which led into a second room, dimly lighted by a couple of candles. A man was seated at a table, reading.

"Here is our friend Godunof, comrade," said the count in French.

Mr. Brown looked up—looked again, stared, then sprang to his feet.

"Jack!"

The taller of the two visitors brushed past Godunof, and father and son clasped hands. For a few moments not a word was spoken by either of them; a stranger might not perhaps have guessed from their manner that they had been parted for nearly a year—the father a victim of foul wrong, the son ignorant of the father's whereabouts and burning to avenge the wrong. But beneath his iron-gray moustache and beard Mr. Brown's lips were quivering, and Jack had a lump in his throat which made him incapable of speech when his father turned to the count and, keeping Jack's hand in his, said simply:

"My son, Count."

Count Walewski was deep in conversation with the other man. He seemed scarcely to comprehend what Brown had said.

"Your son! But—my daughter—you remember her letter; she is here, now, in a junk at the shore; Godunof says so; it bewilders me; am I dreaming? Your son!—they came together; Godunof tells me they have come to take us away. After all these years!—Brown, this will kill me!"

The count, trembling like a leaf, leant for support against the crazy table.

"Sit down, my friend," said Brown. "We must keep our heads. Jack has come on a desperate adventure; it takes my breath away; he must tell us what it means."

A long conversation ensued—not long in point of time, but in the amount of matter compressed into it. The difficulty of arranging the escape lay in the impossibility of knowing from what quarter the wind would be blowing at any hour that might be determined. Without a favourable wind the *Yu-ye* could not get out to sea; and it would be madness for Mr. Brown and the count to go aboard until there was a practical certainty of the junk being able to slip away. As soon as they were missed, every boat in the roadstead would be searched. And even if the vessel cleared the bay, there was always a risk of its being followed by the government launch engaged to patrol the fishing settlements along the coast, perhaps by a gunboat sent from Korsakovsk in response to a telegram. The launch at this moment lay at anchor in the bay, and unless the *Yu-ye* got a good start and a fair wind, it must inevitably be overhauled, though the government boat was an old and crazy vessel whose best work was long since done.

Granted a favourable wind, then, it was arranged that the two, the following midnight, should make their way down to the point at which Jack had landed. If the wind proved unfavourable, the departure must be postponed. The

junk would slip her moorings at the first glint of dawn, and before the escape was discovered Jack hoped they would be hull down on the horizon.

"But what speed can you make?" asked Mr. Brown. "You can't outrun a steamer."

"I doubt whether the launch would venture far into the open," said Godunof, the colonist who had carried the letters between Gabriele and her father. "She can't stand heavy weather, and a gale may spring up at any moment in these seas. Besides, she'd be chary of meeting Japanese cruisers in the Strait of La Perouse. I wonder, indeed, she ventured into this bay—no better than an open roadstead, and exposed to attack."

"She only arrived two days ago from Korsakovsk," said Mr. Brown. "She came on a matter of revenue; nothing else brings her here."

"Well, we must chance it, Father," said Jack. "We've got here safely, and please God we shall get away safely too. We can run for the nearest Japanese port, and there we'll be as safe as—as in Portsmouth Harbour, by Jove!"

The plan having been discussed rapidly, yet with anxious care, Jack took leave of the two gentlemen—all three with full hearts wondering whether they would ever meet again—and returned by the way he had come.

His return was eagerly expected on board the junk. He had scarcely clambered over the side when a figure closely enwrapped in Chinese dress moved towards him.

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle. He was overcome at the news that you were here."

"And is he well? And your father—both well? Oh, Monsieur Jack, I pray that nothing, nothing, may happen! Nobody knows of your visit?—you are quite sure? You made them understand?—the time, the place, the wind? To think that we have to wait a whole night and day! I can hardly endure it!"

"I am just as bad, really, Mademoiselle. Lucky for me we have to load up to-morrow; that will give me something to do. By this time to-morrow——"

The next day was a time of dreary waiting. It was a bright morning, the sky clear, the sea smooth—too smooth, thought Jack, anxiously whistling for a wind. The cargo was taken on board—smelling horribly, but Gabriele waived Jack's condolences: what was such an unpleasantness beside the larger matter of her father's safety? As the day wore on, black clouds came scudding out of the north; the wind freshened minute by minute, and the junk began to roll.

"The wind serves!" cried Gabriele joyfully. "Oh for the dark!"

Some time before the hour agreed upon, the sampan was punted to the appointed spot. In it were Jack, Hi Lo, and the owner of the *Yu-ye*. The wind was roaring, the sky was black, the tide full, and the Chinaman had much ado to prevent his craft from being dashed against the rocks. Time passed; nobody ap-

peared. Jack looked at his watch; it was twenty minutes after midnight. What had delayed the prisoners? Another twenty minutes; he was becoming uneasy. What could have happened? Godunof could not have played him false; the colonist had not returned to the junk with him the night before, but since he had received only a portion of the reward promised him, it was unlikely that he had betrayed the secret. Had the prisoners been delayed by an unexpected visitor? Had they started and been caught? All kinds of possibilities occurred to him.

At last, when the two were fully an hour and a half late, he could endure the anxiety and suspense no longer. He resolved to go up to the hut, and alone. But when he told the Chinaman what he intended, and asked him to put him ashore, Hi Lo spoke:

"My go long-side masta."

"No, no; you must stay and look after Mademoiselle."

"My no wantchee stay-lo; my no can do. Masta wantchee some piecee man allo-time long-side; ch'hoy! what-fo' Hi Lo no belongey that-side?"

The boy was already slipping over the side of the sampan.

"Very well then," said Jack reluctantly.

Then, turning to the Chinaman, he bade him remain at the same spot until near dawn. If by that time Jack had not returned, the man was to go back to the junk and come again when darkness fell on the following night. He must find some excuse for not putting to sea, and not let it be known that anyone connected with the junk was ashore. Above all, he was to watch over the women.

With great caution Jack and the boy stole round the settlement towards Mr. Brown's hut. Unfortunately, as Jack thought, a bright moon was shining fitfully through gaps in the scudding cloud; and having to take advantage of every patch of shadow when it appeared, their progress was slow. The wind was bitter cold; the spring-like promise of the earlier part of the day had been succeeded by a sharp frost, which had already hardened the slush and mud except in places sheltered from the blast. The thin ice on standing pools broke under their tread, with a crackle that gave Jack a tremor lest it should have been heard. But there was not a light or a movement in the settlement, nor any sound save the whistling of the wind and the booming of the surf on the shore.

Stealthily they made their way up the hillside. They arrived at the hut. The door was closed, the window dark. Jack tried to peer through interstices between the rough logs of the wall; he put his ear against the wood; he heard nothing, saw no glimmer of light. With a sinking heart he pushed gently at the door. It yielded to his touch. He entered, groping in the dark; and bidding Hi Lo close the door, he struck a match and held it above his head. Feeble as the light was, it showed enough to strike him cold with despair. The hut was empty, and in disorder. A chair was overturned; a half-burnt candle lay on the floor; the

table was pushed into a corner, and a book had fallen beneath it and stood on its bent leaves. Jack picked up the candle and lit it. The clean boards of the floor were marked with many muddy stains as of scuffling feet. Dreading to search, Jack yet looked for traces of blood; there were none. But among the marks one struck him particularly—a huge footprint, too large to have been made by either Count Walewski or his father. Someone had entered before the ground outside had frozen. But the struggle—everything in the bare hut spoke of a struggle—must have taken place after the fall of dusk, for with a pair of old perspective glasses found in the junk Jack had kept a close watch on the hut, and had seen his father enter, late in the afternoon, with another figure—presumably the count.

Dazed with this sudden set-back to his hopes, Jack sat down on one of the chairs, resting his throbbing head upon his hands. A feeling of utter helplessness paralysed him. Hi Lo stood watching him, the boy's whole attitude one of mute sympathy. Had the authorities got wind of the plot, thought Jack, and again spirited his father away? Had Godunof, the ex-convict, betrayed him? Scarcely, or a police visit would have been made to the junk, and he himself arrested. He tried to pull himself together; he must do something, and at once; but what? He could not tell; he was in the dark; and Gabriele in the junk was waiting, listening, wondering why ere this she was not in her father's arms.

Bending forward in his misery, suddenly his eye fell on the huge footmark made with a clay-clogged boot on the white floor. The boot must have been of quite unusual size; what could have been the stature of the man who owned it? Jack suddenly sprang up; if there was such a footmark within, would there not be others, similar, without? By them could not the assailants be traced? He was convinced that his father and the count had been attacked: should he rouse the settlement? Their lives might be in danger; in warning the authorities he would at the worst only risk his own liberty. But supposing the authorities themselves should be concerned in the matter! To appeal to them would then be worse than useless; he would merely sacrifice his own freedom, and with it all possibility of serving his father.

Still the footmark stared at him. An idea suggested itself. Could he trace the man himself? He had never followed any trail but that of a paper-chase; but what of that? It was worth a trial. In a rapid whisper he told his thoughts to Hi Lo. The boy nodded with full comprehension. Jack blew out the light, and pocketed the candle; then the two groped their way to the door and issued forth

into the moonlit night.

CHAPTER XXIX
The Heart of the Hill

Trackers—Voices—Into the Open—Waiting for Dawn—Demons—Greater Love—Choke Damp—Found—A Rusty Chain—From the Depths—Explanations

The moonlight and the frost, which Jack had been disposed to regard as hindrances, were now all in his favour. The moon threw just sufficient light to enable him to avoid obstacles and to see the impressions of footsteps in the mud, which the frost had suddenly hardened. Bending low, he was at first unable to distinguish, among the many footprints in front of the hut, the large one for which he was so intently looking; but a little distance away he had no difficulty in picking out two separate trails of the enormous foot, one approaching the hut, the other receding from it. It was the latter that must be followed, and with Hi Lo at his side Jack walked as quickly as possible over the glistening track.

Every now and then the traces disappeared, for whenever the moonlight was obstructed by a cloud, a hut, or a tree, it was impossible to see clearly enough to distinguish them. Then it was that Hi Lo proved himself invaluable, and made Jack thankful he had not refused the boy's request. It was he, as a rule, who succeeded in finding the lost trail; scouting ahead like a sleuth-hound, he seemed to be able to see in the dark.

The way led steeply uphill. It was hard and rough going, following a narrow road probably used for the haulage of timber. Under the thin coating of ice the mud was deep, and at times their feet sank up to the ankle. The little hamlet of log huts was soon left behind; they came into a clearing dotted with the low stumps of trees; here, evidently, had been felled the timber of which the huts were built. Then they passed into a densely wooded clump, through which in the darkness they had to grope their way. Once or twice Jack ventured to light a match; this being the sheltered side of the hill, there was no wind, and during the few moments of feeble light Hi Lo could assure himself that they had not lost the trail. Crossing more rapidly another open stretch, they entered a still thicker and darker patch of wood. When, after going some distance into this, Jack again

struck a match, the boy, peering on hands and knees, declared that the footprints were no longer visible. They must needs go back to pick up the trail, far more difficult to distinguish in these forest depths than in the open. The search took time; anxiety was all the while tearing at Jack's heart-strings, but he schooled himself to patience. At last they came again upon the huge footprint with which they had now grown familiar. Lighting the candle-end, Jack traced the mark for a few yards on the upward path; then, together with the other footprints, it suddenly disappeared.

"What in the world are we to do?" whispered Jack.

The forest was dense on each side of the path. At the few points in the course of their journey where a gap let through the moonlight, they had seen extraordinary effects, the trees seeming to have been tossed about by giants, lying at all angles against the trunks that had arrested their fall. But the path had been cleared of these obstructions, for if not removed, the waleshnik, as the fallen timber is called, would soon block up any forest road in Sakhalin.

Groping about, Hi Lo at length discovered, to the right of the main path, a fallen tree that concealed a narrower track, made by men, but apparently no longer in use, and partially overgrown. For some time the keen little fellow's search failed to find the footprint, but at last, at a break in the undergrowth, he pounced upon it. The man with the big feet had evidently passed this way. Jack struck up the path; it was steeper now, and blocked at many points by trees that had been allowed to remain where they fell; but it was fairly broad, and at one time must have been as important and as frequently used as the path they had just left. Here and there they came to a clearing—the work of fire; blackened stumps standing grim and gaunt in the moonlight. Then on into the forest beyond, picking their way by touch rather than sight, barking their shins and rasping their elbows against obstacles they were unable to avoid.

The air was pervaded by the musty smell of decayed vegetation. It was silent as the grave save when a quick rustle told of some wild beast scurrying away into the thicket. Suddenly Hi Lo stopped, putting his hand on Jack's arm.

"What is it?" murmured Jack.

The boy instantly clapped his hand upon his master's mouth, and pulled him from the path through a mass of tangled undergrowth. They were at the edge of a small clearing. Through the still air Jack could now hear voices ahead; then came the faint glimmer of a light; and soon, as they crouched breathless behind a friendly trunk, two figures appeared on the farther side of the clearing, coming towards them, one carrying a lantern. The men's voices were low; even in this remote spot they were doubtless mindful that it is illegal to be abroad after dark. Jack held his breath as they passed within two yards of him. He caught a few words in Russian.

"How long do you think?"

"About three or four days—unless they can eat coal!"

Then a hoarse chuckle.

The voices receded; the light died away; the men were gone. One of them was tall and broad, a son of Anak: clearly the owner of the giant foot.

His heart thumping against his ribs, Jack waited until he thought all was safe; then with Hi Lo he recommenced his climb up the wooded hill. He had no doubt that these men, whose voices the boy had fortunately heard in time, were concerned in the disappearance of his father and the count. But what had been done with them? Were it not for the evidences of the struggle Jack would have been tempted to suppose that the men were in league with the two prisoners, conniving at or assisting their escape. But the state of the hut belied any such thought.

It was some time before he ventured to strike another match in order to make sure that he was still on the track; the merest glimmer seen from below might lead to disaster. When at last he thought it safe to do so, he saw clear indications of the recent passage of several feet. He hurried on at the greatest speed the difficult path and the darkness allowed, and after some twenty minutes emerged upon a kind of table-land above the bay. He remembered seeing it from the junk—a huge terrace in the hills, sloping gradually upward, and after about a mile ending in another steep incline. The road was here more easy to follow; there were no fallen trees; it was the so-called tundra of Sakhalin. The trees were not so thick: through gaps in them he caught glimpses of the sea, silvery in the moonlight; and he thought of the fair girl waiting in the junk, now doubtless in an agony of apprehension regarding her father's fate.

The two pressed on. By and by they came to the steeper ascent. It was necessary once more to verify the trail. Fearful lest a gleam should give the alarm below, Jack took off his hat and struck a match within it. There were the footsteps, going up and down the hill, which was not, like the slope below, covered with trees. Indeed, during the last few hundred yards the two searchers had stumbled over sleepers, rails, and other things indicating a railroad either abandoned or in course of construction. Once they came full upon an upturned truck; a little beyond, upon a coil of wire rope. Jack stopped more than once to examine these impediments, always careful to conceal his light; and he concluded that they were rather the relics of a railway than material for a new line. He was still wondering what had tempted Russian enterprise to construct and then to abandon a railway in this spot, so remote and difficult of access, when the explanation came suddenly. He found himself among the outworks of a deserted coal-mine. The ground was littered with timber, dross, rusty tools; the path had come to an end; and Jack stopped abruptly, at a loss what to do.

It was hopeless in the darkness to attempt to explore the workings, for he had no doubt now that his father and Count Walewski had been brought here and left in some remote part of the mine, to perish of starvation. He saw through the villainous scheme. "About three or four days—unless they can eat coal!"—the words were now explained. What the motive was he could not guess. The conspirators had shrunk from murdering their victims outright; but when starvation had done its work they would no doubt come upon the scene, discover the dead bodies, and claim the reward which the governor would probably have offered for news of the fugitives.

The matches were used up; it would be dangerous to attempt to trace out a route in thick darkness. All that could be done was to wait for the dawn. What that might bring forth who could tell? With morning light the prisoners would certainly be missed, and a hue and cry would be raised. Even if the plot were the work of officials, still a search would be made. In that case it would be perfunctory; while if they were innocent undoubtedly they would scour the country all round the settlement. There would be little to guide them. The main path from the hut was largely used; many tracks crossed and recrossed on it; and if the night's frost was succeeded by a thaw, as was almost certain, the footprints would become mere puddles and give no clue.

Jack and the boy made themselves as comfortable as possible in the shelter of an overhanging cliff; but the hours till dawn seemed to creep along. Jack's thoughts dwelt in turn on the prisoners and their fate, and on Gabriele waiting in the junk. She was dressed in Chinese clothes, but would she escape undetected when the vessels in the bay were searched in the morning? Jack was tempted to send Hi Lo back, so that she might be warned; but second thoughts counselled him to wait until daylight. He might then at least let her know whether the count was alive or dead.

There was no sleep that night for either Jack or Hi Lo. As soon as it was light enough to see the ground they resumed their search. Almost immediately Jack understood why they had failed to pick up the trail the night before. The party had climbed on to a ledge of bare rock a few feet above the ground, and on this their boots had left no mark. But a little farther up the hill the track could be distinguished. It led directly towards a dark opening in the cliff—one of the galleries of the deserted mine.

As they approached the opening, Hi Lo began to shake with fear. A mine to an unsophisticated Chinaman is a terrible thing. He believes that the delving of the earth lets loose innumerable demons, enraged at the disturbance of their homes. So strong is this belief that mining is actually forbidden by law, though the law is now fast becoming a dead letter. Hi Lo knew nothing of western progress, and he implored Jack to turn aside from this black tunnel into the

earth. Jack did not laugh at the boy's fears; he told him to remain at the entrance and give warning if anyone approached. Then he stepped into the mouth of the gallery.

He had already concluded that the mine consisted of galleries, not of shafts. The outcrop of coal was visible in the side of the hill. He therefore had no fear of coming unexpectedly upon a pit. But he groped his way along with great caution; the truck rails had not been removed from the floor of the gallery. The air was pure; he felt indeed a slight draught, which pointed to the existence of an outlet of some kind in the direction in which he was going. After proceeding for a few minutes he was brought to an abrupt halt by a solid wall of rock in front. Feeling each side of the gallery, he found that the passage branched off to right and left. Which turning should he take? He stood in indecision; in the darkness there was nothing to guide his choice. Then it occurred to him to shout. If his father and the count were in the mine, they were doubtless alone: they would hear his call, though it were inaudible outside. He gave a halloo, and listened; he heard nothing but the sound rumbling along the passages. He shouted again; there was an answering cry behind him; then the patter of footsteps hurrying, stumbling along towards him. Facing round, he raised his fist to fell an enemy; but a small form cannoned against him, and a boy's voice uttered a gasping yell. It was Hi Lo. Hearing the shout, he had unhesitatingly plunged into the blackness. Anxious as the moment was, Jack admired the spirit of the little fellow, who, to come to his assistance, had braved dangers none the less terrifying because so purely imaginary.

"Well done!" said Jack, patting his arm. "Now run back and wait for me. I'm all right here."

"My no can do," said Hi Lo decisively. "My stay-lo long-side masta. Big piecee debbils this-side; my helpum masta fightey; my no can lun wailo."

"Very well. Keep close."

Again and again he shouted, always without response. Then at a venture he turned into the right-hand passage. After a few yards he felt Hi Lo's hold on his tunic relax. The boy had fallen to the ground. Hastily stooping he picked him up, almost falling as he breathed the lower stratum of air, and staggered with his burden to the main gallery. He had but just reached it when he himself was overcome and sank to the floor. He did not lose consciousness, but his head buzzed and swam, and he felt a horrid nausea. When he was somewhat recovered, he carried Hi Lo back to the entrance, and was relieved to find that in the open air the boy quickly regained consciousness. But he could not expose the little fellow again to such peril; bidding him remain at the spot, and on no account to follow, he plunged once more into the darkness.

This time he turned into the left-hand passage, and found that it sloped

rapidly upward. Before long he was brought up by a similar obstacle; the gallery again divided. He felt a slight current of air strike against him from the left-hand side; in that direction he continued to grope along. If the words he had overheard meant anything, they meant that the prisoners might be expected to survive for a few days. As that would be impossible in the foul air of the unventilated passages, he could not be wrong in pressing forward wherever he could breathe. Again he shouted; again there was no reply but a series of echoes. But moving on again, and listening intently, he fancied he heard a low continuous rumbling ahead; this could not be an echo. The sound grew stronger as he advanced; in a few moments he understood its cause; it was unmistakably the sound of falling water. Stepping now with still greater caution, he soon became aware that he was within a few yards of the waterfall; the sound seemed to rise from beneath his feet. He threw himself on his face and crawled forward—and the floor ended; he was on the verge of a precipice.

With a shudder and a long breath he drew back. For some distance he had noticed that the walls of the passage suggested to the touch stone rather than coal. They were hard as flint, and the roof was so low that he had to bend almost double. Apparently it was a prospector's gallery, not a real working. He wished he had a match; in the current of air that he now clearly felt, there was little risk of explosion from fire-damp. But his box was empty. He understood that the sound of the waterfall must hitherto have smothered his shouts; but if he hallooed now he might be heard, if there was anyone within hearing. Making a bell of his hands he uttered a shrill coo-ee. It gave him a kind of shock when, apparently from only a few feet below him, there came an answering call.

"Is that you, Father?"

"Yes. For heaven's sake be careful, Jack. It is a sheer drop. Wait a moment."

Mr. Brown struck a match. Jack peered over the edge. There, some fifteen feet below, on a broad ledge of rock sprayed by the waterfall that plunged past it into a dark abyss, stood his father and Count Walewski. The rock above them was perpendicular and smooth; on either side of them the ledge rounded inwards; in front of them yawned the unfathomable gulf. As he looked, the match went out, and with the return of complete darkness a feeling of terror seized upon him; his limbs shook, his skin broke into a cold sweat.

"Are you there, old boy?"

"Yes."

"You've no matches, I suppose?"

"No, but—of course, I've a candle-end." Jack was pulling himself together. "Do you think you could pitch up your box, Father?"

"I can try. I'll strike a match; the count will hold it so that I can get an aim."

Both spoke in a loud tone, to be heard above the splash and roar of the fall.

Count Walewski held the lighted match aloft; Jack stretched himself to the edge of the precipice; his father, retreating a few feet along the ledge, took careful aim, and tossed the box of matches gently into Jack's outstretched hands. In a moment the scene was faintly illumined.

"You see how we stand, Jack; can you get us up?"

"You were let down by a rope?"

"Yes; they took it away with them."

Jack remembered the coil of wire-rope he had noticed at the entrance to the mine. It had no doubt been formerly used for hauling the trucks.

"Wait a few minutes, Father. I'm going to see what I can do."

"Blow the candle out; there isn't much of it left."

Again the scene was in darkness. Jack hurried back along the passage, and found Hi Lo at the entrance. Together they retraced their steps to the spot where the coil of wire lay. As Jack feared, it was too heavy to carry; it proved too thick to break. Wasting no time here, he sent Hi Lo in one direction while he went in another to search for any stray rope that would be long enough for his purpose. He came to a tumble-down hut which from its contents he guessed had been the foreman's tool-house. Rummaging about among its rubbish, he found a chain some ten yards long, rusty, but quite strong enough to bear a man's weight. In a corner stood a broken sledge-hammer; and among a heap of bolts, clamps, and miscellaneous old iron he came upon several iron wedges such as are used for breaking hard ground and rock. With these they hurried back to the waterfall. Lighting the candle again, Jack, now in complete possession of his faculties, saw that the ledge on which his father and Count Walewski stood was at the base of a cavern. By the feeble glimmer he drove two of the wedges into the floor of the passage. Then he quickly attached one end of the chain to them and lowered the other end. In this Mr. Brown made a loop, which he tested.

"The Count first," he shouted.

The poor old nobleman, who was ten years his elder, and older than his years through the sufferings he had endured, sat in the loop and clung to the chain with his thin feeble hands. Hi Lo coiled the chain round the wedges to prevent an accident, and Jack, steadily hauling on the chain, brought the Count—a very light weight—to the edge of the precipice. Then he firmly secured the chain to the wedges, and, his hands being now free, lifted the Pole over the brink. The old man, broken down by his terrible experiences and exhausted from lack of food, was at first helpless; but when he had recovered from the terror of his ascent, all three hauled on the chain, and succeeded in drawing Mr. Brown up.

"Thank God!" he said, as he gripped Jack's hand.

The Count murmured a feeble but heartfelt "Amen!"

"Let us get away from the noise of the waterfall," said Jack. "Then we can

talk over the next step. Please God, we'll get you clear away yet, Father."

They withdrew for some distance into the passage, and sat down. In a few words Mr. Brown explained what had happened: how on the previous evening, when they had been reading in their hut, they had been surprised and overpowered by two ruffianly posselentsys and forced to accompany their captors up the hill path. The men were unknown to Mr. Brown; he could only explain their action by supposing that the plot to rescue him and Count Walewski had been discovered.

"How did you find us out, Jack?"

"We tracked the fellows by the footprint of one of them; or rather Hi Lo did; he has done me many a good turn since you disappeared, Father; I'll tell you the whole story when you are safe."

"What are we to do, Jack?"

"It won't be safe to leave here before night. If we did, we should be sure to run up against one of the search parties that are probably out by this time."

"You're right. I can manage to hold out, I think; but I'm afraid for Count Walewski. He's not so strong as I am; we've both been without food for more than twelve hours."

"My go fetchee chow-chow," said Hi Lo instantly.

Jack looked dubiously at the boy. Was it safe? he wondered. Hi Lo pleaded so earnestly to be allowed to go that Jack at last consented.

"Be very careful," he said. "When you get out of the mine, go a roundabout way to the shore. If you get there safely you'll be able to reach the junk. Tell Mademoiselle that we hope to see her to-night, and bring just enough food to keep us going until then. Be as quick as you can, boy, and hide if you see anybody on the way."

"Allo lightee, masta; my lun chop-chop; no piecee Lusski catchee Hi Lo, no fea'!"

And he slipped away.

CHAPTER XXX
Crowded Moments

A Search Party—Touch and Go—Food—Sowinski Reappears—Trackers Tracked—Recrimination—De Profundis—After Long Years

"Now, Jack," said Mr. Brown when Hi Lo was gone, "do you think it safer to stay here, or to leave the mine and hide in the woods till the evening?"

"Here certainly, Father. If we go away we stand a chance of running up against a search party. They are bound to search the workings."

"Yes, if they remember the mine," said the Count. "It has not been worked for several years. And suppose they come into it. How can we escape them?"

"Hi Lo and I nearly came to grief in one of the galleries. The air was very foul. We might hide there, going as far in as is safe. We could keep wet handkerchiefs about our mouths and hold out longer than the pursuers. They wouldn't dare to strike a light for fear of an explosion."

"What is the height of the gallery?" asked Mr. Brown.

"From five to eight feet, I should say. It varies. The other galleries seem to be regular."

"Well, whatever the height, the purer air will be at the top. If in one of the higher parts we could raise a platform and mount it we might venture farther in than if we remained on the floor. Can we do that?"

"Yes, there are some logs just at the entrance. It's worth risking, and the sooner the better."

Hurrying to the entrance, Mr. Brown and Jack carried in as many balks of timber as they could find, dropping them at the turning of the gallery. Then, holding their breath, they rushed one of the logs into the gallery as far as they dared, and ran back to the open passage. They repeated this operation until a small platform was raised some two feet above the floor; then, bidding Jack remain in safety, Mr. Brown mounted to test the result. He found that the air, though foul, was not bad enough to be dangerous. The position would be endurable for a few minutes. He hoped that it would not be necessary to have recourse to this unpleasant place of refuge, but it was well to know that it existed in case of need. Then, somewhat sickened by the foul air they had swallowed, they went to find the Count, who had volunteered to keep watch at the entrance to the mine.

He reported that he had seen, far off on the hillside, two parties of men moving in different directions, in a manner that suggested a search. But they had now disappeared. For some time nothing further was seen, and Jack and his father took the opportunity to exchange confidences about all that had happened since that June day when they had parted at the door of their house in Moukden.

Suddenly the Count, who had remained constantly on the watch, considerately leaving father and son to themselves, touched Mr. Brown on the arm and pointed. The heads of half a dozen men could be seen topping the brow of a slope about 300 yards below them. Instantly the three withdrew into the first gallery, taking the precaution to remove their boots, so that they would not be heard if

they had to retreat to the platform. In a few minutes they heard the echoing voices of the men as they left the open and entered the mine. It was impossible to see who they were, but the Count recognized the voice of one of the prison warders, and Mr. Brown that of a prisoner who had occupied the next bed when he was for a week in hospital. It was soon apparent what the prisoner had been brought for. The party halted within a few yards of the fugitives, and their words were now distinctly audible.

"Now, Scuratoff, you know the galleries?" said the warder.

"Yes; I worked here seven years ago."

"Then lead the way. Is it safe to light a lantern?"

"Maybe; I cannot say. It used to be safe enough in the main gallery, but in my time there was foul air in the side galleries. We had safety-lamps."

"Yes, confound it! I looked for a safety-lamp, but there wasn't one to be found in the place. We must do the best we can with the ordinary lantern; and to make sure, we'll only use it in the main gallery. If the air in the others is too foul for a light, it will be too foul for life."

The waiting fugitives heard the click of the lantern as the warder opened it, and silently retreated into the side gallery, raising their make-shift respirators to their mouths. They saw a feeble light at the junction of the two passages. The search party continued their progress and halted where the galleries branched, being now in full view of the three within.

"This is the dangerous passage—this one to the right," said the prisoner. "Better take the light away."

The warder retreated some paces with the lantern.

"Go in, Scuratoff, as far as you can. Foul air be hanged! You'll be well rewarded, remember, if you find the runaways—a year off your sentence, at any rate."

The man groped his way in, while Jack and the others quietly drew back to the little platform, where they took their stand. Nearer and nearer drew the Russian; it seemed as though he must discover them, and Jack's hand instinctively went to one of the two pistols he had had the forethought to bring from the junk. Then the voice of the warder, sounding hollow in the vaulted passage, was heard calling.

"Do you find anything?"

"Neither man nor beast," replied the prisoner in a shout. Hitherto he had held his breath, but after speaking he took a mouthful of the foul air. Instantly he turned, rushed down the passage, and stumbled gasping at the opening into the main gallery.

His companions dragged him out into the purer air, and the warder retreated still farther with the lantern. Jack and the others stepped down from the

platform, and hurried towards the main gallery, to get the much-needed air while the man was being revived.

"That's enough for that one," they heard the warder say. "We'll push on."

When the searchers passed the entrance of the gallery, the fugitives had again retreated, but were within two yards of them.

It was long before the Russians returned, and meanwhile the fugitives ventured into the main gallery, to enjoy the comparatively pure air as long as they could before they had again to seek shelter. At last the search party, baffled, passed by towards the entrance. Jack heard the warder commenting on the chain they had seen hanging over the edge of the precipice. Somebody at some time must have descended by its means to the ledge; but if the fugitives, they had paid the penalty, for there was no sign of them.

They left the mine. Ten minutes afterwards Jack ventured as far as the entrance. They had disappeared.

By and by Hi Lo returned with a small supply of food, which the three ate ravenously. He reported that every junk in the bay had been searched; and that the "missy" had hardly been prevailed upon not to return with him, so anxious was she to see her father. The condition of Count Walewski was pitiful to behold. Privation and anxiety were telling upon his already broken constitution, and Jack feared lest under the terrible suspense his heart strings should snap.

"Keep a good heart, my friend," said Mr. Brown. "In a few hours all will be well."

The day wore away, all too slowly, and evening settled down over the hillside. Jack, looking out, saw a slight mist rising from the sea, and welcomed it as favouring their dash to the bay, where the vessels at anchor were already raising their riding-lights. So intent was he upon the scene seawards that he had not noticed two men, who were coming up from the woods, furtively, as if fearful of being observed. When he did see them, he shrank back in momentary alarm, remembering immediately that as he had not left the shade of the dark entrance he could not have been seen. He watched their approach. One of the two was of huge stature; the other!——Jack felt his heart leap, for the other, whom in the distance he recognized rather by his gait than his features, was Anton Sowinski, the man whom he believed to be hundreds of miles away in Manchuria, in the safe hands of Ah Lum.

"Look-see, masta!" whispered Hi Lo at his elbow. "Polo man, galaw!"

Once more his father's enemy was upon his track. The Pole's presence was of evil import. What was he doing here? Was he merely a searcher, like the rest? He halted near the entrance, and the taller man, who overtopped him by at least six inches, stooped and drew from behind a broken truck a coil of rope. Then both came into the gallery.

Jack slipped back to the others.

"Sowinski!" he said in a whisper. During their conversation earlier in the day he had told his father of his dealings with the Pole, and of the man's identity with Ladislas Streleszki, the traitorous steward of the Count. This news Mr. Brown had kept from the old man, who had been all along in absolute ignorance that he owed his exile and imprisonment to a member of his own household.

Once more the fugitives shrank back into the foul passage. As the two men passed the entrance Jack heard Sowinski say:

"I cannot understand it. Are you sure they searched the cavern? There are not two caverns?"

"No, barin. There is only one. Scuratoff guided them; there is no mistake."

They turned into the left-hand passage. Jack instantly resolved to follow them. Without his boots he would be inaudible, and they carried no light. Accustomed as he now was to the darkness of the mine, he could move about it more rapidly than the Pole and his companion. He whispered his intention to his father.

"Better not."

"I don't think there's any danger. We three should be able to deal with the men, big as the Russian is. I'll give you one of my pistols. Hi Lo can fetch an iron rail from the workings for the Count to use."

"Very well, but be careful, my boy."

Jack slipped away in the wake of the two conspirators. In a few moments he heard the Russian apparently hailing someone in a low voice. Approaching within a few yards of them he heard the man still hailing. There was no reply. Then there was the chink of a boot against a chain.

"What's that?" cried Sowinski in his harsh voice. "Light your candle."

The posselentsy lit his candle. The two saw the chain wound about the wedges, and hanging over the brink. Jack wished he had removed it.

"Scuratoff had no rope," said the Russian. "He must have gone down to the ledge with this. Now tell me if I was right, barin."

"Hold your tongue, fool! The candle throws no light downward. Let it down over the edge."

Fastening it to the rope, the posselentsy paid the latter slowly out. A dash of spray from the waterfall extinguished the flame.

"Pull it up again!" cried Sowinski with a curse. Jack felt instinctively that the man was at a white heat of baffled rage.

Once more the candle, lighted after some trouble, was lowered. This time it escaped a wetting. The Russian stretched himself on his face and peered over.

"I can see nothing. Bozhe moï! They are not there."

He rose slowly and clumsily, pulling up the rope with the candle at the end.

Then he turned and faced the Pole, and by the sputtering light Jack saw the look of silly amazement on his face.

"What did I tell you, you clumsy, hulking fool!" cried Sowinski through set teeth. "You've bungled it; idiot that you are. Why, why, I repeat, didn't you take my hint and do for them outright?"

"If it comes to that," replied the man, red with sullen anger, "why didn't you do it yourself? You wanted to run no risks; you wanted it done cheap; did you think I'd chance another twenty years in the prison yonder for two hundred roubles? No, I wouldn't do it. This was your plan; your plan, to save a few paltry roubles. I'd have cracked their heads if you'd made it worth my while; you've only yourself to blame."

"Yes, I was a fool to trust the thing to a sheep-headed lout like you."

"Sheep-headed! Look you, I stand no abuse. I've done your job; two hundred roubles is little enough for it; and I'll trouble you to hand over the balance."

"The balance!" snarled Sowinski. "Eka! You may think yourself lucky to have got what you have. You get no more from me."

"We'll see about that, you white-livered little rat!"

The man made a sudden step forward and shot out his free hand to grip the Pole by the throat. But Sowinski, instinctively aware of what was coming, drew back quickly, his right hand seeking his pocket. The Russian saw the movement, flung himself forward,—dropping the candle, which sputtered on the floor of the passage—seized the Pole with his right hand, and with the left clutched at the other's right arm. But he was a second too late. He missed his grasp, and even as he swung his opponent round with the intention of hurling him into the abyss, there was a flash and a report that startled a hundred echoes from the cavern and the galleries. The Russian gave a quick grunt; then all was in darkness; they had trodden out the light. Into the next moments so much was crowded that Jack could never disentangle the separate events in his mind. His father's voice; a cry from Hi Lo; an appalling scream from Sowinski; a dull thud, followed by a brief silence save for the splash and rumble of the cataract. Then, through the sound of the waters, came a second and heavier thud that turned Jack's blood cold. At his side his father struck a match.

"They're gone!" gasped Jack, white to the lips.

"Your pistol?"

"No."

"Thank God!"

Tempter and tempted had struck the ledge in their fall, rebounded, and gone headlong to the rocks a hundred feet below.

Some few minutes after midnight, a sampan put off silently from a solitary angle of the bay. Creeping through the white mist, slowly, to avoid the intervening junks, it skirted the anchored vessels and quietly ran alongside of the *Yu-ye*. A hooded figure leant over the bulwarks, watching with straining eyes as five dark figures climbed up the side.

Count Walewski tottered into his daughter's arms.

Jack turned away and spoke to the skipper. An order was given in a low voice. The junk, riding on a single anchor, slipped the cable and ran up her enormous foresail. Spars and cordage creaked; but all was silent around; and the sail filling to the strong north-easter, the junk began to make way towards the open sea.

CHAPTER XXXI
Entente Cordiale

Censored—A Letter—An Oxford Version—Last Words from Ah Lum—A Rencontre—Debit and Credit—Schwab Sympathizes—Business—Partnership—Light in the East

"My word! And then—and then?"

"That's all, Monsieur Brin. The old junk sailed magnificently; with morning light we found ourselves off the Japanese coast, and three days later ran safe into the harbour of Hakodate. There's nothing more to tell. We spent several weeks in Japan among the plum-blossoms, and—here we are, in time to see this great meeting of the fleets."

Monsieur Brin and Jack Brown were among a party seated at dinner in the George Hotel, Portsmouth. The Browns had landed at Southampton two days before with Count Walewski and his daughter. They had been met by Mrs. Brown and her two other children, and had now come to Portsmouth to witness the festivities in connection with the visit of the French fleet. Monsieur Brin was at the same hotel, in the capacity of special reporter for the *Soleil*.

"But now, Monsieur," continued Jack, "I've told you all our adventures. What about yourself? What have you been doing since I saw you last at Harbin?"

"Ah! You ask! My friend, my history is in sum one word—Kaiser! You left me in Harbin: well, I devote care to Hildebrand Schwab; he recovers; we are both

recalled, he because his negatives are all lost, I because when I describe the only battle I saw, my despatch is blacked out by the censor. Naturally my redacteur open his eyes when he must pay my bills for such as this. Look! Here is a leaf of my copy; that is what the Russian censor has done—and Russia, par exemple! is the ally of France. Behold!"

He took a leaf from his pocket-book, and laid it on the table. It appeared as follows:—

"Les Russes ont commencé aujourd'hui un ----------
---------- j'ai vu le général
Kouropatkin qui buvait ----------
---------- 'Doucement bercé sur ma mule fringante,'
je chevauchais à côté du général ----------

---------- au même moment, psst! j'entends
le sifflement d'un obus qui me va au----dessus de la tête
éclater dans ----------

---------- des jambes,
des bras, *disjecta membra*, comme dit le ----------
---------- plus loin, un médecin qui plonge ----------
---------- et ----------
---------- la bataille."

"That is my account of a most dramatic episode of the battle of the Sha-ho. What is left? Nothing! It provoke curiosity, it tantalise, but does it satisfy, does it excite, hein?"

"The censor has certainly made a terrible hash of it," said Mr. Brown, passing the paper round the table. It created much amusement, and seemed to fascinate Jack's fifteen-year-old brother Humphrey, who gazed at it with a sort of awful admiration.

"But you spoke of Herr Schwab," said Jack. "What became of him?"

"He came——"

"By gum!" interrupted Humphrey, "don't I wish old Cæsar's despatches had been blacked out like this!"

Brin glanced at the boy over his glasses and resumed:

"Schwab came with me from Harbin by the same train. My word! it is Kaiser, Kaiser all the way. 'Our Kaiser who is in Berlin': I begin to think that is the German paternoster. I left Schwab at Vienna; he was going to sell his camera. He has a great admiration for you, Mr. Jack, but he is filled with regret that he never had an opportunity of doing business for Schlagintwert with that chief of brigands—how did he call himself?"

"Ah Lum. By the way, I forgot to tell you that when we landed at Southampton I found a letter awaiting me from him; it had been forwarded from Shanghai, and got here first owing to our little tour in Japan. It explains how Sowinski was able to reach Sakhalin."

He handed Ah Lum's letter to the Frenchman. Brin read it carefully, and with much gravity. It was as follows:—

From my camp above Tu-men-tzü, First Sunday after Trinity.

Honoured Sir,

A man's manners, says the Sage T'ai Ping-fu, are to be measured by his intentions. If therefore your servant, greatly deploring his ignorance of your honourable language, write through another hand, I pray you will not charge him with want of courtesy; does not the poet say "Respect is the corner-stone of friendship"? Nor will you, honoured sir, be other than indulgent if this letter should seem to have been unduly delayed in the writing. Even as a pearl is not to be found in every oyster, so is it rare among our literati to meet a scholar learned in the barbaric tongues. Such a one I have now discovered in the writer of this letter, Mr. Chang Fu-sing, whose late return from the august University at Oxford was duly reported by my agents at Ma-en-ho-kai. [*Lincoln College: 3rd class Mods., aegrotat Mod. Hist. Chang Fu-sing, B.A. Oxon.*] Him I secured by night for the trifling loss of five men. [*My nose abraded; one eye bunged up. Ch. F.-s., B.A.Oxon.*] Trifling, for rarity—and the need of the purchaser—are the true measures of value. To the starving man a crust outweighs a viceroy's ransom.

Since the auspicious day when your honour's never-to-be-forgotten assistance enabled our troops to reach the shelter of these mountains, the insolent Russians—may their graves be defiled!—[*Idiom="Ruin seize thee!" Cf. Gray, "The*

Bard", i. 1. Ch. F.-s., B.A. Oxon.]—have not dared to molest your unworthy servant. For, as the ineffable T'ai Ping-fu says, the bird that has once escaped the net is hard indeed to snare. But, again, as Wang Wei reminds us to our profit in his *Essay on Military Matters*, small reverses, by inspiring caution, may benefit an army, even as small successes may lead through saucy confidence to humiliation. After a little affair otherwise unworthy of your august attention, the two prisoners, Bekovitch and Sowinski, were found to have absented themselves from our custody. As the proverb goes, Only a fool expects courtesy from a hog.

Yet, as Li T'ai-poh harmoniously says:

When stings the Bee, and Pain is keen, then shouldst thou
think of Honey;
Wise Men seek Good in every Ill, yea, e'en in Loss of Money.

[*The versification is mine. Competitor: Newdigate Verse. Ch. F.-s., B.A. Oxon.*] After consulting the works of Tu Fu, I found that, the sunshine of your honour's presence being withdrawn, it was allowable to return to our ancestral usages in matters relating to the treatment of prisoners and criminals. If in this my judgment was in error, I must beg your honour's clemency; for are we not taught by P'an T'ang-shên that in defending a friend from calumny all measures are laudable? It may suffice to say that some days before his escape, the Pole, kneeling on hot chains, was induced to confess his crimes; these were duly inscribed by him in the Russian tongue and signed. Thereafter his partner in guilt, who had shown more obduracy, even resisting our most approved means of persuasion, acknowledged his many wickednesses, among them the preparation of forged papers secretly introduced by a menial into the writing-cabinet of your honour's august father. True is it, as the Sage says, "Fear rather a faithless servant within the gates than a hundred enemies without", or, as the more homely proverb warns us, A worm at the root will bring the noblest oak to earth.

But calamity treads hard upon the heels of the wicked. Witness the fate of the Russian—may his posterity be cut off! [*Idiom="A murrain on thee!" Cf. Shakespeare, "The Tempest", iii. 2. 88. Ch. F.-s., B.A. Oxon.*] By sure hands your unworthy servant brought his confession beneath the eyes of the barbarian commander-in-chief. He is blind indeed who cannot see the length of his nose. My agents now inform me that the evil-doer is stripped of his offices, and of the emoluments thereto pertaining; as our saying goes, he has lost his buttons. His fellow-criminal has evaded my most diligent enquiries. But him also Justice pursues with sharpened sword, resting not by night neither by day.

Quantum suff. Though our lives be henceforth as two rivers flowing east and west, the recollection of past favours will be with me, honoured sir, as a plant

in perennial bloom. What says P'an T'ang-shên?—"A man should find as much joy in the remembrance of a friend as though his worst enemy were to boil in oil."

My son, who is now under the tutorial charge of Mr. Chang Fu-sing—[*purely honorary—no pay. Ch. F.-s., B.A. Oxon.*]—adds, as in duty bound, his humble respects.

Permit me, honoured sir, to subscribe myself

Your most grateful obedient Servant, AH LUM.

P.S.—May I venture once more to commend the works of Li T'ai-poh to your august attention?

"Thanks!" said Brin, handing the letter back. "I am ver' much interested. The English is good, hein? In the idiom of Oxford? Permit me to make a copy for my book that will appear at early date, *L'Ascension de la Chine*."

Meanwhile Humphrey Brown had gone to the window, and stood with his hands in his pockets looking into the crowded street. A cab rattled up to the door of the hotel.

"I say," said Humphrey, "here's a funny old guy. Come and look, Agnes."

"I prefer to listen to the conversation," said Agnes, a self-possessed girl of thirteen.

"All right, grumps! But it would make you laugh. He's coming into the hotel. My eye!"

Not two minutes later the door opened, and there entered a portly figure in light-striped flannels; a pink cummerbund showing beneath the vest; gold-rimmed eyeglasses fixed somewhat awry on his broad nose. He stood at the door for a moment to choose his table.

"By George!" exclaimed Jack, springing up; "it's Schwab himself."

He went towards the door.

"Good-evening, Herr Schwab!" he said, holding out his hand.

The German turned and stared.

"Ach! I haf not ze honour, unless—who do you rebresent, sir?"

Jack smiled. Schwab instantly seized him by the hand.

"Du meine Güte! I abologize. I know you now. Nefer before did I see you in ze evenink dress. How are you, how are you, how are you?"

"Jolly glad to see you," said Jack. "Come and be introduced to my father, and mother, and the rest. You know Brin. We were talking of you only a minute ago."

The introductions were made. Humphrey turned away to hide his laughter at the German's elephantine bows.

"I abologize to ze ladies for my so unbecoming addire, but ven I egsblain zat I haf shust gome from ze station——"

"Say no more," said Mr. Brown. "Very unfortunate I couldn't meet you in Moukden, Mr. Schwab."

"Ach ja! Bermit me to ask, haf you seen ze evenink baber?"

"Not yet."

"Vell, I haf vun. I bought it at ze station; ze baber boys zey should be made to keep change. I haf only a benny, ze boy he haf no ha'bny—I muss vait five minutes till anozer gustomer arrive. Zat is not business. Ven I read ze baber, I see a baragraph vat I zink interess you. I read to you. 'It is announced from St. Betersburg zat ze rebresentations of ze British ambassador in regard to ze extraordinary case of Mr. Brown of Moukden haf at last been crowned viz success, and orders haf been issued for Mr. Brown's immediate release.' Zere is somezink I do not understan', since already Mr. Brown is here."

"Ah! You're not a diplomat, Mr. Schwab," said Mr. Brown, laughing. "It is a little funny to know that three months after my escape, and when Sakhalin is in possession of the Japanese, I am graciously permitted to regain my liberty."

Jack gave Herr Schwab a brief account of the final scenes of his quest.

"Zen for how much is your claim?" asked Schwab of Mr. Brown at the conclusion of the story.

"What claim?"

"Vy, your claim for gombensation—for intellectual and moral damage. Business are business. As business man, I advise downright zumping big claim."

"Well, Mr. Schwab, I've been turning over the matter, and really I think I'll let things alone. You see, Sowinski is dead, poor wretch! and Bekovitch is degraded, and if the account were properly adjusted, and Jack's damage to the Siberian railway put on the debit side, the balance might turn out against us after all."

"Ach! zat is anozer matter—ja! you muss gonsider ze balance-sheet. Zat is business."

"You are still in business?" said Jack.

"I am in business forever. It is ze bress of my nostrils. Vargorresbondencephotography, zat is not business; it do not bay egsbenses. I am now in beacephotography. I gome here, rebresentative of Schlagintwert, to make bicturebostcardphotographs of ze French and English entente. And zen I return to ze Baltic to make photograph of our Kaiser ven he velgome ze British fleet."

"Hé!" cried Brin with a chuckle. "Welcome! It must be snap-shot—prestissimo! When your Kaiser welcome the British fleet there will need a good

camera, and exposure—one-millionth second. Ho! ho!"

Later in the evening Schwab took Jack confidentially aside.

"Mr. Brown, my frient, I have somezink to say. It has been gonfided to me zat you gondemblate a gondract."

"A contract, Herr Schwab?"

Schwab guffawed.

"Zat is my shoke—a madrimonial gondract."

"Who has been telling you that?"

"Ah, I haf it in gonfidence from your sister. Already is she a frient. She tell everybody in gonfidence."

"Then you can contradict it in confidence, Herr Schwab. There is no foundation—that is to say, nothing is settled."

Schwab looked sly.

"No, not settled, of course—but gondemblated."

"Really, Herr Schwab!——"

"Yes, yes, I understan'. Shust so. I also have affair of ze heart." He sighed deeply. "I can symbazise. But viz me it is different. You are lucky dog—ze Fräulein Walewska is kind; vile I am in ze depss of desbair: Madame Bottle—ach, she is gruel. I sigh, she smile; I groan, she laugh; I even make bresentation, she decline vizout zanks. Ah! Mr. Brown, you do not know vat it is to be gross in lov."

Jack looked as sympathetic as he could, while Herr Schwab, laying his hand lightly on his waistcoat-buttons, continued lugubriously:

"Ach, truly it is a terrible zink to lov vizout return. It break ze heart; it shpoil ze digestion;—it is bad for business. No longer can I gif sole attention to ze interest of Schlagintwert. Vy, it is only a few days since I take order from Robinson & Robinson in London; yesterday Schlagintwert return ze order. Vat haf I written?—'Subbly Mrs. Bottle, 68 Crutched Friars, London, 50 casks botato shbirit, last quotation, f.o.b. Hamburg.' Zere is fipence vaste in bostages. Zat show you!"

"Yes, very amusing," said Jack absently. Gabriele had just come in with Mrs. Brown, and Jack was on thorns lest the German's by no means gentle voice should reach the ladies.

"Amusink!" cried Schwab. "Schlagintwert do not see ze shoke. Vy——"

"Of course, I meant annoying. But, Herr Schwab, if you will——"

"Yes, yes," said Schwab, noticing how Jack's eyes strayed to the other end of the room, and how he fidgeted with his watch-chain. "Yes, I see. Only vun moment, Mr. Brown. Ze business I shboke of. Already I mention it to ze young lady——"

"Upon my word, Herr Schwab!—

"Vait, I egsblain. Zere is nozink fix—not nozink at all. Ze Fräulein vill say

nozink. She blush; zen she ask me to tell her about my ancestor, Hildebrand Suobensius. But zis is business."

"Well, what is it, Herr Schwab?"

"It is an obbortunity—an obbortunity for Schlagintwert and for yourself. Our firma establish a new branch—bon-bons, gonfectionery. Zey vish to open accounts in zis gountry: you understan'?"

"Understand?—what?"

"Vy, zis—here is ze obbortunity. Schlagintwert zey require advertisement: zey shall make you ze vedding-gake—*costprice*!"

About six weeks later, Mr. Brown was looking over his copy of the *Shanghai Mercury* which had come by the morning post.

"Here, Jack," he said, "this paragraph will interest you."

Jack took the paper, and read:

"One of the results of the treaty of peace recently signed between Russia and Japan is that the famous brigand, Ah Lum, has been summoned to Pekin. The military ability he displayed in his operations in northern Manchuria has been recognized by his appointment to a high post in the Board of Civil Office."

There is shortly to be started, in Hong-Kong, a new firm of produce brokers under the style of Brown, Son, & Co. Brown we know; Son we know; Co. at present consists of Mr. Hi An-tzu. Whether it will by and by include Mr. Hi Lo-ch'u depends on that young man's business aptitude: Son thinks it very probable. Brown is to be the sleeping, or as he prefers to put it, the consulting partner. Son will manage the London house; while Mr. Hi in Hong-Kong will open accounts with respectable Manchurian farmers, of whom one will undoubtedly be Mr. Wang.

Some of Brown's friends took him to task for lifting his former compradore from his lowly station to the equality of partnership. To their remonstrance Brown replied with a morsel of political philosophy.

"It's all very well," he said, "to sneer at the 'heathen Chinee', and look upon him as fit for nothing better than to smoke your opium and do your work in South African mines. Believe me, John Chinaman is not so very heathen; and he is waking up: and when he does move he will hustle. For myself, I prefer a colleague to a competitor."

What Brown thinks to-day his business friends generally think to-morrow.

Glossary

C=Chinese, P=Pidgin-English, R=Russian. The Chinese substitute *l* for *r*, and add the terminations *-ee*, *-um*, and *-lo* to many words.

ach (R), oh, ah.

allo (P), all, every.

artel (R), a society of workers formed on co-operative principles.

barin (R), lord, gentleman.

batiushki (R) = By Jove!

belongey (P), often equivalent simply to the verb to be.

bimeby (P), by and by, afterwards.

bobbely (P), noise, uproar.

bottom-side (P), down, below.

bozhe moï (R), good heavens!

cash (C), small copper coins carried on strings.

catchee (P), to get, have.

ch'hoy (P), an exclamation.

chop-chop (P), quickly.

chow-chow (P), food.

Chunchuse (more strictly *Hunhutze*: C), literally red-beard: the name given to the organized bandits of Manchuria.

compradore (Portuguese), superintendent of a European's native staff.

da (R), an exclamation; literally "yes!"

droshky (R), single-horse carriage.

dushenka (R), little soul: a term of endearment.

-ee, a pidgin-English termination.

eka (R), an exclamation: "there now!"

Fa-lan-sai (P), French.

fangtse (C), cottage.

fan-kwei (C), foreign devil.

fan-tan (C), a game: the players stake on the remainder when an unknown number of cash is divided by 4.

fan-yun (C), foreigner.

feng-shui (C), the geomantic influences of the earth, determining the luckiness or unluckiness of places.

first-chop (P), best, excellently.

flend (P), friend.

fo' (P), four, for.

folin (P), foreign.

galaw (P), a common exclamation.

gorodovoi (R), policeman.

gospodin (R), sir.

gráf (R), count

he (P), he, she, it, they, him, her.

Ingoua (C), English.

kopeck (R), silver or copper coin: 100 kopecks make 1 rouble.

kow-tow (P), to bow humbly.

li (C), a Chinese mile: about one-third of an English mile.

ling-ch'ih (C), capital punishment by slicing.

littee (P), little.

look-see (P), look, examine.

lowdah (P), captain of a junk.

Lusski (P), Russian.

mafoo (C), groom.

makee (P), make, do.

Melican (P), American.

moujik (R), peasant.

muchee (P), very.

my (P), I, me, my, mine.

nichalnik (R), station-master.

no can do (P), cannot.

nu (R), well!

numpa (P), number: numpa one, first-rate.

och (R), oh!

one-tim' (P), once.

ph'ho (C), an exclamation.

pidgin (P), business: pidgin-English, English as spoken by Chinese at the ports.

piecee (P), used with numerals: *one piecee man*=a or one man.

ping-ch'wahn (C), gunboat.

plopa (P), proper: allo plopa, all right.

rouble (R), the standard money (paper) of Russia: ten roubles=a British sovereign.

samovar (R), tea-urn.

sampan (C), a Chinese punt.

savvy (P), know, understand.

side (P), place, direction: this-side, here; that-side, there; what-side, where.

so-fashion (P), in that way.

suttingly (P), certainly.

tael (C), a coin (rarely seen) worth 6s. 6d.

that-side (P), there.

that-tim' (P), then.

this-side (P), here, hither.

tim' (P), time.

tinkee (P), think.

Toitsche (P), *i.e.* Deutsche, German.

too (P), very.

topside (P), above, superior; in the head.

troika (R), three-horsed vehicle.

verst (R), two-thirds of English mile.

vodka (R), brandy made of barley.

wailo (P), away, to go away, run away.

wantchee (P), to want.

what-for (P), why.

what-side (P), where.

what-tim' (P), when.

yamen (C), mandarin's residence and office: yamen-runners, equivalent to English bailiffs, but a very inferior class.

yinkelis (P), English.

* * * * * * * *

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