



THE
QUEEN of
QUELPARTE

CANNOT LEAVE THE LIBRARY.

CHAP. ----- PZ-3

SHELF. ----- H 876 Q

Copy 3

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

9-165



Winfield S. Lukens.

The
Queen of Quelparte

*A Story of Russian Intrigue
in the Far East*

By
Archer Butler Hulbert

Illustrated by Winfield S. Lukens



Boston
Little, Brown, and Company

1904

Copy 2C1

PZ3
H 876 Q
Copy 2
C1

THE LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS,
Two Copies Received
FEB 27 1904
Copyright Entry
Feb. 27-1904
CLASS 2 No. No.
80449
COPY A.

LB
MP

Copyright, 1901, 1902, 1904,
BY ARCHER BUTLER HULBERT.

All rights reserved

UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

TO
MY MOTHER

AND

THE MEMORY OF OUR HAPPY DAYS WHEN IT
WAS WRITTEN, WITH DEEPEST AFFECTION

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

P R E F A C E

events in the chapters, "The Imperial Funeral" and "The Signal of the Scabbard," are derived largely from the author's letters to American papers written from Korea at that time.

But there is something more vital here than certain descriptions and incidents, and that is the spirit of Russian intrigue and Russian aggression. The thread of the love drama is, of course, a fiction of the author's, which all will recognize, but the record of Russian methods of intrigue in the East, of her infinite scorn of truth, of the depths of her deceit, of the intense liveliness of that old dream of Peter the Great, of Russia's purposes in acquiring possession of Korea, and of the reason for her throwing it away again, is essentially true.

The Will of Peter the Great, referred to in Chapter Second, is kept in the secret archives of the Russian government with vigilant care and religious reverence. It is inscribed: "The Secret Plan of European Supremacy left by Peter the Great to his Successors on the Russian Throne."

ARCHER B. HULBERT.

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SEALED ORDERS	1
II. A DREAM THAT LIVES	4
III. A LESSON EARLY LEARNED	14
IV. THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND	26
V. THE ROAD TO WUN CHOW	40
VI. THE TEMPLE OF CHING-LING	51
VII. A LAST SERVICE	61
VIII. THE CUE OF A QUEUE	71
IX. THE HOLOCAUST	83
X. AT THE END OF THE SEA	93
XI. KEINNING	106
XII. ONE LIE I NEVER TOLD	115
XIII. A NEW PROGRAM	122
XIV. DULCINE	132
XV. AN EARLY MORNING'S TASK	147
XVI. THE KING	155
XVII. A QUEEN INCOGNITO	163
XVIII. THE TRAIL OF EARTH	173
XIX. THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL	181
XX. THE SIGNAL OF THE SCABBARD	195
XXI. THE MASQUERADER	203
XXII. A RUDE AWAKENING	213

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER	220
XXIV. THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB	233
XXV. EMMILÉ	246
XXVI. A NEW DEJNEFF	255
XXVII. "ORANOFF"	262
XXVIII. KIM	272
XXIX. A QUEEN'S SOUL RAMPANT	289
XXX. THE FLIGHT OF A SOUL	297
XXXI. A HELPING HAND	304
XXXII. THE PASSING OF IVAN ORANOFF	312
XXXIII. THE CAMEL'S HEAD	320
XXXIV. ENSEMBLE	325

Illustrations

“ ‘ Father,’ she said slowly, ‘ may I present Mr. Robert Martyn?’ ”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“ He raised aloft the head of the corpse at his feet ”	<i>Page 80</i>
“ ‘ Colonel Li was lost too,’ I murmured ”	“ 120
“ Men of commanding stature and voice read the proclamation aloud ”	“ 164
“ ‘ I have gained all you have lost’ ”	“ 209
“ ‘ Kim, lad, you know me, you must know me!’ I cried ”	“ 284

The Queen of Quelparte

CHAPTER ONE

SEALED ORDERS

I STARED over the railing upon the changing face of the sea; the long sweep of the hungry billows, the blue-black troughs between them, the deceptive, curling crests plunging one after another like thundering columns of plumed cavalry driven at the freak of the winds, matched perfectly the incoherent turmoil of my thoughts.

Miss Oranoff's chair was close to mine, but a great gulf separated us, such as will come sometimes between friends when mutual explanations are long over-due; and the silence of that gulf lay heavy upon us after my first words of hot resentment, which made a pale girl paler still and an angry man not less angry.

What Dulcine Oranoff and I had been to each other matters little to the record of what we became; but it mattered very much to me that she had left Washington without one hint

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

or word of farewell, as though I were no more to her than a Legation lackey. I had at least been more than that.

And now, while pacing the deck before reading the strange letter my father had bade me not to open until I was on the sea, I found her, to whom I half feared it related, smothered in rugs in a steamer-chair near the Captain's cabin — a passenger on my own good ship "Gaelic" to China!

I would not speak, and she, it seemed, could not, and as we sat like pouting children in dogged silence my thick thoughts stumbled on from one impossible explanation to another more impossible, and it was not until I thought again of my father's strange letter that I saw any light. One mystery sometimes unravels another, as one poison is an antidote to another, and it occurred to me that that letter might explain this other mystery, which was so like slow poison to me.

But as I arose to go I found a gentleman behind us, and Dulcine sat up quickly at sight of him.

"Father," she said slowly, "may I present Mr. Robert Martyn?" Then, in a moment she

SEALED ORDERS

continued, not without a catch in the words which belied their formality: "Robert, my father — Colonel Oranoff." The swift glance, the low tone, the halting words, coupled with my knowledge that the name Oranoff was not on the steamer's passenger-list, made it plain that the two were traveling incognito.

Colonel Ivan Oranoff had married a Washington lady and maintained a home in Washington, though he was detailed abroad almost constantly in the Russian diplomatic service. His name was well known in many lands, and the man was said to be known even where his name was not!

The commonplaces of introduction were quickly over, and Miss Oranoff hastened my departure by lightly scoring me for not having read my steamer letters.

Not one word about steamer letters had passed between us!

"Read those from home first," she called after me, despite a quick, low word from her father. The command, with its distinct challenge, made me surer than before of the secret within a secret which that one envelope would explain.

CHAPTER TWO

A DREAM THAT LIVES

WHENEVER I look back to those hours in which I determined to enter the employ of Colonel Oranoff of the Russian Service, my father's lifelong friend, I remember best my light-hearted carelessness — and I am sobered. How much Youth owes to Ignorance; its buoyancy, its indomitable hopefulness, its reckless self-confidence, were, each and all, impossible but for that monstrous debt.

“I have never urged you, Robert,” the letter ran, “to interest yourself in this game we play, but it is the one grand game of the world. Where else are the stakes so great — the gains and losses so momentous? This offer of Oranoff's gives you a splendid chance to ‘take a hand,’ if you care to. I determined to let you come to your own decision alone at sea. Make it and cable me from Yokohama. You have knocked around the East enough to fit

A DREAM THAT LIVES

you for such business; this with your West Point training makes you the very man Oranoff needs.”

For what business I had been fitted by following, two years before, a runaway Celestial army, might well be considered a Chinese puzzle, yet such had been my chief experience in the East. During the Japan-China war I had been an aide to an American army officer, Colonel French, detailed to study the Chinese campaign, and we had followed the Yellow Dragon throughout the inglorious retreat from Korea to Peking; from Wun Lung we got back to Tu Loo and Tu Lung, and if there had been more Loos and Lungs between that and the palpitating heart of the thing, Peking, I doubt not we would have gone there too. But the Russian Bear, in his humorous but favorite rôle of White-Winged Dove of Peace, stepped in and put a stop to the war through fear Japan would keep what he wanted,— Port Arthur, the Gibraltar of the East. After that, Colonel French and I could have given points to a stampeding herd of cattle — but what else were we good for?

This, with a lazy journey through Europe,

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

homeward, made up the sum of my experience in the golden East. Yet I had acquired a thing of which I did not know; it was the Travel-Fever.

Have you had that fever? If not, you have escaped the most pitiless disease; one knows not when he contracts it and it never leaves. Other fevers burn themselves out, or snuff out the patient and die down with the life-light. This fever never dies; it fills the sufferer's eyes with aching dreams of quaint harbors almost, but not quite, reached; his ears ring with a new coolie chorus all but clearly heard; it fills his nostrils with the medley scent of flower fêtes more beautiful than any he ever saw; it rages in his brain with luring suggestions of odd shadows on unfamiliar hillsides; he hears new voices laughing beneath new trees, weird temple bells tinkling in the night; and, now and again, he sees the battered prows of a ship come 'longside out of an unknown sea. Other fevers freeze at Death's touch — but does the Travel-Fever? Some say yes, some no, and many are silent here.

“The note enclosed,” the letter went on, “states in my name that you will meet Colonel

A DREAM THAT LIVES

Oranoff in the Captain's cabin the midnight following its receipt. Send it, and go to-night, lad. Cable me your resignation, and we will send another man to Tokyo."

The sea was calm at eventide and the moon shone bright. After the dancing Dulcine and I found our chairs and looked out happily upon the glistening wastes. If we were quiet now it was because the waves were quiet — the baffling winds had left us all to peace. We had prettily made our mutual confessions, the burden of mine being that I was no sailor and could not have read a steamer letter, though it contained a will leaving me the steamship line for an inheritance.

The lights danced high in Dulcine Oranoff's large black eyes while we hinted of the days ahead. I was surprised to find how fully this girl shared her serious father's confidences. She soon told me that their destination was Keinning, the old capital of Quelparte.

"We are to settle Japan's and China's ancient quarrel for its possession," I volunteered, looking at my watch.

"Yes," Dulcine answered me slowly.

"In favor of neither?"

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“In favor of neither,” the girl replied as we arose.

When, a few minutes later, I was admitted to the Captain's cabin, Colonel Oranoff welcomed me with genuine warmth to his great table covered with a mass of papers and maps. For a time he spoke of my father, and I soon caught the drift of his reminiscences, in which he implied a great trust and confidence in me for my father's sake. He could not have done this in a more charming indirect way, and it won me to him even more than anything my father had written. For a time then he remained silent, resting his pale face on his hands, gazing down upon the littered table.

A large map, oddly marked in red and white, hung on the wall near me and at once attracted my attention. The man at the table came to me at last, his eyes also upon this map.

“You are looking at Peter's map?” he asked. Then, without awaiting a reply, he continued, stroking it with the end of a pencil as he spoke. “Peter the Great made a will and bequeathed to Russia this eastern half of the world. The red,” and here the pencil swept swiftly from St. Petersburg to Korea,

A DREAM THAT LIVES

“shows the portion of our inheritance we have received; the white we have not yet obtained.”

“The will has been contested,” I commented, dryly enough.

“And is still in litigation,” Oranoff answered suggestively. I was looking beyond Korea to Quelparte.

“Quelparte is still white,” I said. The man looked at me one moment and understood. “You have not danced all the evening,” he commented with a pleasant nod. Then he turned quickly to the map and his face grew stern as he answered me: “But it will be red, Martyn, before a single month has passed. The Czar has a Razor for every beard; men talk of the power of Russian armies, but they are nothing to the secret service men who are fast realizing Peter’s Dream. The heavier the beard the sharper the Razor—and the rule works both ways, even while Czars come and go. That Dream is still president.”

There was fire in the words and the man unconsciously raised a hand as he spoke them as though swearing a holy oath. I was thrilled.

How that old dream does live on!—aye, and will live while most dreams are dead and

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

forgotten. Peter left the eastern continent to Russia. If this was not the first it was the greatest will ever broken. By some cruel mockery of fate Russia has come into the possession of the greatest but least desirable portion of its inheritance, the deserts of Asia and Siberia; but Europe and India, Persia and China are, for some reason, still unconquered. My thoughts ran back to Quelparte.

“There is a Razor, then, for the King of Quelparte?”

“For this reason,” said Oranoff, coming close to me; “we are about to lease Port Arthur from China; that will make Japan wild. I am to go and conquer Quelparte with gold roubles — the King and his nobles; when that is done —” the man threw his hands apart quickly and looked to me.

“Throw Quelparte over as a sop to Japan to avert war and —”

“And keep Port Arthur,” said Oranoff, sinking into his chair, evidently satisfied with me.

The wind was rising, and as the prow of our ship pounded into the trough of the sea the great red and white map floated lazily out from its anchorage on the wall.

A DREAM THAT LIVES

“It is growing rougher,” said Colonel Oranoff at last, rising to tighten an incandescent globe on his table. I wondered that he could so quickly come back to the present.

“Then if you fail,” I ventured, my thoughts still running fast to the end of the chapter, “little is lost, since the conquest of Quelparte is only to be a temporary triumph.”

“Fail!” he repeated in a gentle tone. “Those Razors are not sharpened on failures,” and Oranoff looked at me smiling. He had the patience of a true teacher!

A little nettled at myself, I lay gazing upon that blood-red map, and soon the color made me think of war, and I found myself talking again to that silent man.

“You cannot fear a war with Japan, Colonel Oranoff?”

“Peace is surer,” he answered quietly. Then looking at the map he continued: “We have gained much more by peace than by war—more than Cæsar or Alexander or Napoleon ever gained in war,” and the tired voice seemed to strengthen on the boast.

“‘Peace hath its victories,’” I quoted with solemn triteness.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“But they cost too,” interrupted Oranoff, “cost more than those of war; our wars cost the Czar the lives of thousands of his lowliest — peace the lives of hundreds of his best; war takes muscle — peace, brains. Does the Czar gain or lose?”

“He gains the Dream,” I suggested, and the tired man sighed “Amen.”

The night's conference ended with the story of Menin. I had risen to take my leave when Oranoff drew me to the table and displayed a photograph of himself he had taken thoughtfully from the recesses of a cabinet drawer.

“You spoke of failure,” he said, and then tossed this picture angrily on the table.

“A good likeness,” I observed; the poise of body and head, the coat and hat, the black imperial, were all lifelike.

An oath burst from the white lips. Startled, I looked more intently, and Oranoff's pencil pointed to the shoulders; I saw that one was lower than the other.

“The hell-hound can't help that,” he whispered fiercely.

“Then it is an impostor?” I cried.

A DREAM THAT LIVES

“ My only failure,” said Oranoff, slowly, “ was due to this dare-devil’s cunning. I happened to cross his plans once in Bangkok and he played hell with me in Herat. Look at him sharply, Martyn, and swear you will know me when I carry my shoulders like that.”

“ You fear him still ? ”

“ Aye — and you would, too, could you know him.”

I looked intently at the picture as Oranoff held it out to me as he might have held out to a bloodhound the garments of an escaped prisoner before starting it on the trail. Presently I affirmed that I could know those shoulders anywhere, and understood well enough that I was to be, for the present, at least, the body-guard of Colonel Ivan Oranoff. The contest for Quelparte, after all, might be, perhaps, a thing for this Menin and me to fight out!

“ At least I shall be kept near Colonel Oranoff, and that means near Dulcine,” I thought with a pleasure not in the least marred by my knowledge that I was to guard a man engaged in a business not apt to make him loved — the reddening of Peter’s Map.

CHAPTER THREE

A LESSON EARLY LEARNED

TWO weeks after I parted from the Oranoffs at Yokohama my little steamer brought me to Tsi, the seaport of Quelparte.

I was rescued from the coolie-infested wharves by a gruff old Captain Dejneff, who came down from the capital with Miss Oranoff to meet me. Soon we were off for Keinning, twenty miles inland.

A clear, sweet day of the matchless month of November lay upon the Land of Morning Calm. Such is the native name, preserved by courtesy, of a land which has known only centuries of oppression by China or Japan since long before the birth of the Christ. But the mornings have remained true to the name—in inverse ratio to history's defiance of it. The battle-ground of the nations, each side of it, the wanton spoil of conquerors from all sides, Quelparte has been the "dark and bloody

A LESSON EARLY LEARNED

ground" of Asia, and nowhere has the fate and doom of a nation so plainly affected its people. The Quelpartiens, great, stalwart men, each a king in stature and mien, are weak, resistless, hopeless; yet, withal, a soberly happy race which loves the helpless land as though pitying it for having no stauncher friends.

Dulcine was jubilant with the enthusiasm of a new-comer to these old plains and hills. The strange, white dress of the natives, the multicolored clothing of the children, the long, tender vistas across the paddy-fields, the dim blue of the distant mountains, appealed with freshening charm to her happy eyes. The contrasts, which in Quelparte must attract all visitors, fascinated her.

"They do everything backward here," she was already laughing out to me; "the boys braid their hair down their backs and the men do it up on their heads; the fires are built under the floors and the chimneys open into the gutters; is that a new adaptation of your Russian stoves, Captain Dejneff?"

This gruff old officer, whose face was buried under a great sandy beard, took not unkindly to Miss Oranoff's running fire of bantering

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

quips. Yet my little experience among men made me look twice at him; he had an odd predilection for humming old songs, and he looked at the plains as though they had told him some of their strange secrets. Dejneff had been connected with the Russian Legation here for many years; he was somewhat forgetting the outside world — being slowly embalmed alive in the traditions and superstitions of this strange land.

This Dulcine was discovering, without comprehending its real intent.

“See,” she cried to me, as we were passing a little cluster of straw-thatched huts in a sequestered vale, “the only children in the world who do not play on a doorstep!”

We had suddenly flushed a covey of little people, who ran helter-skelter into the nearest huts and peered out at us from the dark interiors.

“Do you also fear the Devil-of-the-Threshold, Captain Dejneff?”

The low-hummed song was choked as the great square shoulders came up in a shrug.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he replied, “why not? If there is one — *peste!* — it’s better to look

A LESSON EARLY LEARNED

out, I think. Did not the Romans carry brides over them?" A people of ten millions and not one who dares to stand or sit on the threshold for fear of the Devil there! As I recalled the superstition in the light of Dejneff's attitude I thought of the draughts in a doorway. Were they the Devil?

A flock of wild geese flew suddenly up from a paddy-field and went waywardly circling in the thin blue air toward the distant mountains.

"There goes my Widowed Wild Goose, Captain Dejneff," cried Dulcine; "give me the melody, and Lieutenant Martyn shall see I have not wasted my time in Keinning."

The old man hummed a little louder, but, as Dulcine caught the measure he stopped quickly and listened to the girl's clear notes in the Quelpartien Love-song:

"Silvery moon and frosty air,
Eve and dawn are meeting;
Widowed wild goose flying there,
Hear my words of greeting!

"On your journey should you see
Him I love so broken-hearted,
Kindly say this word for me,
That 't is death when we are parted.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“ ‘ Flapping off, the wild goose clammers,
Says she will if she remembers.

“ ‘ Farewell ’s a fire that burns one’s heart,
And tears are rains that quench in part,
But then the winds blow in one’s sighs,
And cause the flames again to rise.

“ ‘ My soul I ’ve mixed up with the wine,
And now my love is drinking —
Into his orifices nine
Deep down its spirit ’s sinking.

“ ‘ To keep him true to me and mine,
A potent mixture is the wine !

“ ‘ Fill the ink-stone, bring the water,
To my love I ’ll write a letter ;
Ink and paper soon will see
The one that ’s all the world to me.

“ ‘ While the pen and I together,
Left behind, condole each other. ’ ”

The sky and plains made a perfect setting for the song, so sad and yet throbbing with human experience.

One must be impressed with the weird songs of the East, bearing so lightly and everlastingly their heavy loads of care. But does this burden differ from the burden of our own popular music? I recalled the street

A LESSON EARLY LEARNED

songs of America prevalent at the time. What a load of sorrow, regret, hopeless contrition, this mongrel music voices! Are the world's songs all sad, and are our Christian hymns of hope and trust and faith our only happy music?

Old Dejneff was interesting Dulcine in the women of this poor land, some of whom we met — veiled, unveiled, smiling in the chairs in which they were carried by hurrying coolies, or weeping under weary loads.

Up to the age of ten or twelve the little Quelpartienne of good family enjoys great freedom, and can play in the yard with her brothers and see whom she wishes, but the time comes when she must never be seen without the *chang-ot*, or sleeved apron over her head and held close about the face. From that time she remains mostly within doors and can be familiarly seen only by the people of the household and the nearer relatives. This stage of her life is short, for she generally marries young and goes to take her place in the family of her husband, who will be found living with his parents. From that time on she can be seen and conversed with face to face only by her husband, father, father-in-law, uncle, cousin,

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

second cousin, etc., down to what the Quelpartiens call the "eighth joint," which means the relationship existing between two great-great-grandsons of a man through different branches. This means something like fourth or fifth cousin in America. It will at once appear that a Quelpartienne is not entirely cut off from social intercourse with men, for in a country where families are so large as in Quelparte the men on both sides of a family within the limits prescribed may number anywhere from twenty to a couple of hundreds. Of course, grandfathers and great-grandfathers and great-uncles are also among the favored ones, although their number is naturally limited. But as a rule none of these male relatives will enter the inner part of a house, or woman's quarters, except on the invitation of the husband, and generally in his presence.

To all this, and much more, Dulcine listened with rapt interest, though interrupting her grave companion often with merry peals of laughter. What particularly interested me was the amused interest this Dejneff took in the strange customs of the people, while at the same time he turned out to be signally super-

A LESSON EARLY LEARNED

stitious regarding their superstitions. Other things being equal (if they ever are), a superstition is a thing one man believes that another does not. Yet there was a philosophy in Dejneff's orientalism that impressed me. He sought deeply for reasons in all their fanaticisms. For instance, as he and I were discussing the Japan-China war, over our lunch at a little Japanese inn at Oricle, Dulcine swamped our sober efforts at the mention of the battle of Ping-yang.

"The city of Ping-yang, Robert, is said to be situated in a boat, and no inhabitant dares to dig a well within the city wall for fear of scuttling the boat!"

We looked to Dejneff, who said thoughtfully, "And they bring water half a mile, I do think."

"Cursing the boat all the way, no doubt," I commented.

"You believe the legend, of course, Captain Dejneff?" The square shoulders came up, and the growl was deeper in meaning, even, than in tone:

"It's not the only vile city on a boat named Cholera and they are scuttled by the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

thousands who do not drink water brought from without."

And was this reckless philosophy? In civilized communities are we not coming to know that our great cities are on boats, and are not millions lost each twelvemonth who do not drink water brought from afar?

But it was at the House of the Tiger-Woman that Dulcine lost all hope of shaking old Dejneff's sober conceptions of these foolish myths. This was once a little hut beside the worn path to Keinning, now it is only a great heap of stones.

It is a Quelpartien belief that if an animal drinks water which has stood for twenty years in a human skull it will change into a human being. The story goes that a youth once loved a maid whose parents dwelt in this buried hut. But while betrothed to her, which means more in some countries than in others, he became enamoured of another maiden in Keinning and a wedding day with her was set. With brazen face the youth came one day to give Erlane a last traitor's kiss. Her parents were overjoyed at the return of the forgetful lover, but the girl sat trembling on her mat — for a crane by

A LESSON EARLY LEARNED

the river had told her all. When the lad took Erlane in his arms, her hands held him tight and still more tightly, her sweet form changed contour beneath his caresses, her clothing fell from her, while to cover her blushes a tawny, mottled fur closed over her face — and a tigress sucked the faithless lover's life-blood and left him dead.

We went on in silence (after each of the coolies had cast his stone upon the growing monument), the shock of superstition heavy on us all. The coolies had uttered fierce words as they hurled their stones, and this brought out Dulcine's next question, though she was silent for a long space and mocked old Dejneff no longer:

“What do the coolies cry when they throw their stones, Captain?”

“When the women throw they cry, ‘A tiger for each traitor’; the men, ‘A tiger for each broken vow.’ Does that superstition work good or ill, think you?”

Nearer and nearer drew the ragged peaks of the mountains which lie about Keinning. Our day bade fair to end a little soberly, and I wondered if it was not all a stern lesson

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Dejneff had been sent to teach me early, — a lesson he seemed to have learned well in all these years. My thoughts ran on to the game that was playing between those mountain crests. Was the King of Quelparte being shaved easily? Or was his beard of tougher fiber than had been anticipated? Whatever the beard, I knew the “Razor” was keen!

Yet old Dejneff took occasion to strengthen his gloomy triumph over our incredulity. A great hillside on the outskirts of the city was covered with little mounds of earth. The sentinels stationed there were paid by the relatives of the dead; for, Dejneff told me, it was a myth of Quelparte that if a grave was harmed all relatives of the desecrated corpse became insane. “Rifling graves becomes a new way to pay off old scores,” he said at the close, suggestively.

“But does the legend come true?” I asked.

“Often,” he answered quickly; “when the sacrilege becomes known they think they are going crazy, so they go; and it’s all the same to me what makes them, I think.”

I know of no city, which the average globe-trotter visits, more alive with the tales of dead

A LESSON EARLY LEARNED

centuries than this gray old Keinning, which most ignore. As we went swaying through the great gate of the wall the grinning clay monkeys on the roof, placed there to keep the devils out, made no cry.

Dejneff's chair was near mine as we went through.

"Dejneff," I asked quietly, that Dulcine might not hear, "do you who live here really believe the wild legends of this land?"

The low, weird monotone he was humming ceased and he turned stolidly upon me:

"No, Martyn, we don't; but you follow our line and you won't get off far: *we act as though we did.*"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

THE first impression of the capital of Quelparte will be the most lasting impression, however long may be the stranger's stay. He may learn the great wide avenues, the little twisting streets, the palaces old and new, the great gates of the city wall, and even the mountains round about—but to the city he will be a stranger still. The spirit of that valley, caught up slowly in centuries of time, is never really felt by the temporary sojourner; at least, after a busy month with Oranoff here I felt when I gazed out from the plaza of the Russian Legation over that sea of roofs that I was no less a perfect stranger than when I first saw Keinning. It was nothing that Dulcine Oranoff and I had followed that great city wall ten miles in circumference, or that from the highest peaks of the "Silk-Worm's Head" we had looked for hours upon this old relic

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

of other centuries. Our happy companionship was real — aye, fast deepening; the mellow autumn lights aslant the blue mountain sides were real — these intangible things could be seen and felt: but old Keinning lay deep in a revery, not a syllable of which could be caught and held. Its white people were ghosts, and all their beliefs and traditions were ghoulish mysteries.

Such was the general setting of the Piece! As for its development, even the sober Oranoff seemed satisfied; each act, carefully planned, went through perfectly. The King, after the Japan-China war and the murder of his Queen by Chinese renegades, had fled to the Russian Legation; here well "in hand," he had been played clean to the hilt. Old Andorph had secured practical possession of the mint and customs, and Dejneff had come quickly into the good graces of Quelpartien army officers. Scarcely a night but a banquet of one kind or another was served in the great dining-room of the Legation. The boxes of roubles, brought merrily up from Tsi by troops of thundering Cossacks, often needed replenishment, but never was the need unsatisfied.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I attended Oranoff continually at first, but as he found it less and less necessary to move about, I was often detailed under Dejneff, who was "straightening out" the army; between us we were whipping into line a regiment or two that could at least march. More than that could not have been expected of us. The wonder was that we were so far successful, and when we drilled in the avenues near the palace, the admiration of the thousands who gathered was Dejneff's solace. It was plain his ambition was not to have an effective army, but, if possible, to awe the populace. After the last review the old intriguer's beard was full of soft songs. I had conducted the manœuvres while he with his interpreter mingled with the crowds. He heard what was said!

"We have them," he laughed softly, as we rode back to the Legation. "Martyn, tell Oranoff to-night that we shall be ready in a week."

I wondered what he would be ready for; and if I was silent that evening in the salon with the ladies it was because I felt we were swiftly approaching the climax of the drama. Of this I had been assured by Colonel Oranoff

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

himself, for, the "silent conquest" going smoothly, little now was left but to have the Russian protectorate openly declared to Quelparte and to the world. To guard against an uprising of the populace it had been decided to postpone the announcement until a favorable opportunity occurred in the shape of a public holiday or celebration. Toward this Oranoff's plans were heading with success, and the funeral of the murdered Queen, long postponed, was proposed even by the King himself. The pageant, as planned, would occupy several days while the nation took a holiday. With minds set upon this, there was little or no danger of an *émeute* on the part of the Quelpartiens.

The talk in the salon had centered about this pageant, and the ladies were particularly interested in learning of the preparations made by the native government, for royal funerals in Quelparte are well known to be the high-water mark of heathen mummary and oriental extravagance. Everything was spoken of save the one incidental feature of the orgy, — the Queen's Sarcophagus and her remains. With a strange fatalism my mind continually reverted

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

to this very center of the proposed celebration which was so skilfully evaded by every one.

But even as I pondered these things I received a summons to Oranoff's office in the King's wing of the Legation. Were my questions to be answered so soon?

About the room were seated those whom by dress I took to be noblemen of Quelparte. They arose when I entered, impressed no doubt by the sumptuous military dress in which Captain Dejneff compelled me to appear at the Legation and barracks. No sooner were all seated than I perceived the company awaited some one. All were silent, and sat facing a sofa covered with tigers' skins which had been drawn into the center of the apartment. After a few moments a secret panel moved and a stately figure, in spotless Quelpartien robes, stood in the doorway. I sank to my knees saluting, with the others.

It was Whang-Su, the King of Quelparte.

His Majesty broke the spell of royalty for me by sauntering into the room, nodding to one and another of his cabinet, touching a hand here and calling a name there, and then by dropping on the sofa and lighting an

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

Egyptian cigarette which he drew from a silver case.

He had just broken his fast — for, since the murder of the Queen, the King of Quelparte slept when the world was awake, and met his cabinet and issued his heathen decrees when the rest of the world was asleep.

Colonel Oranoff at once got to the center of matters.

“Your Majesty has consulted the soothsayers?”

Whang-Su bowed, smiling blandly.

“And the Imperial Funeral will be decreed as we planned?”

“Yes,” answered the King of Quelparte, taking the cigarette from his lips, “on the night of the round moon, that is, if —” and he glanced quickly to a nobleman near him, Prince Ting.

The latter knelt, then rose, saluted, and spoke:

“Your Majesty has been correctly informed; the Mausoleum is quite completed.” But this did not answer the King’s question, and he instantly arose to his feet —

“Yes, but the Queen’s body,” he cried, lowering his voice.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

All had arisen with the King.

And now Colonel Oranoff spoke quickly to him in a low tone, and, satisfied, at length the King called Prince Ting to his side, to whom, in a low tone, he gave several orders in swift succession.

“You will need me no more, gentlemen,” he then said, turning to depart. “Trust Prince Ting and have all in readiness on the night of the round moon. I go even now to invite the foreign representatives; you will do the rest.” Turning to go, he electrified me (the others seemed not to notice it) by turning to Oranoff and saying with a laugh:

“Yes; you will do the rest! Ha, ha, ha!”

All having withdrawn but Prince Ting, we three drew close together, Colonel Oranoff summoning me to a place beside them.

From the conversation, I learned that the Queen's body was being secretly kept in a Buddhist temple on Lynx Island in Wun Chow Bay, sixty miles westward from Tsi. The “round moon” (full moon) came on the nineteenth. This was the tenth. There were nine days, therefore, in which to bring the Imperial Sarcophagus a distance of one hundred

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

and fifty miles by water and twenty by land to the Russian Legation in which we sat.

Frequently, as we talked in low tones, Colonel Oranoff looked quietly at me, and I felt, long before Prince Ting left, that I was to be employed in this singular but vitally important mission, and, as Oranoff returned from the door through which the Prince passed out, I could not resist the impulse to grasp his hand.

The spontaneousness of the action pleased him, I think, though his face instantly sobered:

“ But wait. This is a more difficult mission than you have thought. First, of all we are gaining in Quelparte in these days, nothing is to be kept permanently except this very Lynx Island. If Port Arthur cannot be retained for any reason, Wun Chow Bay is to be the terminus of the Siberian railway. Our agents on the yacht ‘Dulcette’ are at work there now making private purchases which will enable us to control Lynx Island and its bay. Thus the effort to obtain the Sarcophagus must not be allowed to jeopardize these negotiations now pending.”

When at last Colonel Oranoff, though by implication only, gave me an opportunity to

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

decline the service, I drew up quickly and saluted, for I would not have withdrawn for worlds, and I knew he knew it.

“A squad of Quelpartien cavalry with Colonel Yon Li and twenty Cossacks disguised in Quelpartien uniform will await you when you are ready to go,” said Colonel Oranoff, and, though he walked away to his table, I knew by the slight rising inflection of his words that he meant to ask me how soon that could be.

“I shall be ready to go, Colonel Oranoff,” said I, with as much candor, I hope, as earnestness (and I looked him honestly in the face as I said the words), “when I shall have seen and said good-by to Dulcine.”

He was sorting the papers on his table when I said these words, the meaning of which could not have been mistaken by any man. He paused as I uttered them, and pretended to examine more carefully a paper he had lifted from the table. But his eyes were looking over it and he was staring at the green table cover. He stood still a moment, then gathering his papers quickly (in very little order) into a secret drawer, he turned frankly upon me and held out his hand.

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

“Be seated and I will call her. Colonel Li will await you on the Barrack’s Parade at daylight. Remember you can telegraph me from Han Chow.”

I looked at my watch. It was two o’clock. Then Dulcine came smiling sleepily, but anxious and full of questions. We presumptuously drew the King’s tawny throne up to the fire and sat down. Colonel Oranoff entered a little room off from us which contained his private desk and sat down to a pile of papers which he stirred busily now and then.

“What is it, Robert?” Dulcine whispered, coming suddenly close to me.

“I am to go away.”

“Away?” she echoed; there was something more than surprise in her tone.

“I am ordered with Colonel Li to Lynx Island to bring back the body of the murdered Queen.”

Dulcine started at the words, and I felt surer than before that there was something about this miserable Queen that I did not know—and God knows I knew enough! I kept silent, ready to seize upon the girl’s first words.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“Why you rather than Dejneff?” she said, at last, after looking into the fire awhile.

“Oh, perhaps to remove an obnoxious quantity,” I answered with assumed lightness.

“Father does not send men on errands like this to rid himself of them.” I saw my chance.

“What do you mean by ‘errands like this’?”

It was a moment before the answer came, and then it came slowly as though with pain:

“Have you not heard the talk of Tuen?”

I had not. I knew Prince Tuen of China had, through his agents, caused the murder of the Queen and that he longed for the downfall of Whang-Su, the King of Quelparte. More than this I knew little.

“It began with the King,” Dulcine at last replied; “he said Tuen was pawing Quelparte over for the dead Queen’s body.”

What the devil the Chinese Prince wanted of the remains of the former Quelpartien Queen was more than I could guess. I kept a crowd of questions back, and at last Dulcine crept nearer me and I felt her tremble as she whispered:

“You have forgotten Dejneff’s legend that insanity comes upon the relatives of the dead who are desecrated.”

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

“Rot,” I burst out, angry with myself for the chill of fear that ran through me at the wild words. “No wonder Colonel Oranoff chose another man than old Dejneff. He knows too much and believes it all.”

“For to know is to fear,” whispered Dulcine; she did not tremble now. I knew she liked my uncompromising attitude (I had always laughed those legends to scorn out of principle), though she did not possess the guile to counterfeit it as I did.

“I thought father would trust Dejneff anywhere,” she said thoughtfully.

“He is more needed here than I, and your father happens to dare to trust me.” I did not know how the words would sound until I blurted them out. The girl’s hands went to her face, and the echo of my own words cut my heart right and left.

“Forgive me, Dulcine,” and I seized her bended shoulders in both arms; “you would not have me refuse, would you?”

The wet face was slowly lifted to mine. “You know I would not, Robert,” she said. And I drew her to me now in the silence which was broken only by the rustle in the little room

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

far beyond and the flutter of the dying fire which cast a red glow over our mottled throne.

It was six o'clock when I again looked at my watch. We were just trotting out of the old West Gate of Keinning, for I had found Colonel Li and his escort forming in the Barrack's Parade, the Cossacks looking rather disgusted in their outlandish oriental garb, though taking it all good-naturedly, like the soldiers they were.

Once in the open country the Quelpartien cavalry scurried ahead, a motley crowd and ill-horsed. Behind them rode Colonel Yon Li. My Cossacks came after me, well-horsed, silent, and looking neither to the right nor the left. Beyond them, as I looked back, lay the old walls of Keinning; before me, fifty miles as the crow flies across the mountains, the Buddhist monastery on Lynx Island, and its Imperial secret.

Three miles from Keinning we passed the completed mausoleum where the Queen was soon to be buried. Colonel Li fell back and explained this to me. A mound of solid earth fifty feet high contained the great granite tomb above which was suspended a monstrous tablet.

THE SECRET OF LYNX ISLAND

When the Sarcophagus was placed within the tomb, this tablet was to be dropped, and no human power could raise it again and disturb the royal remains. Colonel Li informed me that this was the second tablet imported; the other had broken on the first trial drop. The present slab had stood one test, by being dropped upon a temporary foundation. A second test was to be made to-day.

Indeed, we had not gone far when a strange noise came over the foot-hills with the wind. Colonel Li nodded to me, saying:

“The great tablet has stood the test.”

The sound was as though a gigantic hammer had struck a mountain cliff, and it rang and rang in my ears unpleasantly.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROAD TO WUN CHOW

WE made forty miles over the rough mountainous road and rested our horses the night of the eleventh at the little village Tu Men in the mountains. The Quel-partiens lagged far behind, but got in before midnight. We knew that the remaining twenty odd miles of the journey would be more difficult than the forty we had covered, as the road would be constantly descending ragged mountain spurs.

During the long hours in the saddle I had much time to think of the future, and I confess I never looked it more sternly in the face than during those hours. But the best-planned battle in history was lost by him who planned it, and won by those who had no plan.

The fears of a possible encounter with the agents of the Chinese Tuen were of a nature to sober the most dauntless, and the more I

THE ROAD TO WUN CHOW

pondered upon that phase of the situation, the more interested I became. The Queen of Quelparte had been murdered by Prince Tuen's agents, on the well-founded suspicion that she was playing Quelparte into the hands of the Japanese, who, after the Japan-China war, came to have, as all the world knows, the upper hand in Quelpartien affairs. If, on mere suspicion of Japanese ascendancy in Quelparte, Prince Tuen had caused the murder of the Queen, there could be little doubt that, upon learning of Russian predominance, he would make a bolder stroke at Whang-Su and his dynasty.

And if the secret of the temple on Lynx Island had been discovered, what could be easier than the seizure of the Sarcophagus to those who had run a hundred guards, entered a palace, and murdered a trebly-guarded Queen?

I could have endured with better relish the idea of a contest for the body of the Queen with Europeans. But Chinamen! I would rather fight Indians or Burmese, though they, too, like the Chinamen, have an absurd way of reasoning backward. Prejudice led me to feel that Chinamen would never choose the reasonable or expected alternative, or do the thing

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

you were prepared to resist, but would eventually win out against you by the use of unheard-of expedients, as inconsistent as illogical.

When I try to recall those days I find I have only the dimmest recollections of Quelparte. Of this singular journey over those mountains I remember little more than my fears. But there were great brown hills which we climbed by a tortuous path after leaving gray Keinning. Further on we found ourselves in the foot-hills of the mountains, cut up by many a pleasant vale, but sombre and dreary because of the great rocks which arose on every hand. Here and there on the mountain-sides white-robed figures (for Quelpartiens dress all in white like Koreans) were raking dry grass or burrowing for roots to burn. Now and then we met a native boy with a string of little Korean ponies loaded with wood, which was worth its weight in copper cash in Keinning. At times we clattered through a little mountain valley where diminutive paddy-fields were covered with rippling water, which gurgled to the roadside on its way from one terrace to another, or we awoke the echoes of a secluded mountain village of straw-thatched mud-huts, from which

THE ROAD TO WUN CHOW

uncouth heads were thrust with many querulous, guttural exclamations of surprise. Little boys and girls dressed in multicolored coats peculiar to the youths in Quelparte, as in Korea, scurried away as fast as they could in their ungainly wooden shoes. Sometimes, if we came with great suddenness upon a sleeping hamlet, an odd collection of little wooden and hobnailed shoes lay in and along the road indicating a flight quite as unceremonious as our arrival.

In more than one village the national game of kite-fighting was being played, the total population, with faces upturned, watching the battle. The two contestants, crossing their strings, sawed back and forth until one of the strings broke, whereupon victory was claimed by him whose string had longest stood the test, and the laughter of the crowd was the unhappy portion of the vanquished. Colonel Li informed me that in a village through which we passed there once arose the greatest kite-fighter in Quelparte, a reputation gained by a series of victories won in every province in the kingdom. Finally the secret of his success was unhappily discovered. A paste of meal and pounded

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

glass was made to coat his kite-string! And the victor, whose praises had been sung so loudly, was stoned to death by the infuriated inhabitants of the city where the trickery had been exposed.

But these visions of villages and villagers came and went before my eyes as though I were in a dream, and from each succeeding height I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse of the sea and the temple roofs on Lynx Island.

Beneath a stolid, commonplace, oriental appearance, I found Colonel Li to be an interesting, even a remarkable, man. I came to know him but slowly, and found, to my amazement, that he had traveled much, and that he could talk intelligently of Chicago and Washington, of London and Paris. All this drew me to him at first, though I came to fear him as I hope I shall never have cause to fear another man.

Touching the business before us, Colonel Li was to the point. He bore the Imperial order for the Sarcophagus of the Queen. He had assisted in bringing it to this lonely island toward which we were hastening.

THE ROAD TO WUN CHOW

But while we spoke of the work before us, I could not refer to that which was uppermost in my mind, — Tuen. I did, however, make up my mind to sound the man cautiously as to any positive difficulty in our way. This side of our task had not been altogether overlooked, but when Colonel Li referred to it, incidentally, I could not determine whether he was keeping up courage by inward denials, or was actually in ignorance of the suspected designs of Prince Tuen. To enlighten myself further on this all-important point, I diplomatically directed our conversation. Turning the talk again to the Colonel's experiences on the Western continent, I inquired :

“But, Colonel, you seem greatly to have appreciated your visit to America and Europe. Did the wish never come to you to remain and become a citizen with us? I should think Quelparte would seem tame to one who had been once lost in the roar of our great cities, and who enjoyed the novelties and attractions of the new world as keenly as you.”

We were just topping a commanding spur. Far up on the face of a cliff, from which an eagle's scream came rasping down, a dark hole

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

showed the mouth of a Buddhist monastery in the solid rock. A tinkling bell, swayed by the winds, and the dull throb of a cymbal could be heard above the eagle's scream, and a thin puff of smoke showed where some suffering devotee had just burned a paper prayer. In a notch in the road far above us a pony boy was singing, and the smell of burning leaves in some hidden hut came to us on the wind. Colonel Li pulled up his horse quickly at my words, and took in all this with a significant sweep of his arm:

“Look, listen, breathe! What is the turmoil and foolish fury of your new world to me compared with these? As water in the teapot to the thirsty drunkard!”

And I could only hum to myself the British soldiers' song:

“If you've 'eard the East a-callin',
Why, you won't 'eed nothin' else.
No! you won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells
An' the sunshine an' the palm-trees an'
The tinkly temple bells!”

“But, Colonel,” I pressed on, for I had my point to make, “life here seems to have so

THE ROAD TO WUN CHOW

little to offer. For all your service and devotion to your King what worthy reward have you? Custom inexorably compels you, if you gain high office, to support all your relatives. So there is little or no financial gain; and you must make enemies, who, because of your triumphs, will be more delighted when you fall."

"True," he said; "but does the thought of failure keep your politicians from entering the contest? Triumph is not less sweet in Quel-parté than in America. And if you are with the King your triumph is as lasting as the dynasty, by the King's favor."

"But what of the dynasty?" I hurried on, heedlessly now, for my chance had come. "Who can say how long it will last? Surrounding nations are rivals in the fight for the land, and all the while the devil Tuen is plotting to overthrow Whang-Su and to wreck his throne."

I held my breath when I said the words. The man was riding at my horse's flanks and I could not see him. I dared not look back.

"Prince Tuen!" he muttered hoarsely. That was all he said, but the tone made me shudder.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“So the Chinese Prince is Yon Li’s enemy, too,” I mused, as we went forward in silence. But now I did not know whether Li was thinking of him in connection with our present business. I resolved not to give up, however, and was about to renew the subject, when the Colonel abruptly left me and dropped back to the Quelpartiens, who were lagging behind as usual. In less than half an hour a cry came from them, and as I trotted back I saw that a trooper had fallen from his horse and lay insensible on the stony road. As I came up, Colonel Li detailed two men to stay with the injured man, and we pressed on. Then I saw, for the first time, that Li’s face was that of a dead man’s. I started at the sight of it. My spurs pierced my horse, and I was carried forward to my Cossacks at a rattling pace.

So I was not the only one who was dreading Prince Tuen’s emissaries at Lynx Island! And that was what I wanted to know.

I rode on with the Cossacks for a number of miles. From one of them with whom I could converse I found that they were in bad humor over our business. Moreover, they had become suspicious of the Quelpartiens, who, I

THE ROAD TO WUN CHOW

was told, were armed as no native cavalry had ever before been armed—even to dirks concealed in their jackets. This gossip I listened to, but minded not, for soldiers are men bred to idle talk. But as the day wore on, their words kept ringing in my ears. Colonel Li kept closely with his men, and I with mine.

Thus, slowly, a terrible suspicion dawned on my brain. I was a loyal servant of the King,—I and mine. What of him and his? Had Chinese gold been of no avail with him? Was I going to Lynx Island with a wily tool of the Chinese werewolf? Was I the dupe of Colonel Yon Li and virtually in the hands of the King's enemy already?

I cannot tell how disconcerted these awful suspicions, bred by my Cossacks' idle talk, made me, and at the first thought of failure I became sick at heart. The capture of the Imperial Sarcophagus would, I knew well, make no earthly difference with the length of the dynasty, but I was not so sure that the knowledge of such a capture would not stagger the King's brain and that of every "relative," and so, in reality, fulfil the direful prophecy.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

My Cossacks were riding their horses at natural gaits, some near, some far in advance. Suddenly one of them returned up the steep path, his horse wet with lather. Reaching me, he saluted, and said in French :

“Three of the Quelpartien cavalry have circled us and are riding hard and far in advance.”

I remembered instantly the rider who had fallen and the two companions left with him; also, that the accident happened after I had spoken as I did of Prince Tuen to Colonel Li.

It may seem, as I tell it, that this was all that I needed to assure me that my fears were not groundless. But I could not distrust Colonel Li without reflecting seriously on Colonel Oranoff, and that I was in no mind to do. However, it was only that which kept me from stopping in the first rocky pass, calling my Cossacks about me, and making a prisoner of my guide and senior officer.

As it was, I felt for my weapons, put on a cheerful face, and rode at the head of my men into the village of Wun Chow.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TEMPLE OF CHING-LING

WUN CHOW BAY is a basin measuring about two miles both in width and length. On three sides it is bounded by the mainland, which ends in a promontory of jutting rock. On the fourth or south side a mountain of an island rises three hundred feet from the sea. The harbor entrance is a narrow inlet between the promontory of the mainland and the eastern extremity of Lynx Island. Several picturesque rocky figures stand out of the water in the inlet as if to mark the mainland's ancient boundary line, — the sentinels of Lynx Island, a nightmare to captains inward bound. On the western shore of the bay was the small native village, and around the western end of Lynx Island, on the little neck of water dividing it from the mainland, was a Japanese village; for this was an open port and a regular landing-place for Japanese steamers plying between Nagasaki and northern Chinese ports.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

One of these steamers was lying at anchor in the harbor of Wun Chow, surrounded by sampans. Another was just clearing the harbor as we entered the village, the black trail of its smoke lying along the horizon, making the sentinels of Lynx Island look like diminutive smoking volcanoes.

But my eyes passed quickly from the merchantmen and rested long on a little white speck on the blue waters,—the yacht “Dulcette,” of the Russian man-of-war “Ulric,” which was stationed at Tsi. The little craft lay floating near the precipitous side of Lynx Island, evidently as near shore as possible, and I confess my spirits rose as I watched it rise on the swell of the sea. Then my eyes ran from it to the shore, a distance of two hundred feet—how could we bridge that leap?

From the shore I looked up the steep side of the mountain, and my heart sank within me, for it seemed a well-nigh impassable course down which to bring a burden in the dark of night. The mountain-side was serrated with great ribs of rock extending from end to end. Here and there the dark ravines seemed, from my standpoint on the beach at the village,

THE TEMPLE OF CHING-LING

more impassable, even, than the rugged face of the mountain-side. Our burden, I doubted not, would weigh no less than six or eight hundred pounds and I knew that the Temple of Ching-ling (so it was called locally) was on the summit of the island, though I could see no trace of it.

Two courses were open to us: a difficult (if not impossible) climb down the side of the mountain, or a long roundabout trip along the summit, down the descending western slope to the Japanese village, then through Wun Chow to the shore of the bay. Secrecy would demand that the former course be adopted if it was within the range of possibility.

As I have said, I was unable to bring myself to act on my suspicions of Colonel Yon Li. I have stated them in the order in which they arose, to show what must have been my perturbed mental condition when I arrived on the ground. In proper order it will be seen whether or not I acted rightly.

Once in Wun Chow, Colonel Li advised me to take my Cossacks to the Japanese village, where we could find more comfortable accommodations at Japanese inns, while he and his

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

men remained in Wun Chow. It is needless to say I went with great misgivings, for I had resolved not to let the man out of my sight, unless necessary to prevent raising his suspicions of my doubt. But now, at the outset, I was compelled to choose between my fears and Colonel Li, and, brought to the point which I could not evade without discomfort and embarrassment, I assented without betraying a shadow of distrust. He promised to follow quickly after me and pilot me to the Temple on the island for a preliminary survey of the ground.

In fact, I had not finished my late tiffin when he came clattering up with fresh horses, and we were off. Forging the narrow inlet which at low tide was not more than two feet deep, we gained the mountain and began ascending the narrow, stony path.

Once on Lynx Island, I felt a new interest in our mission. Added to this freshening zeal, Colonel Li was instantly full of much necessary information. The monastery of Ching-ling had been raised to first rank at the time of the Queen's death. This exaltation in rank made necessary a number of alterations in the

THE TEMPLE OF CHING-LING

Temple, a larger and more elaborate service, and a greater number of priests, the number of the latter being doubled from twenty-five to fifty. I commented, to myself, that the additional force was undoubtedly a soldierly set of men and well armed—for priests! Colonel Li further informed me that none of all this retinue knew the nature of the treasure they were guarding, save the three high-priests, but that all knew that when the monastery was made of first rank a precious gift was laid within the altar, appropriate to its exalted position,—as was true of all monasteries of primal rank in the kingdom.

What masterly artifice, thought I, had been displayed in safely guarding the body of the Queen! Here, on this mountain island, a picked body of men under the cloak of religion lay guarding their King's precious secret more safely than it could have been watched in the citadel of any fortress defended by an army. "The cowl is mightier than the sword," they say in Quelparte. But cowl and sword were here.

Our horses were climbing away vigorously, and soon we neared the summit of the hill

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

where a picturesque scene greeted our eyes. A great canyon split the summit of Lynx Island, and from one rocky side to the other a green vale extended, perhaps two hundred yards wide. A number of old trees stood upon the grassy plot, and in the distance appeared the temple roof, its gable ornamented with clay monkeys of life-size, which, the Quelpartiens believe, will preserve any building from evil spirits. As I saw their grotesque little figures silhouetted against the distant sea I wished for once to believe with old Dejneff in their power. As we pushed on more rapidly, a second building came into view, distant a hundred yards from the Temple. This, Colonel Li had forgotten to explain, was an auxiliary dormitory for the twenty-five additional priests brought to the monastery when it was made of first rank. It was merely a long, straw-thatched native hut. As we drew near, what I had taken to be the wall of the Temple appeared to be an outside wall surrounding the Temple itself,—an unusual, but not unheard of, method for the protection of temples from vandals.

I shall never forget my first ride into this

THE TEMPLE OF CHING-LING

canyon of Lynx Island. My eyes saw everything, and my ears caught every sound. Eagles were circling over the cliffs above us. White-caps danced on the far-off sea, visible through the vista of the canyon. A gong was sounding somewhere, and thin metal fishes, suspended on the tongues of little brass bells, hanging on the Temple, floundered desperately in the wind, ringing their bells to keep off evil spirits.

From his latticed window the gate-keeper saw us coming, and took Colonel Li's package within. Soon a priest came hurrying to meet us. It was plain that we were expected, — but I did not think of this until afterward, — yet everything suggested it, from the clean-swept quadrangle to the spotless attire of the attendants. A gong sounded, and the priests came out from the Temple chanting, some passing out of the gate to their auxiliary building, the remainder entering huts which were built against the inner side of the wall. Colonel Li informed me that the ceremony just concluded was the last, but one, to be held over the Queen's remains, for on the following day, at this hour, the final service was to be performed according to the King's orders just received. The high-priests,

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Colonel Li, and I now passed within the Temple of Ching-ling.

In the dim light, the candles on the altar were first visible, and incense filled the air. Between heavy curtains I could barely see the Image at the farther end of the room, within the inner court, where none but the high-priests might step; and to this spot my eyes went quickly and remained, for there, perhaps beneath those very candles, lay the embalmed body of the Queen!

As I peered forward, the three men at my back spoke to each other swiftly and in low tones. Frequently I heard my name mentioned, but all the rest was meaningless, since they spoke the native language. I need not more than refer again to the lurking fears which beset me whenever suspicions became uppermost in my mind. I remember thinking, as I stood there blinking into the darkness toward the dimly lighted shrine, that if Colonel Oranoff was betrayed, no man had ever been duped by more cunning tricksters; and the highly comforting speculation followed, that if he had been betrayed, my life was not worth the vapor that rose from yonder burning candle.

THE TEMPLE OF CHING-LING

Soon one of the men, who had been introduced to me as General Ling, familiarly put his hand on my arm and led me toward the inner court. Turning from the Image upon which I was gazing with equal curiosity and expectancy, the man pulled away a thick mat from the floor and lifted a trap-door, and, unceremoniously grasping one of the sacred candles from the altar, he sat down on the edge of the black, square hole; then getting a foothold on a ladder, he crawled awkwardly down. I followed. If I had known I was going to my grave, I could not have retreated. The ladder was some six feet in length and stood in a narrow hallway cut into the limestone rocks. Numerous dark passages went off in either direction into inky blackness.

At the end of a long walk General Ling stopped and stamped upon the floor, then, leaning over, he scraped away loose dirt, and with much labor lifted another heavy slab trap-door. Again he went down, and again I followed him, on wide stone stairs, into a still lower apartment. The room was heavy with foul air, but another odor was unmistakably present, — a perfume faintly floating in the air! General Ling

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

paused on the lower step, and, turning to me, grasped my hand and looked me in the face while he raised the torch above his head.

I peered into the scented room. A moving object first appeared. In a moment, as I looked, I beheld a face, and started, gasping. Then I saw it was a soldier, standing silently "at attention" and looking at General Ling.

We see some things first by averted vision. By such means there came slowly into my sight a long, glittering object, by the soldier's side. For a moment, while it grew larger and more distinct, my eyes were fixed upon the soldier's stolid face.

When at last I could look, I saw, resting on two great beams thrown across the little room, the golden Sarcophagus of the Queen of Quelparte.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A LAST SERVICE

AS we ascended to the Temple General Ling explained the plan which had been formulated by the high-priests, subject to the approval of Colonel Li. The final service in the Temple had been set for two o'clock on the next day, as I have said, and in the meantime every preparation for the removal of the Sarcophagus was to be made, — floors opened, doors widened, trusses built. After the service, and not until then, were the priests to be made aware of the presence of the Sarcophagus, and on their shoulders it was to be brought up into the Temple. Although Colonel Oranoff had informed me that a new Sarcophagus would await the body at the Russian Legation in Keinning, lest the one at Lynx Island be injured during the transfer, General Ling had already made a great wooden case in which to place it preparatory to its removal. The total burden would

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

be eight hundred pounds, which, he affirmed, could be borne down the face of the hill by the fifty priests, with the aid of blocks and tackling, without danger to the Sarcophagus, even if the outer case should be marred.

In this, as in all else, General Ling seemed to be a most sensible and faithful servant of the King. We had reached the foot of the ladder which would take us again to the Temple shrine, when the man suddenly sank to the floor and he grasped my hand as I put one foot on the ladder. I turned, and, from being the cool, far-seeing, resolute man I had thought him, he seemed to become a child as he fairly sobbed to me:

“ Sir, you cannot guess what terrible years these have been. Here, with only fifty men, I have been placed to watch ” — and he nodded toward the room from which we had come — “ that which is more precious to the King than life itself. You may or may not know why. The first year I could scarcely sleep, for when I did, a sound as of distant thunder came to my ears, and for days thereafter I could close my eyes no more.” Tears were running down the poor man’s pallid cheeks as he spoke. “ But

A LAST SERVICE

finally I learned to sleep, sir, with both eyes open, sitting upright at my table, on which I balanced myself with my elbows. But why do I tell you this? — that you may mention my faithfulness to the King. Of it he knows little more than my success. I would that he knew the fears I have undergone for his sake and the eternal vigilance with which his secret has been guarded. I have become an old man in these forty months and have little longer to live. I have a son, — Kim Ling, in the Quelparte army. Tell the King he will serve him faithfully as I have, and even until death.”

There was something besides the pathos of the man's plea that touched me, the sense of the justice of the great reward which he seemed to feel was due his laborious service. And he asked it not for himself, but for an only son. I promised then and there to “speak to the King,” though I used the words merely in the conventional sense. He was pleased, and we ascended into the lighter dimness of the Temple, but no one being in sight, as we entered the inner court, I paused, for I too had something to say:

“But during these years, General Ling, have

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

there not been many whom you have suspected of treachery?"

"Yes, sir," he answered as quickly and as frankly. "I have suspected all — but myself."

"Colonel Li?" I suggested.

"Yes, Colonel Li," he responded; then he added after a pause and a shrewd turn of his head: "But not so much as you."

"You may trust me," I said, holding out my hand. He clasped it tightly, for on my honor and faithfulness hung the success or failure of all these long nights and days of watching, and he answered almost pitifully:

"There is nothing else to do."

As we entered the area without the Temple Colonel Li appeared with the horses, but I had other plans which I communicated to him, and he rode off alone. Calling General Ling, I asked him to pilot me down the mountain path.

Passing outside the monastery walls, I was taken to a footpath which went down the rocky side of the canyon, doubling back on itself frequently to accomplish the feat. Once on the crest of the rocks the view was entrancing, for the sun was just setting in the mountains beyond Wun Chow. The bay below, so perfect

A LAST SERVICE

in outline and lovely in color, seemed a great opal in the quiet, dying light. From a certain craft just leaving the little pier at Wun Chow, a weird sound came. A stately figure in white was standing in the prow beating a flabby drum, behind which a dozen men pulled at their oars, driving the barge slowly across the bay. General Ling informed me that this ceremony was performed at the beginning of each native month to keep the devils of the sea from entering the harbor.

My eyes moved slowly from the white figure in the barge to the trim little craft riding at anchor near by, and I thought of its mission to Lynx Island. Neither the monotonous throb of the flabby drum nor the rocky sentinels of Lynx Island had kept it out. While looking for Devils, a Bear came in unnoticed! I was surely becoming a philosopher of old Dejneff's school! We pushed on downward, for the light was waning, General Ling slowly picking his way. At first I thought he was choosing it as he went, but before long I saw stakes had been driven in the ground by some one who had fully anticipated all that I had been dreading. Through rocky defiles, down

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

steps as high as those of the great pyramid, along little grassy ways at the very verge of a precipice, the stakes led us. In actually making the descent, one did not find it such a difficult task. As we neared the bottom my guide signified the necessity of his returning before it became too dark, and we parted, after arranging that I should be at the monastery at two o'clock the following afternoon. I found my way easily to the shore and was taken to the yacht in a sampan, where, I need hardly say, my letters made me a welcomed addition to a jovial party of men. Spirits here ran high, for the mission of the "Dulcette" had been consummated and the boat now only waited its "cargo" to be off for Tsi.

Lulled to sleep by the gentle rocking of the waves, I made up for two sleepless nights and barely came from my bath as tiffin was served. I had little more than time to climb the steep path of the stakes when the last service over the body of the late Queen of Quelparte was begun.

I should observe here that the "Dulcette" was brought fifty feet nearer shore on this morning, and four sampans were lashed together and boarded over to convey our burden to the

A LAST SERVICE

yacht. According to the King's orders, General Ling had been commanded to fire the monastery immediately upon the removal of the Sarcophagus ; secrets of which I have only the merest suspicion undoubtedly connected with the anticipated Russian possession of the island, rendering this waste of property necessary. Accordingly, I had ordered my Cossacks to station themselves on the road to Keinning behind the village at sundown, ready to start for the capital the moment the light of the flames appeared on the summit of Lynx Island. By them I sent a message to Oranoff, stating the success of my mission and that of the "Dulcette."

As I entered the temple a hundred tapers sprang to light. The candles on the altar were at the same time increased, showing up the hideous figure of the Image unpleasantly. Some one was reading in a nasal tone from a Thibetan book, and during the reading the threescore priests entered the building, bearing swinging torches. Upon entering they knelt ; then, with noiseless feet, they formed a procession and marched slowly before the Image of Gautama.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

If it should be my lot to witness many august ceremonies, I doubt if I could remember another as I do the one of that memorable night on Lynx Island. There was something in it of the heathenism of ancestor-worshipping peoples, — something which suggested the religious fervor of India, though blended with and discolored by the duller dross of Chinese superstition. Whatever it may have been, — I cannot describe it, — that march of those monks and their monotones will never be forgotten while life shall last. And whenever I listen to chanting, my ears seem to hear, above the song of the singers, the chant I heard that night:

He knows he lies who dares to say
That Karma cannot be;
For the body of Dharma, pure and white,
Ever lives in the liquid light,
Though his form we may not see.

In a thousand rivers there water is,
In a thousand rivers a moon,
In a thousand leagues no cloud is seen
Where the heavens lie like an endless dream
To temple our wind-swept tomb.

On Griddore Peak where vultures fly
And lustrous flowers are found,

A LAST SERVICE

Full many an occult thing may be —
If the wood comes not can the tortoise see
Till a thousand years roll round ?

When half the procession had passed the altar the priests faced it, and, prostrating themselves, chanted :

O Honorable One by the Altar,
O source of the pure, endless springs,
Favor our frail lips that falter,
Grant us the three blessed things:
 The Buddha,
 The Dharma,
 The Shanga, —
The thrice-blest, the three Precious Things.

Rising, they marched on, then, turning, retraced their steps before the Image, chanting wondrously :

The three worlds swing in an endless arc,
Rebirth, decay, and death ;
An hundred thousand kalpas fly
Like grains of dust across the sky,
While Buddha breathes a breath.

O clear, pure wind of unmeasured love,
Oh, blow now straight, afar !
Had not your heart been proven sweet,
Who would have dared its message keep,
Pyel Ho of Kasyapa ?

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Let the chant go forth to the Honorable One
Who sits by the Altar on High,
And strives to break the dark clouds of night
That worlds may reflect his glorious light,
And Karma be banished for aye.

I sat, I know not how long, as one bewitched. The swinging torches, the monotonous chanting, the perfumed incense, all combined to make me what I had never been before,— somewhat of an idolater myself.

At last some one touched me and spoke. It was General Ling, and when he asked if I was ready, I looked out through a crack in a paper window and saw it was growing dark. Already my Cossacks were awaiting my signal of flames. Already the "Dulcette" had lifted anchor and was in full heat to be off.

I tightened my belt, felt of my pistols, and answered him: "Yes."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CUE OF A QUEUE

THE darkness was not altogether due to coming night, for a storm was blowing in from the murky Yellow Sea, although the long service had lasted to near the day's end, when General Ling came to me.

For some reason I had felt in no hurry to begin the night's work, for a strange quiet had come over me, intensified fourfold by the service to which I had altogether given myself up. After three days of intense mental and physical activity, I was enjoying a reaction and recuperation. Not that my fears were dead, or my anxieties forgotten, but from the moment I met General Ling I felt a new confidence in myself and in those about me. He had suffered suspicions for four mortal years, — suspicions of every one, including myself. Beside him, and he a heathen and an idolater, I was a coward. His pitiful words respecting his trust in me — “There is nothing else to do”

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

—rang in my ears. How nearly they coincided with my own reluctancy in trusting Colonel Li! And I have ever remembered this valuable lesson, — to trust those whom I must trust as I trust myself.

Upon this motto I had acted since I awoke that morning on the “Dulcette.” Ling and Li had done everything. The Sarcophagus was as good as on the “Dulcette.” My Cossacks were no longer needed, and were spoiling to return to Keinning. Consequently I had written to Colonel Oranoff, and stationed them to await my flaming signal to be off. I was particularly glad to be able to dispense with their presence, as the secret of Lynx Island was confined to so many less tongues — and soldiers’ tongues are loose at both ends, as all the world knows.

At the conclusion of the final ceremony the priests had been taken to an inner room, where Colonel Li imparted to them the nature of the King’s orders touching the immediate removal of the sacred treasure of the Temple and the utter destruction of the Temple itself. The astonishment of the priests can be imagined, but not the scene which followed. Old men,

THE CUE OF A QUEUE

whose lives had been spent at Ching-ling, came out weeping and moaning, and here and there they leaned against the walls as if to embrace them for a last time. Some crowded about the Image on their knees and prayed with quaking voices; others, most of them younger, began running about like frightened deer, while some fell into groups in the corners, whispering to each other in their haste.

Evidently fearing that all control over his men might be lost, Colonel Li hastened to read yet another decree from the King, which detailed each priest to service in other temples, and gave to each a sum of money from the Royal Treasury. This had the desired effect over the younger and most restless of the men, who otherwise were quite beside themselves with disappointment, but many of the older men failed to be reconciled by pecuniary reward. Young men came to older ones, who, sobbing by the wall or praying by the Image, seemed to heed only the first decree.

“Have cheer, father,” said a son to an old man by the wall near me; “you and I are to go to Wun Lung, where King Chan-ning is buried. Have cheer.”

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“Be silent, son,” sharply cried the elder, turning his wet face upon the hopeful youth. “You remember the grave of Chan-ning, and forget that of your mother on Lynx Island. What if that is plundered and we become insane? It would be a just reward.”

The old man’s face went back again into his sleeve, and by the shaking of his shoulders I could see he was weeping anew.

Some there were among the soldier-priests whom the second announcement did not quiet, the reason being, I supposed, that the destruction of Ching-ling meant they were to go back into the dreary barracks.

Orders were given for the priests to collect their personal effects immediately, and to be ready in an hour to assist in the work of removing the sacred treasure. This necessitated great tumult and confusion, particularly in the mud huts; and, though it seemed to me hasty business to ask men to prepare within an hour to leave homes in which they had lived a lifetime, yet the need of having the destruction of the Temple seem to be a religious observance (and thus less likely to be attributed to the passing of the island into Russian possession)

THE CUE OF A QUEUE

rendered such a course necessary, however summary it might seem.

It was more than an hour before all was in readiness; and save for the extreme foresight of General Ling, all would not have been ready then. The storm had swept furiously upon us, and torrents of rain fell, to counteract which General Ling had oil in readiness to smear the Temple and the straw-thatched roofs, and other combustible material was piled against the Temple. Within, the Audience Room had been stripped of all decorations save the heavy curtain which hid the inner court from view, from which the Image of Gautama was brought into the centre of the Temple.

“A hot Nirvana for him,” thought I, as I paced restlessly by amid the confusion, thinking of the end that was approaching it.

After a long wait the priests from the farther building came in a body, and a more frightened crowd of men I hope I may never see. Those in the front rank were bold, even surly, but behind them were those who cringed and shrank. Their officers, who now openly asserted their authority, much to my relief, brandished sabres, and urged on the timid with

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

sharp words of command and not a few savage thrusts.

All being ready, General Ling drew back the curtain which hung before the inner court, and exposed a great rectangular hole in the floor made by raising the stone flagging above the hallway. A torch was given to each of the foremost men, and, taking a torch himself, General Ling leaped down. The men followed in dead silence, curiosity overwhelming their fears and sorrows, and crowded down the narrow hallway with many muttered exclamations of astonishment. Upon reaching the end of the dark passageway another great opening met their wondering eyes. A large space had been opened directly above the stone stairway. Down the stairs we passed, and the room below and its secret was in plain view.

I looked about me at the peering faces, as the men stepped forward to see the contents of the apartment. With his usual foresight, General Ling had had the Sarcophagus placed within the wooden case, so that a plain box, five feet high and seven feet long, was all that was exposed to view. I did not know how many, if any, of those men dreamed what the box

THE CUE OF A QUEUE

contained, but I thought by the action of some that they suspected that the "sacred treasure" of Ching-ling was a corpse. But, my imagination being a capricious quantity, I put aside idle speculation and went to work with the others.

It was plain that the most difficult task before us — at least within the Temple — was to move the box the first step, or up to the hallway above the room in which it rested. The stairway was cut in the solid rock and could not be removed. Moreover, it was composed of wide steps and only five of them in number. Ropes were let down and deflected into the room and placed around the box, and repeated trials were made before there was any gain. When at last the box was lifted, the ropes could not be raised sufficiently and the weight swung to the steps, striking them with a terrific crash, which showed, for one thing at least, that it was solid and able to stand all that could be reasonably expected of it.

Li did not care to have that experiment repeated, and he inquired immediately if there was not a room directly above that in which the box stood. General Ling answered affirm-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

atively, and Li advised that the floor of that room be taken up. His suggestion seemed a practicable one; the work was instantly commenced. A number of men went above and the work of raising the floor and removing the loose dirt was begun, and with Colonel Li, I guarded the Sarcophagus, those about us clearing away the débris which fell through the growing aperture. Suddenly and without warning a great slab, loosened from its bed of surrounding dirt, came crashing down upon us. I barely escaped having my leg caught under it; and a priest at my side, who had been especially valuable because of his authority over others and his notable activity and watchfulness, received a terrific blow on the head and sank with a groan between Colonel Li and myself.

Colonel Li jumped quickly to the poor man's rescue, and with my assistance drew him from the débris and dust into an adjoining apartment, which I had not seen before, where the soldiers who had guarded the Sarcophagus slept. The blow had been received fairly on the head, crushing in the wire net in which Quelpartiens put up their hair, and had inflicted a serious, if not fatal, wound.

THE CUE OF A QUEUE

Men were at once sent for water, and I, remembering my flask in the pocket of my great-coat, went to the Temple, where I had cast it aside.

As I hurried through the Temple of Ching-ling for my whisky flask, I felt a something in the air which gave me a sudden, terrible warning. I thought at first the accident had played a little trick on my nerves, and, as I retraced my steps, I drew away at my flask myself. But no—it was not that. Everything took on a new appearance, and I dodged at my own shadow on the walls. Men were hastening by me, running through the halls and the Temple, stumbling on the ladders and disappearing through numerous doors; the accident is being reported, thought I, and the simple-minded and superstitious are disturbed by it.

Thus I argued the case within me as I ran down the steps into the room where the Sarcophagus stood. The room was quite empty. Above me the work of removing the floor continued, the workers having started up a sing-song chant such as Quelpartiens indulge in while working. But below a strange silence

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

reigned. Seeing the torchlight in the further room, I hurried thither, flask in hand.

I shall not describe the sight which met my eyes in all its frightfulness of detail. Colonel Li and General Ling were standing near the center of the room, each looking at the other in speechless horror. In Li's hand was his sword, the blade hidden behind his robe.

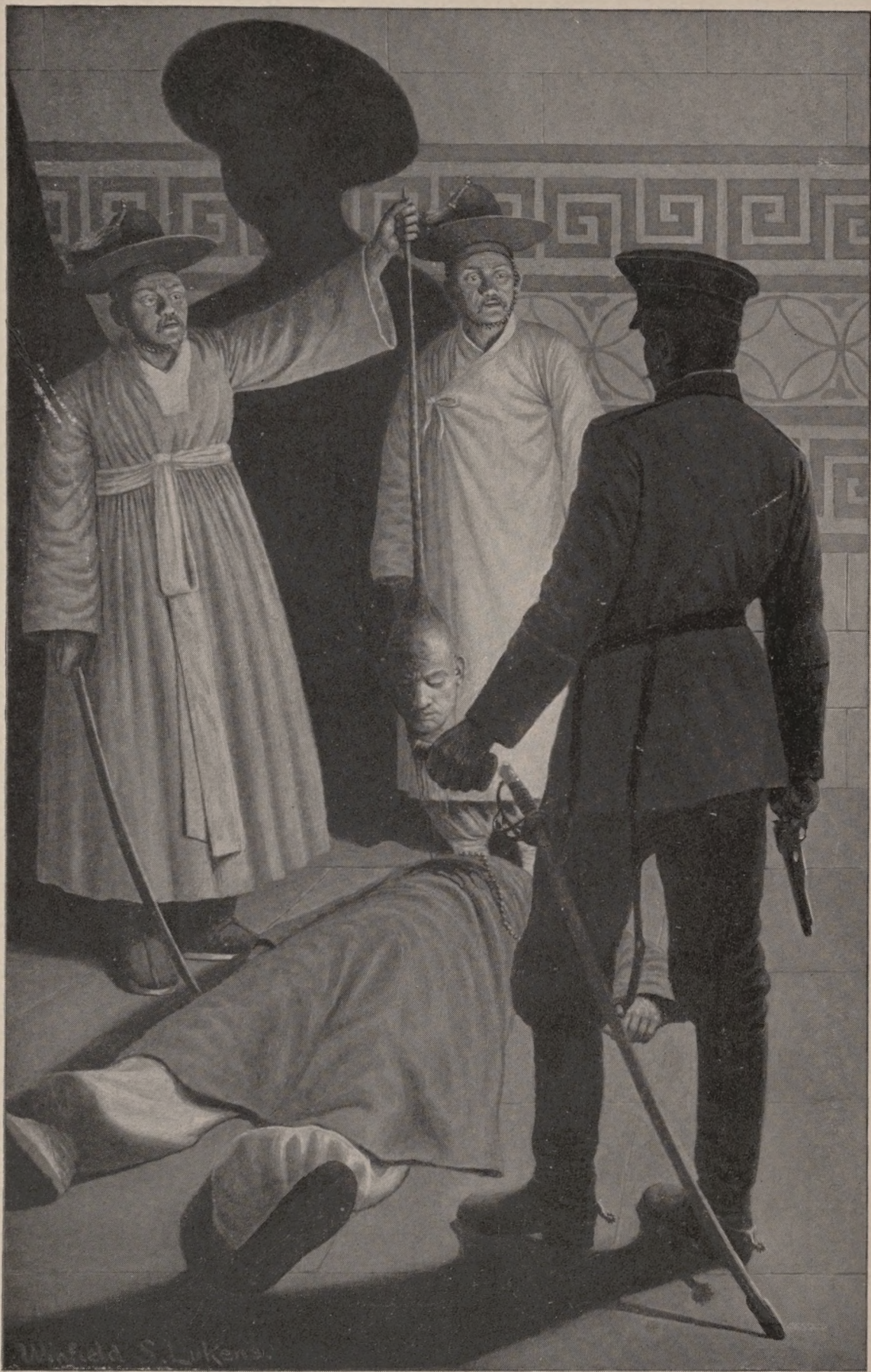
On the floor before them lay a headless corpse.

Both men attempted to look at me, but they could not take their eyes from each other. Together they turned like automatons, still staring one another in the face, speechless.

"A sharp stone," I gasped at last, drawing my revolver.

Then, slowly, Colonel Li's other hand came up from his side, drawing after it what seemed to me a black cord. And he raised aloft the head of the corpse at his feet, holding it by the end of its finely braided queue.

"The Chinese!" We three spoke the words simultaneously. Then old Ling dropped his face into his hands, but Li lifted his streaming sword and, with an awful oath, struck again the headless body at his feet.



M. S. Likero.

THE CUE OF A QUEUE

Such was the dramatic announcement of our betrayal in the Temple of Ching-ling. Prince Tuen, in order to secure the Queen's body, had corrupted the priests of the Temple. The man accidentally injured was a Chinaman who had joined the priests without detection. He was perhaps the leader of the awful plot. Thus, in a few swift words, we analyzed the situation.

Feeling my revolver in one hand and my flask in the other, I replaced the weapon and drank from the flask. Then I passed it to my companions and the liquor restored us. Instinctively drawing our swords, we dashed upstairs. The building seemed quite deserted. Here and there, however, we found our men talking in frightened groups, or, unconscious of the disturbance, working away at their various tasks. Crowding them together, Colonel Li, the genius among us, looked them over quickly.

"We are betrayed," he said firmly. "There are no priests here who live in the outer building." To prove his terrible suspicion, he called a witless fellow from his task and sent him to summon the priests from the outer building

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

back to their work ; but as the messenger went out, the gates were closed securely.

A deep silence settled over the Temple as we waited. But our suspense was not lasting. A rifle-crack broke the deathly stillness, and its echo rattled long in the rocky canyon of Lynx Island.

Colonel Li was right ; we were surrounded by armed servants of the Chinese Prince commanded by Chinamen in disguise. With us was the Sarcophagus of the Queen, the preservation of which determined the destiny of the reigning dynasty.

And the Temple was drenched with oil !

CHAPTER NINE

THE HOLOCAUST

ALARM is not so terrible when an enemy is located and his distance measured. Despite the peril of our situation, surrounded as we were in the little Temple of Ching-ling by the armed body of treacherous priests who had been corrupted by emissaries of the Chinese Prince, our fears were not so acute as when, for a moment, each of us looked the other in the eye, a traitorous accusation on each stern lip. As our suspicions of one another lifted, and we counted a score of men left with, and still faithful to, the treasure, a great weight rolled from my heart, and I could see that General Ling and Colonel Li experienced like relief.

Honor and praise to those two brave, faithful men on that night; not because it was their last night on earth, but because, brought suddenly to bay by the cruel foe so long feared, they showed the stern stuff of which they were

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

made. In spite of the many aspersions cast upon their race by the unknowing world, I remember with awe the courage of those men, and realize something of what millions of other hearts may be capable of enduring, though they be oriental and heathen!

Caught once by the deceptive wire head-dress, Colonel Li first determined to thwart further danger from that source, lest there be traitors still among us. Accordingly, one by one, the trembling priests were made to kneel while their hair was loosened from the netting where such strange secrets might lurk. As the long hair fell down over the face and shoulders of each, and testimony of faithfulness to the King came from lips parched with fear, we all took heart to make ready a stout resistance.

A search for arms was instituted by Colonel Li, and, knowing the thoughtfulness of General Ling, I was surprised that the search resulted in producing but two guns. There were perhaps a dozen revolvers at our disposal. But Ling, nothing daunted, put out his sentries, who could, at least, give warning when the assault came, and summoned all the others within the Temple walls.

THE HOLOCAUST

Even to the most confused among us some things were very plain. There was now no longer any hope of keeping the Sarcophagus secreted within the Temple, for every traitor had looked upon it, and could find it again wherever in that subterranean apartment we might stow it. Any secret there would be readily unraveled. The only hope was, then, to obtain assistance from without, drive away the villains, and carry the Sarcophagus immediately to the "Dulcette."

I am sure we thought frequently of the enemy by which we were surrounded and of his plans, but of this no one so much as spoke. How old was the conspiracy? How had it been effected? Had the conspirators been warned by confederates who reached Lynx Island before us? Had it been disconcerted by the sudden arrival of Colonel Li? What was the object of the conspirators in assisting us to raise the Sarcophagus? — these and a score of other questions I asked myself, but I could give no answer. Our success depended, I felt sure, on the rapidity with which I could get my Cossacks into this canyon of Lynx Island. Of them I was confident and so was

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Li; he did not mention his own body of horse at this juncture of our affairs, and I did not anticipate that he would! However, I felt like kneeling to the man, as he stood there in the Temple, surrounded by his trembling priests, to ask him to forgive my suspicions of him.

Plans having been decided upon, we went at once to raise the Sarcophagus to the Temple area, ready to be transported at the moment of the arrival of assistance — if, indeed, assistance should ever come! We mustered twenty men, four of the priests belonging within the Temple walls having bolted out of the gates with the others, now, doubtless, prisoners; though I thought Ling and Li were secretly hoping that they had gone to summon help.

The work went on more rapidly than I feared it would, the aperture above the box being found quite completed. Slowly we lifted the dead weight by sheer strength of arm and shoulder, and, once in the narrow hallway, we made a quick journey to the second opening, and there lifted it again. Silently we laid the treasured coffin of the Queen in the area of the Temple, and covered it with a drapery

THE HOLOCAUST

made of the great curtain which had formerly hung before the inner court.

This done, I bethought me of another duty, and quickly let myself down into the lower hallway, hastening toward the bloody ante-chamber. As I descended the stone steps the skirt of a Quelpartien robe disappeared through the door toward which I was hurrying. Placing my hand on my revolver I went on without flinching. It was General Ling, moved to come here by a similar motive. Together we moved the body to the bed, and Ling (for I could not) arranged it in proper position there. He then came out with me, and ascended the wide stone steps, weeping.

I made a hurried round of our guards. All was quiet. No one had appeared, though we could hear footsteps of sentries without, walking guard about the walls, and now and again we heard stones rolling from the sides of the canyon; when it became evident that our court was being watched from those heights, the carrying of torches was forbidden.

I returned to the Temple. I had considered the whole situation and had determined, myself, to make the attempt to summon assistance.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

The officers had just ended a discussion as I entered, and I found I had been anticipated, for messengers were to be chosen by lot until an answer was received from without. I went to Li and quickly put an end to this arrangement.

“You may draw my name first, Colonel Li,” I said, “for I shall be the first to go.”

The good man raised his hands to object, but I would not let him interrupt. “I can get through if another can,” I continued, “and, once through, I can quickest get our yacht into service and reach Wun Chow and my Cossacks.”

“But, sir,” broke in rough old Ling, “you are more likely to drop dead in your tracks once over the wall.”

“As well dead there as here,” I said, as gruffly.

“Or captured alive and —” This was from Li. He did not finish, for he saw me start.

“Faugh!” I burst out, partly for my own encouragement (for Li’s suggestion would have daunted a more headstrong man even than myself), “I do not fear the cowards. Moreover, a foreigner would fare better in their hands than a native.”

THE HOLOCAUST

Li, who knew me best, yielded first; then Ling acquiesced, but inconsolable, as one could well see. I guessed at a selfish reason and spoke to him, and what I said struck home.

“If I get through it will make your son a captain. Let us not both die—for his sake.”

So it came about that I attempted the journey down the cliffs of Lynx Island that night, though it was certain, as old Ling said, while he helped me get ready, that I was running a most murderous gauntlet. But in my heart I preferred it to remaining in the Temple. In such times I am quite a coward if I cannot be in action,—many a man has led a rout because he could not lead a charge.

As I crossed the court in the darkness the nearest sentry was standing still, listening, and Ling, Li, and I stopped, too. Now and again the tramping of many feet approached the wall, retiring immediately, but to return again. It was quite unintelligible to me, but I noticed the men were anxious that I be gone. I crossed to the farther wall, where all was still. As the sentry without trudged by toward the corner, I sprang upon a straw-thatched roof and climbed

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

from it to the wall, where I lay down, looking over. Nothing was audible save the tread of the returning sentry. His head was five feet below me. I leaned further over to add my arm's length to that of my sword. Unconscious of his peril, the fool walked under me, and then sank lifeless to the ground without a groan.

I fell after him and not an instant too soon, for at that moment a form came quickly to the corner and, uttering a single but piercing exclamation, fled into the darkness. I stopped once to listen. All I heard was the sound of rolling stones started from their places by my feet.

But it was not my duty to inquire into the method of the campaign conducted by the besiegers of the Temple. My duty was to get my Cossacks at the earliest possible moment, and I ran on to the crest of the canyon, where I paused to breathe before risking my life on the cliffs below. The hillside was all rocks. One by one I reached for them and slid and fell forward to the next, sometimes with good fortune, but more often evil. Now and again I paused in my flight to gain my

THE HOLOCAUST

breath, or measure the extent of my latest injury.

I must have been more than halfway down, for I had fallen again and was lying quite helpless where I fell, watching the lights on the yacht below me, when a dull, unearthly roar sent a million echoes ringing through the rocky canyon, and reverberating sharply among the hills beyond Wun Chow. A light, as of a descending comet, suddenly lit up the thunderheads over Lynx Island; then the dulled glare of burning buildings filled the sky.

The Temple of Ching-ling had been fired.

As I lay there, dazed, delayed explanations seemed to come to my distracted mind, — explanations of all the miscellaneous phenomena which accompanied the complete triumph of the emissaries of the Chinese Prince Tuen. Then I thought of the good men — God have pity on their darkened souls! — who were being burned beside the treasure.

The treasure! What of it? I knew too well the answer. There was now no sacred Sarcophagus. There was now no body of the Queen to bury, though a nation was preparing for the Imperial pageant but five days off!

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

And the dynasty — it, too, was doomed now with every kinsman of the late Queen.

All this swept over me as I lay in utter darkness on the hillside. Then, on the land breeze which came with the storm, I heard the clatter of horses' hoofs on the distant hills.

The signal of flame had been given! My flying column of Cossacks was off for Keining — with that letter of good news to Colonel Oranoff!

CHAPTER TEN

AT THE END OF THE SEA

WHEN I regained consciousness I was lying in my berth on the "Dulcette." My head was heavily bandaged, and I could not move my left arm. I found this out by trying to do so, and for a little time I was unconscious again.

As consciousness returned once more, I lay very still, thinking of my strange dream. For hours, it seemed, I had been watching a bear walking slowly over a great meadow of red and white, — the red portion steadily growing larger, for the bear was bleeding. The blood was spreading in all directions, and I thought the animal was wounded in the shoulder. This reminded me of something, but I could not for the life of me tell what it was; I thought I wrote it down, intending to ask Oranoff. The bear went on limping until it came to the mutilated body of a second bear, whereupon it arose on its hind legs, as though

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

crazed with grief, and then keeled over upon its back and lay pawing the air convulsively, which set me to laughing. This woke me up.

For a while I could not get the connections of things, and now and then I saw that bear again. But the world came back clearly to me at last, and I remembered with a groan the events of the night previous—or had it all happened weeks before? I remembered Ling and Li, and wondered if they were really burned alive with the Sarcophagus and their faithful priests. Perhaps, at the last moment, they did escape, and the Imperial Funeral had long since been celebrated and the Russian protectorate successfully declared. Or perhaps Ling had attempted to escape with the Sarcophagus and had been cut down swiftly on the walls. For some reason I felt, even now, that the destruction of the Temple, so long and so cunningly planned, had been accomplished.

Then suddenly my mind jumped feverishly across the mountains to Keinning, whither my Cossacks had taken that letter to Colonel Oranoff, in which I promised to be in Keinning with the Queen's body within two days! Here I groaned aloud, and, to my surprise, Captain

AT THE END OF THE SEA

Kepneff arose from a chair at the head of my berth and leaned over me.

“If you are able, Martyn,” he said, with greatest gentleness, “let us have an understanding at once, for with Colonel Li gone I am under your orders. We found you on the rocks last night while hurrying up to the Temple.”

“Was it destroyed?” I broke in.

“Utterly, — and all within it.”

“All?”

“Nothing remains but ashes and the bones of those cremated.”

I groaned aloud. A sob broke from the face above me. For a time I could not answer, and I listened to the flabby drum that was now starting out across the bay again in search of devils. But as I listened my thoughts ran on to the task now dropped unexpectedly on my poor shoulders. I must now do what Li would have done, and I tried to think what that would be.

“Will you telegraph to Keinning?” asked Kepneff, gently.

“Yes, from Han Chow,” I said, remembering Oranoff’s words.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I did not know what I was asking, for the storm which had come down upon Lynx Island was still raging over the Yellow Sea, stirring the mud bottoms to their stagnant depths. There was but one way for Kepneff to get me to Han Chow, and that was by running around the southern extremity of Quelparte to the mouth of the Khan, and ascending that river. It was a desperate risk, but he knew somehow that we were at a desperate pass, and without a word to me he set the little craft into the teeth of the gale. By worrying cautiously along in the lee of the islands which lay between Lynx Island and the mouth of the Khan, Kepneff, brave man, neared the river as day began to dawn.

The tossing of the little vessel caused me excruciating pain, and it was only by bracing myself firmly that I kept from rolling upon my injured arm. But when, now and then, we ran into smooth water behind the numerous islands, my thoughts turned from myself to the play in which I was becoming so important an actor.

One thing was sure, now. Dejneff's fine-spun theories regarding one of those absurd Quelpartien myths would soon be put to the

AT THE END OF THE SEA

test. There was no doubt about the destruction of the Sarcophagus and of the Queen's body within it. Now, if the myth held good, the King of Quelparte was to become insane and his dynasty perish. I smiled grimly as my thoughts ran on; while I knew every sane man would agree with me and against Dejneff touching this silly belief, I had not expected to precipitate any such actual test as this!

Howbeit, Dejneff had not been willing to admit that the relatives of the desecrated dead could become insane until they knew of the desecration — and who knew of the destruction of the Queen's body except its destroyers and myself? Not one human being! And would I tell — or could they make me?

In such a wise did my thoughts turn anxiously to those who had won the game at the Temple of Ching-ling. Kepneff evidently had no trace of them, for he told me frankly that all had been destroyed. I was sure that, had he any trace of them, he would not have spoken in such a way. Evidently their original plan to get possession of the Queen's body had been frustrated by the sudden advance of the date of the funeral and by the arrival of Colonel Li and

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

myself on the scene. But after that, they had played their forced hands desperately and well, and my accidental escape was all that now stood between them and complete triumph. With an oath I swore into my wet pillow that I would still thwart their damnable, hellish plot even more completely than I had already! That funeral must be postponed, and the destruction of the Queen's body be kept a royal secret! Here I laughed and clinched my fists; the thrill of our wild game was on me, and I was instantly caught up in a delirium of daring courses.

And yet some very sober second thoughts came to me as the day grew brighter. What of our Russian protectorate? As I thought of that phase of the affair things took on a different color. It was one thing to win from Tuen by postponing the funeral, but quite another thing to ask Colonel Oranoff to postpone the announcement of the protectorate. It certainly could not be announced when the people were just cheated out of a holiday upon which so many thousand hearts had been so long and so fondly set. If the pageant were postponed, Tuen's men might easily raise the cry that

AT THE END OF THE SEA

Tuen had, after all, "pawed Quelparte over" with success, and the proof of it was that there was no Queen to bury.

But by the time our little boat had beaten her way into the smooth course of the Khan I had definitely resolved to telegraph Oranoff to postpone the funeral; this was the important thing. Other matters must adjust themselves some way. And despite my mental suffering the hours of quiet had done wonders for me; I felt stronger than I had thought I could, and while Kepneff protested vigorously against my venturing out, I had my way and was soon striding up the main street of Han Chow toward the long, low building to which the zig-zag line of telegraph poles from Keinning led me.

A boy sleepily answered my shout and I entered the paper door into a large room which I saw at once was the operating room.

"Can I send a message to Keinning?" I said hurriedly.

The lad stood speechless. A voice in the next room spoke a surly monosyllable, and the boy answered:

"Yes."

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I turned to the table and composed the following:

“Message carried by Cossacks premature. Am returning on ‘Dulcette’ alone. Postpone funeral indefinitely. Martyn.”

After re-reading, I re-wrote this in cipher and handed it to the man who now appeared, adjusting his raiment. It was all I thought best to say. It was unnecessary for Oranoff to know that his worst fears had been realized. This I thought (and much else) as I held out the paper to the lazy fellow, who began to blush and back away. I was angry in a moment, and with good reason, and roared out to the man, who spoke again to the boy. Then the boy said to me:

“He says that you asked if *you* could send a message.”

Whereupon the fellow pointed to the instrument, nodding wildly.

I wanted to knock the nodding head off the man’s shoulders, in my anger. He was holding the message in his hands where he lay when I crossed the room. The boy fled. In my despair I touched the instruments. I fondled the shining little bars. I opened the key and shut

AT THE END OF THE SEA

it, each motion being recorded on the receiver. Then the receiver began to sing alone monotonously, and then it stopped for a reply. Sweat poured from my face, and I thought of putting my mouth down and of shouting my message into the instrument. Then I arose, crossed the room, and kicked down the paper walls.

Cautiously the boy returned with a man who could explain the situation, and from him I learned that a new "Minister of Interior" had recently been appointed, and, to satisfy a great host of relatives halfway down to the "eighth joint," even the telegraph service had to be invaded, capable operators being thrown out and novices put in their places. They had held office a month now, and not a message had passed over the Imperial Quelpartien Telegraph line. All this I learned as I stormed out of the building and down the straggling street to the village.

Consider my desperate plight. A hundred mountainous miles from Keinning, and out of connection with it, no decent horse to ride, and the Imperial Funeral but four days off, not to be postponed until I could come and declare that there was no Queen's body to bury!

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

It so happens to a fellow sometimes (and happily for his sanity) that failure becomes so overwhelmingly apparent that he feels he is being led providentially into paths he would never otherwise have entered. As I ran to the shore of the Khan and was being taken to the "Dulcette," it was a relief to stop and assure myself that none of the luckless train of unfortunate events had occurred through any conscious failure of my own. I could not see where I should have done other than that I had done. Had I not played a poor hand well?

These reflections fortified me to meet Kepneff and his dark face — for they had had a fearful night and were loath, I saw at once, to hurry out to sea again.

I stated my plight to Kepneff as clearly as possible without revealing my secret. His gloomy face grew darker. He looked downstream and asked if I could not go by land. Then he went and studied his charts and instruments and left me alone in agony.

Day broke, and with it came the tide, moonled up the great rivers of Quelparte, — that tide of the end of the sea. As I sat on the deck of the yacht and stared gloomily before me, what

AT THE END OF THE SEA

I saw matched my sickening brain. We were (while the great tide of the Yellow Sea was out) thirty feet below the high-water line. A thousand slimy roots lay exposed to view, covered with black mud which slid off continually and dropped into the water below. A thousand hateful, crawling things were wriggling back into the river. Banks of reeking mud lay open to view, sagging, stinking, slinking into their own unfathomable depths. The cavern of Avernus has never been pictured so horrible as the un-bared sea-coast and river-banks at the Yellow Sea end of the sea.

Then, silently, a change came. Our little boat drifted to the other side of its anchorage, and reeds and grasses and branches, mud-coated, swung leisurely up-stream, by the order of the setting moon. The drifting became a flowing, and the flowing a flood-tide, sweeping swiftly inland from the storm-tossed sea. One by one the great mud-banks disappeared from sight, and the crawling things and the black roots were covered by murky, boiling waters. Lower and lower the land seemed to fall, as our little craft shot thirty feet and more into the air, and on the wind, which followed the rising waters,

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

came the noise of the incessant clamor and crash of the sea where the waves pounded the black sea-wall.

When Kepneff woke me, his face was still dark, for the poor man knew he could not weather that sea, and had to tell me so. And I saw at the water's edge two ponies, saddled. I knew the rest.

After two terrible days and nights Kepneff's servant and I reached Keinning. The first night we slept a few hours in a deserted hut near a village where we had made an unsuccessful attempt to purchase new mounts. Our two little Korean ponies broke down in the middle of the afternoon, and we had pushed on this far afoot. The second day our experience was similar, though the ill-fed horses gave way sooner on the rough, unused road along the mountain ridges. We walked on. At last we stopped on the summit of a precipitous ridge and built a fire. My man had brought a little rice with him, and we put it to boil before trying to push on to the nearest village. After consuming our meagre dinner, he went into the valley to the brook, and after a long absence returned.

AT THE END OF THE SEA

On a stone by our fire he placed two freshly baked loaves of Chinese bread. I was too thankful to question gift or giver, though nothing could have been more miraculous to me. Kepneff's servant only smiled. At a venture I drew from my belt a roll of Japanese yen and he weighted them down with a little stone on the rock beside the fire, and I felt that hidden eyes were watching us as we passed away.

That afternoon we procured more ponies, and at dusk passed the Imperial Mausoleum outside of Keinning.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

KEINNING

THE capital of Quelparte was arrayed in its barbaric best. Even by night and without other light than that of the moon, the holiday attire of the heathen city was spectacular. I could hardly stay on my weak little pony, and but for my companion's arm I should have fallen to the ground never to see Keinning that night. Yet this sight — a nation prepared for the funeral of a Queen whose corpse I could not bring to them — stung my heart to new strength.

For a long distance before reaching the city we had been passed by crowds of pilgrims wending their way toward Keinning. Every mouth was talking of the great celebration, and those who were silent were thinking as they trudged along only of the pageant they were to witness at their journey's end. The great forms of the men in their loose clothes seemed to occupy all the roadway, as they

KEINNING

swung along with giant strides. What a nation of soldiers the Quelpartiens would make! Men of such stature are nowhere to be found in the world, and yet their white apparel exaggerates their proportions. But their paces suggest their immense size; and, one after another, they passed my horse all day long as though it were a wounded snail.

The road was much like that between Keinning and Lynx Island, — narrow, stony, circuitous. How a civilization can be judged by its roads! Who could not tell from these little, twisting, rough roads of Quelparte that it had always been a conquered, apathetic Hermit Nation!

As it grew dark and we were within sight of Keinning, we fell in with several parties of pilgrims who were not able to better our own poor rate of traveling. As we rode behind such a party Kepneff's servant listened to their conversation, and I asked him what was said. After waiting a moment, he repeated to me each traveler's remarks in turn:

“We are lucky to get in before the robbers are out.”

“Yes, the robbers will do big business before

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

the great moon has set." The speaker looked back at us and seemed to feel more safe in our company.

"We might as well be robbed by highwaymen as by the government, I think," put in another of the band. Several laughed solemnly.

"Has the government been robbing you lately?" asked the first speaker.

"No, but it will get to us in time; since the Americans found gold in the mountains the government has been sending out men to locate gold mines around through the country. They came into Chulla province last month. They find out who the rich men of a province are, and then go to their family graveyards and decide that there is a large gold mine on that very spot." A deep, querulous growl arose from each man in the company.

"But they don't dig the graves up for gold, do they?"

"Oh, no; the owners are afraid they will go insane if the graves are disturbed, and so they pay large sums of money to the government prospectors, who move along to the next wealthy man on their list."

KEINNING

For a time there was silence as each one pondered the matter, now and then emitting a half cry and groan as the plight of their poor country came up before their eyes.

“The funeral has been long delayed,” some one put in after a continued silence.

“Yes, and the King will breathe easier when the body is in that marble tomb.”

“He will be lucky to get it there too, against Tuen’s bragging.”

“Look at the banners,” another cried out, suddenly. We had approached nearer the city than we knew, and beside the gate great bamboo poles bore silken flags announcing the Imperial Funeral.

“Oh, see the roof,” a third traveler cried out, at the sight of the green and red flags and streamers which ran off westward with the evening breeze. As with the gates, so with the streets, the Bell House, the Legations, the Marble Pagoda, — flags, streamers, pennons, banners, were everywhere, and my heart sank lower as I watched each piece of bunting rise on the freshening wind.

The words of the countryman concerning Tuen struck home hard and quick, and

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

trebled every fear I had known. If all these thousands were talking thus, what would be said when the announcement of postponement was made? Yet I knew Oriental statesmen were prolific in excuses, and I doubted not for one moment Oranoff's ability to meet the extremity. Some reason would be raked up which could quiet the people. The King might be taken ill; we had him, and it surely would be no task to arrange some hitch. The soothsayers could be bribed (if there were any roubles left!) to put the affair off.

Such were my thoughts as my pony stalked unsteadily over the stones of the gate and into the wide avenue lying white beneath the moon. It was crowded, as though another Spring rice famine was on the land and had brought a dozen Coxey's armies to Keinning; yet this was not a famine crowd, for it was well dressed and not very drunk. The merchants in their booths, and the candy boys with their trays strapped to their backs were doing a big business. How they would growl when this celebration was postponed!

I felt my pony growing weaker, and at last the poor thing stopped and then sank slowly

KEINNING

upon the ground. Kepneff's servant caught me in his arms, and tried to lift me to his own horse. I asked him to support me while I attempted to walk to the Legation, the blaze of its lights making it seem now but a short distance away. So we went forward, but as I gazed unsteadily upon the blur of lights, my strength left me, poor swimmer that I was, just as I neared the river shore! My companion dragged me along to the Legation gate where the Cossack guard came to his assistance. From there they took me in the first door, which happened to be the anteroom of the Throne Room where the new Sarcophagus stood awaiting the body that I did not bring. Here I revived and asked to be taken to my own room. With my last bit of strength I closed the lid of the Sarcophagus that no one might know that I had failed in my errand. Then I sank on a Cossack's shoulder and let go of everything.

When I became myself I was in my own bed, a soft hand on my brow; my boy Pak was standing beside Dulcine, and in a chair pulled up before the fire Dejneff was sprawled out, his face tilted dejectedly over into his great

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

beard. Nothing could have brought me more quickly to my senses than that picture of Dejneff, and I closed my eyes and went to work on the miserable problem now confronting me.

I knew and felt at the time that I should have called Dejneff and Oranoff to me and made a clean breast of everything, but as fate would have it I had conceived a sort of a plan which to my dazed brain bade fair to save me from making a confession. I would go to the King and tell him that Ling and Li had perished in the fire which consumed the Temple of Ching-ling, and that I, being only an aide, had not been allowed to take the Queen's body from Lynx Island, — the order Li carried from the King being lost with him. By this ruse the funeral would be postponed at least until another messenger was sent to Lynx Island for the corpse; in the meantime new and better plans could be made.

So I lay quiet under the stroking of that kind hand until Dejneff got up and went unsteadily out of the room. Then I pretended to return to consciousness and attempted to sit up. I was surprised at my success; evidently

KEINNING

the nourishment given me was of no weak character.

“Lie down, Robert,” Dulcine said softly; “you are ill; the doctor is coming soon.”

“I must not be ill,” I blurted out. “Where is Colonel Oranoff?”

“At Audience with the King—” Dulcine hesitated, and then added reluctantly, “who has just sent for you.”

“Good,” I said with a spirit I did not possess, “I must go at once,”—before the doctor comes, I thought to myself.

For a moment there was silence; then, unmindful of the servants, Dulcine seized my hands:

“Tell me first, Robert dear, have you brought it,—the Queen’s body?”

I dreaded to begin my lying rôle, and especially with this girl I loved, but I could see no happier alternative. Her face was pale, and I could see that some one had been suffering beside myself. “The storm has been terrible, and we were afraid the ‘Dulcette’ might be destroyed with all it contained,” she added.

This was a new turn to the black lane I was

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

traveling, but I gave the same answer that had formed upon my lips.

"We came overland, Dulcine." A great, happy light broke over the girl's face, and I saw she believed I had placed the Queen's body in the new Sarcophagus Colonel Oranoff had prepared for it. I ached to tell her the truth, but I withheld it and let her bury her face in my hands a moment for very joy.

When she left the room I got up sick at heart, and went over to the chair Dejneff had left, and sent Pak for a decanter of wine, from which I drank and drank desperately. I did not know how weak I was, nor how much liquor Dejneff had poured into me before.

Then I asked to be taken to the King.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ONE LIE I NEVER TOLD

THE great room was brilliantly lighted. At its end, on that mottled throne, sat the King of Quelparte, his Cabinet ranged before him in an extended semi-circle. On his left at a small table sat Prince Ting, the Prime Minister. Behind Prince Ting stood a group of Household Ministers. On the King's right Colonel Oranoff was seated at the head of a long table, his head in his hands, his elbows thrust characteristically into a mass of papers and maps. To him my swimming eyes went quickly and there they rested long.

M. Grouchy, the Russian Minister to Quelparte, was standing midway down the table addressing "the Throne" amid cigarette rings which the King of Quelparte could blow as well as any wise man. The members of the Cabinet were leaning forward from their chairs in varying picturesque attitudes, intently listening to the address.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“Within two days,” M. Grouchy was saying, “this decree of your great and noble King will be given to the people of Quelparte through the government ‘Gazette.’ It is an auspicious time. The nation is enjoying a memorable holiday, and the happiness they must feel at coming at last under the protecting arm of the Czar of all the Russias will dispel in part the gloom which they feel at the burial of their beloved Queen.”

As Grouchy proceeded, my eyes were still on Oranoff. He sat quiet as a shadow while his underling spoke as he had directed, expanding on the benefits to accrue to Quelparte from Russian rule; Oranoff never did his own talking,—he attended to the rest, with others to do that for him.

“Russia has been the boon of Asia and will be all that and more for Quelparte. But we do not desire,” the trickster went on, “to hold Quelparte to any agreement to which the people of the country may in the least object. As you know, this agreement can be terminated at any time by either government. It will be the purpose of my government to study, during the following days, the sentiment

ONE LIE I NEVER TOLD

of the people of Quelparte, and if it is found that an alliance with Russia such as we have signed to-night is displeasing to the people of Quelparte, Russia will immediately withdraw from the agreement and remove the officials whom your King has appointed to high office."

With such words M. Grouchy paved the way to throw Quelparte over to Japan when the lease of Port Arthur was announced.

I had entered the room without attracting attention, and I stood by the door listening to the Russian's words. It was clear that the news brought by my Cossacks had put all in good cheer, and that the funeral was to come off as proposed, beginning day after to-morrow. I had been blinded by the brilliant light in the room, and the scene I have described came to me slowly, and no other picture has stayed with me — save one — so perfect in detail and color. Totally unbalanced as I must have been by fatigue, and desperately drugged with wine, I remember turning from the bright light and wishing that I could, after all, tell Ivan Oranoff the truth. But even as I reached helplessly to the wall for support, the hilt of my

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

sword went clanging against it and every face in the room looked my way.

I believe the King himself recognized me first or at least saw me first; he arose and pointed the fire-tipped end of his cigarette toward me. The Cabinet arose, and M. Grouchy ceased his remarks. Of these things I am a little uncertain, but I am not at all uncertain as to Colonel Oranoff. I knew well enough I was late — later than I should have been without telegraphing him the reason for my delay at such a time as this. I also knew that my report should have been to him, not to the Cabinet or the King. The man drew himself slowly to his feet and leaned over the table upon his hands heavily as I came swaying through the long room.

I had not dressed for the occasion, and my bedraggled appearance and unsteady deportment evidently added luster to the heroic rôle I had suddenly chosen to assume. The King put his cigarette in his mouth and began puffing and clapping his hands. His nobles, mimicking him in everything on peril of their lives, took the cue and applauded me vociferously, and I staggered on to the foot of that "Throne"

ONE LIE I NEVER TOLD

(I could not have gone another yard for the King's crown), receiving an ovation rather than the thrashing I deserved.

"The Temple of Ching-ling has been destroyed, I hear," said the King, diplomatically. Then he laughed and drew at his cigarette.

"Yes, Sire," I answered, glad to find I could talk if I could not walk, "the Temple of Ching-ling has been destroyed." Then I added, eager to bolster up my string of lies with one undoubted truth, "It was burned to the ground and lies in ashes."

"Ah," sighed the King of Quelparte, with admirable affectation; and then, just as I was opening my mouth, he turned to Prince Ting (evidently not wishing his Cabinet should guess that Lynx Island was to pass into the hands of the Russians), saying:

"Orders must be issued to all our sacred temples regarding the danger from fires and the removal of all combustibles to a safe distance, and let it be known that no temple destroyed by accidental fire shall ever be rebuilt."

The wine on my empty stomach was at once my friend and my foe. It gave me strength, especially of sight! I felt Oranoff's eyes on

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

my back, and I broke out for fear I could not speak at all soon:

“General Ling was burned with the Temple.”

“Ling lost,” echoed the King, holding his head sideways to avoid the smoke of his cigarette. “Faithful Ling; he was such a man as kings need — sometimes.” He leered significantly toward Oranoff as he said the words. This King was no novice and no fool, and he had a pretty wit all his own.

“He has a son in the army, Sire,” I said, keeping my promise to old Ling most unexpectedly, “as faithful as his father; I pray you to remember him.” The King instantly turned to Prince Ting and said:

“Appoint Kim Ling to his father’s former office as Secret Guardian of the Queen.”

I felt Oranoff’s eyes burning two holes in my back and I hurried on with my wretched story, for, as the King lived, I now had to hold one eye shut to keep from seeing two of him.

And I knew the strength the liquor gave me was all the strength I had.

“Colonel Li was lost too,” I murmured, holding desperately to the carpet to keep from falling off the floor.



Winfield S. Lukens.

ONE LIE I NEVER TOLD

“Li lost!” spit out the King of Quelparte, suddenly; this affected him. “It must have been a sudden fire.”

“It was, Sire, God knows it was sudden, but —” and here the King broke in again with another gay laugh and cut off the words which were on my parched lips.

I could not hold to the carpet any longer, and so with a happy sigh I let go and went out into space.

“Accidental fires are sudden sometimes,” I heard the King laugh. But I was too far away now to answer. I heard much cheering, which sounded at a great distance, but I could move neither hand nor foot nor lip to tell either the truth or any falsehood.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A NEW PROGRAM

IF it seemed that I was unconscious, I was not. I knew well enough when I was tenderly gathered up out of space and borne to my bed again, and I knew when the doctor came. He was a good, faithful man with a beard like Dejneff's and a gentle voice. I heard, some time before, that all the food the King had eaten for months after the murder of the Queen, when he feared that Tuen was attempting to poison him, was prepared by this man's hands. The medicine he prepared was administered by my faithful nurse Dulcine, who came as soon as I had been put to bed. The medicine made my head stop ringing and I lay still thinking, for I could not sleep.

Dulcine was humming the song of the Widowed Wild Goose. After a time Dejneff sauntered in again and flung himself down into his chair. Soon he too was humming the song, and I wondered if Dulcine had told him that

A NEW PROGRAM

I had put the Queen's body in the Sarcophagus. As soon now as I could I was determined to tell Dulcine the whole truth. But I decided to wait until Dejneff was out of hearing.

Yet as I waited another step sounded at my bedside and I knew Colonel Oranoff had come from the King.

"What does all this mean?" he said without a single word of introduction. His voice was low and tense. Coward that I was, I did not move, and Dulcine answered simply:

"I do not know, father; it was a hard trip to Keinning."

"Did he swim to Tsi?" was Oranoff's reply, and the words were almost a groan; "the 'Dulcette' did not bring him."

"No, he did not swim to Tsi," answered the girl, proudly; "he came overland."

"And the Queen's body?" the man cried out; "did he drag it over the mountains behind him?" I did not blame the man for his sarcasm; my silence at such a crisis had been cruel.

"The Queen's body," said Dulcine Oranoff, composedly, "is where it belongs — in the new Sarcophagus."

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Oranoff repeated those startling words like a man in a dream; then he asked, "Do I understand you, Dulcine?" She did not reply, and he spoke again as if the room were empty. "He brought it overland because the little boat I sent could not weather the gale."

What I had passed through in the last week was nothing to this, — was nothing beside the stinging of those gentle words which were so much to my credit. When the man went out of the room, a head sank on the pillow beside my own and the bed trembled with a woman's sobs. My own eyes were wet, and I fairly trembled as the realization of my position came over me. It was a positive relief when Dulcine pressed her face in my hands and arose and left the room.

From the moment she had uttered those words to Colonel Oranoff my course was clear. I had done my best to bring the Queen's body. Failing, I had then done my best to send an explanation and have the funeral postponed. Failing here also, I had come as fast as human strength permitted to arrange at the last moment for a postponement of the pageant. I had lied outrageously to Dulcine, never think-

A NEW PROGRAM

ing that the lie would be passed on. But now, since every one thought the Queen was safely in the Sarcophagus prepared for her—let them go on with their parade and show!

Who would know the difference? No one but myself knew that the body had been destroyed, save only the wretches who destroyed it. I had been taken first to the anteroom where the Sarcophagus was, and with my own hands I had closed its golden lid. The very daring of it was the salvation of the plot. The faster I thought, the more reasonable it all seemed. The body was lost beyond all recovery, and, after all, what would delay or postponement accomplish? Nothing, perhaps, unless the terrible *dénouement* that there was no Queen to bury!

Then, too, the Russian protectorate was at stake. Nothing would be surer than the failure of Oranoff's *coup* if the loss of the Queen's body became known.

The pageant must go on!

Then I remembered Tuen, and I clambered out of bed at the thought and went striding up and down the room,—a human ship in distress! But I laughed as I went and clinched

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

my fists again, even as I did in my berth on the "Dulcette." This would be balking the devils that checkmated me that night on Lynx Island, — to have the funeral go on, Queen's body or no Queen's body! And what could they do? Spread wild rumors, no doubt, but how could they prove them? Who would dare question, by force, the burden of the royal catafalque? Or who would propose to examine the contents of the royal bier? These things were out of the question.

Yet there were risks, — I did not try to persuade myself otherwise, — but they were inconsiderable to risking the possible failure of the Russian *coup* in Quelparte and perhaps a more terrible exposé which might come with delay. A delay would lend a bad color to any rumor Tuen's agents might circulate.

As for an attack on the funeral procession itself, I would trust Dejneff to take care of that! The whole army was to surround the bier, and if such an attack were made and were successful, the Sarcophagus would be found empty and it would be no task to have it understood that the body had been carried in the royal palanquin or in the casket prepared for

A NEW PROGRAM

the memorial tablets — through fear of just such an attack!

After a time I fell back on my bed satisfied that the ruse would hold good. In a maze of dire extremities a man often falls upon some happier alternative than he expected and finds a relief almost approaching joy. Having scanned the future as keenly as lay in my power, I saw no material objection to letting the game go on as the hands stood.

While I could not sleep I lay resting on my bed in a better mood than I had known for many hours.

Pak sat without my door, for I had not been sure before now that I would not need him. I longed for a word with some one, and so I talked a little with him before I sent him away.

“No, I am not very sick,” I replied to his kindly interrogation; “I don’t know just what is the matter with me. Were you never sick and could not tell where?”

“You ought to have Hu Mok come and see you, then,” said Pak.

“Hu Mok?” I replied. “Who is Hu Mok, Pak?”

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“He is a doctor who tells where people are sick when they don't know themselves.”

Pak was not failing me, and I plied my questions concerning Hu Mok.

“He is a very wise doctor,” Pak explained, “who lives near Keinning; he is so wise that his eyebrows grow very long, longer even than Captain Dejneff's long shave.”

“Longer than Dejneff's what?” I asked. Pak was very sharp at picking up English words, but sometimes he made an odd mistake.

“Longer than Dejneff's shave,” he repeated, holding his hand out from his chin.

“You mean beard, Pak; shave means to cut off a beard.” Japanese barbers came to the Legation each day to treat those of us who desired their services. Pak had caught the wrong word again. But my laughter did not discompose him as it did when he was first in my service, and he continued:

“Yes, Hu Mok is very wise, and he braids his eyebrows and hangs the braids over his ears.”

“How does he tell what's the matter with people, Pak?”

“With his magic stone; one day Hu Mok went away from home and when he came

A NEW PROGRAM

back the day after he brought a stone so bright that you could looking-glass it."

"Use it as a looking-glass, Pak."

"Yes, you could see yourself in it; when any one is sick, Hu Mok comes and puts the stone on them and pretty soon he can tell where they are sick and what is the matter."

"Then I don't want Hu Mok, Pak," I replied firmly and with great truth, "for I don't want Hu Mok or any one to see inside of me now."

As Pak made ready to leave I thought on Hu Mok and wondered if the X-ray doctor of Quelparte had anticipated the latest discovery of our western scientists!

I found myself stronger in the morning, but I could do no more, according to that kindly doctor who seemed to know more than I had admitted to him, than sit before my fire that day, and rest. Oranoff came early to my room and I fairly dreaded to look him in the face; yet I did so frankly as of old, wondering if he would lay all my nervousness to the charge of my fatigued condition. He was full of business, and after congratulating me warmly he went his way. Dulcine and several ladies of

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

the Legation begged admittance to the "hospital," and I found myself vaunted most uncomfortably as a hero for bringing the Queen's Sarcophagus overland in the little time allowed me. The party soon left for a long drive over the Imperial route to the Mausoleum to view the crowds and the mass of heathen bunting that buried the city now from gate to gate.

Thus the day passed slowly. I never seemed able to think as intently as I desired, and I remember that day distinctly from my impatience at being disturbed, though I was left alone for hours at a time. So, restless as a hunted thing, I fought a battle out with my fears before my fire, and by night I was wholly content with my course once more.

Dejneff lounged in before dinner and told me of the busy scenes of the day. My mind was intent on the night to come, and I asked pointedly what the people were saying of Tuen.

"Some say he will win at the end," Dejneff replied slowly, "but they'll miss their guess there. My troops are to surround the bier from the moment the King closes its lid until the great slab falls upon it. Tuen's lost so far, and he'll not win from Dejneff."

A NEW PROGRAM

I was on my feet in a moment, almost gasping.

“From the time the King does what, Dejneff?” I asked, trembling.

“The show starts out with the King closing the Sarcophagus in the Throne Room; he looks in it for a last time to identify the Queen and then shuts and seals it officially. That moment your troops will surround it and guard it until we reach the Tomb. But there’s the bell; can’t you come out to dinner, Martyn?”

I had gone over toward my bed while Dejneff told me these things, and stood there dazed; I was glad the room had not been lighted. Dejneff could not see me.

“No, old man,” I replied, “you go on; I believe I’m not hungry.”

When he was out of the room I fell upon the bed with a groan.

The King was to look into my empty casket!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DULCINE

THERE are times when we know a crisis has been passed, but it is rare that we know the exact moment of its passing.

As I look back from the end to the beginning of the story I remember plainly — aye, best of all — the moment when Dulcine Oranoff raised her proud head and repeated to her father my desperate lie. It was impossible for the girl to think I had failed. Then, where else could the Queen's body be but in the casket prepared for it?

I am very far from sorry that my eyes were not firmly closed when Dulcine uttered those thrilling words, for if I have one picture of her more worthy of the admiration of the curious than another, it is that of the lithe, trim girl fingering the lace of my pillow as she looked straight over me into her father's eyes and told him I had done the task I had miserably failed to do. It is, withal, a somber picture, for

DULCINE

Dulcine was her mother's girl in face and figure, and her dress that night was dark as the twilight beneath her lashes or the midnight of her hair.

It is a picture portraying not only a girl of grace and beauty, but a woman of magnetic power, a woman to dare and do, and make others like herself. I would have wondered that Colonel Oranoff could take those startling words at full face value, had I not seen the firm, true lips, the steadfast eyes of the one who uttered them and believed them to be true. Seeing this, I wondered not that the man turned upon his heel without a word, as though he had just looked into the very Sarcophagus itself.

But the effect of the girl's words and all the depth of their deceit was even more marked upon the man who lay on the bed before her. And as I looked covertly upward for the brief second during which the film of my memory was exposed to this picture, I became thrilled until every unstrung nerve throbbed and then was steeled. I saw more clearly than before our terrible plight, and saw my duty clearer too. Yet through the vision there came courage and to spare!

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

But now — when I was in too deep to get out, when it was too late even to consider owning up to the truth — I found that the King himself must look into that empty casket and close with his own thin hand its golden lid.

I met this new shock with far greater courage than any preceding one; now I was driven only one dye deeper; a form resembling a human body must meet the King's eyes!

I arose, smiling grimly, from the bed upon which I had fallen with a groan. There was something ridiculous in this resolution which was the logical end of my deception, and the reckless daring of it fascinated me.

“There's but a step between the sublime and the ridiculous,” I quoted soberly as I dressed for dinner; “I shall diminish that distance by half before morning.” My shoulder was very lame, but otherwise I felt able to resume my accustomed place in the life of the Legation. At any rate, I knew that my new plans would necessitate my going out; I was only preparing for emergencies.

The ladies had not returned from their sight-seeing, and I was spared playing hero; I made way with the courses as rapidly as practicable

DULCINE

against their return. But I did not leave the room without first placing a note under Dulcine's ring, encouraging one of the table-boys with a coin to see that she did not miss it. I also left word with Dejneff that I would be ready for duty as usual in the morning. I saw he was not sorry to be able to depend upon me to command the troops around the bier; for he was to march with the King, and Andorph was to guard the Mausoleum throughout the night and day. I also saw that Dejneff would not cry either when this pageant was over safely!

Then I went out into the night and made my way to the Bell House, to the great booths where the best of native garments were for sale, taking Pak for a guide and interpreter. I told him on the way what I wanted.

Soon we were being shown a large assortment of fine silk outer garments worn by the women of Quelparte. Pak's eyes glistened as the great pieces of silk were thrown by the cunning hand of the merchant before our eyes. I of course knew nothing of them, not even their quality, but as this was the only thing about which I cared I asked Pak concerning it.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

"He says they are good enough to bury the Queen in," replied Pak, simply, after a word or two with the merchant.

That was as good as I wanted.

Once more in my room I dismissed Pak with a stern injunction as to secrecy and enough silver to make him quite the reverse. Then I turned eagerly to my task.

Now, it is trite beyond hope of excuse to remark that some things seem difficult near by which, at a distance and off-hand, seem exceedingly easy. I remember with what force this conclusion was impressed upon me that night at the Russian Legation in Quelparte, where I attempted to carry out my resolution of making a counterfeit queen to replace the real Queen that I had lost on Lynx Island.

For a time I walked around my bed, which was loaded with the silks Pak had deposited there at my order. Then I sat down and pawed them over gingerly, while the truth of the aforementioned observation came home to me with added emphasis. Now and then I "got together," to use a phrase more expressive to some than to others, and made a fresh start; but everything I got my hands on next seemed

DULCINE

the most absurdly impossible thing to begin with.

Finally I despaired of doing anything with my material *en masse*, when the creditable idea occurred to me to sort out the articles and hang them where I could get a more comprehensive notion of their shape and size; and soon chairs, bed-posts, tables, pictures, and mantel were alive with the fantastic robes of a wealthy Quelpartienne.

It looked as though I was drying a "big week's washing." I locked the door, and sat down in the one empty chair and lit a cigarette.

"Peradventure these were the silks of the women of mine own country," I soliloquized grimly, "I might make some progress," and I gazed about helplessly enough; yet I knew that any good, single man of sense would have bolted the whole thing even then. But I could not bolt, and the danger of my situation came suddenly home to me as I looked mechanically at my watch and found the evening was far gone. How fast the hours were speeding!

Aroused now to my task with freshening fear, I was seized with the hallucination that a

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

subdivision of my stock would help unravel the mystery, and I strode frantically up and down to select, at first, the smaller garments. But where were they? The silk creation on the bed would have covered a span of horses, and the gauze scarf or fish-net or what-not that trailed over my dresser, some chairs, and a table, would have hidden two French windows. If I found anything of lesser dimensions, I had no sooner got it under control than I discovered it was connected by a tail or silk isthmus to some greater affair near by that might have been an awning over a ship's deck. Nor was it easier to get free of these things than to get hold of them, for when I had lain one down and gone elsewhere in my search, I found the last two things I had looked at were still following me about familiarly enough. The texture of this collection of Quelpartienne clothing may have been all I have since heard it was and all that its cost suggested, but this only served to bewilder me the more that night.

And so I floundered up and down in that sea of Quelpartienne *lingerie* which, by midnight, was running high in that wild room,

DULCINE

when a low knock at my door brought a frightened sigh of relief to my lips. With one despairing glance about me I broke over to the door and threw it open wide. I had made no progress whatever, and the night was half spent; in a doubly serious sense I needed Dulcine now.

In walked Colonel Oranoff.

I gasped in dismay while those serious eyes ran over that disordered room, lingering with awkward, questioning glance on each piece of Quelpartienne finery.

“Has the hospital become an asylum?” Oranoff asked quietly. I laughed and gave some answer which he can remember better than I. Then I went to him with the inspiration which had suddenly come to my distracted brain. I dared not be silent one moment before this man, and I risked everything by delivering myself earnestly of the following impromptu explanation:

“Colonel Oranoff,” I said, in a low voice, “you know our great danger is an attack by Tuen’s men upon the funeral procession. I have spent the day planning to frustrate the attack if made. My plan is to place a counter-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

feit body in the Sarcophagus and put the real body in the casket prepared for the memorial tablets. The army will surround the Sarcophagus, and if that is harmed the Queen's body will still be safe."

Even as I spoke I wondered if, after all, Colonel Oranoff had not gone to the Throne Room to prove for himself the miraculous truth Dulcine had told him. But if he had, he had let the matter pass, and I was sure either he was deceived or had chosen to let me play out the farce to which I had so desperately resorted at the eleventh hour.

There are times when the best of men pass back and forth a black lie knowingly, and act toward each other as though it were the truth; might not this sober man have guessed even from the first my lying rôle, and yet determined to trust me and let me play it out? Such were my thoughts as I spoke and as the man looked at me intently yet kindly when I had finished.

"That is a good plan, Robert," he said, after a moment's thought; then he added poignantly, "But you will need Dulcine in this. I will call her and remain in the smoking-room until you are done." He did not say that he

DULCINE

knew I expected Dulcine; he did not hint that he had seen Dulcine. Yet he paved the way easily for our meeting.

There were tears of gratitude in my aching eyes as he passed me to go out, and I found his hand in the skirts of his coat and wrung it silently. The pressure he in turn gave me brought confidence and determination.

Dulcine came in almost as her father passed out, and stood for a moment in blank astonishment within that littered room. Without a word (my throat suddenly became parched) I placed a chair before the fire and drew away such garments as lay near it. The girl did not move. I then went to her unmindful of the stolid Cossack who had followed her in, and took her hand.

Then I saw she was already in tears, and I quickly found they were hot and running fast.

“Robert, dear,” she said, under my trembling caresses, “tell me what it is. There is nothing I would not do to help you.”

I drew her to the chair. Each moment since Dulcine entered my door I had felt guiltier than ever before. I had failed everywhere, and I seemed to be able to do naught but force the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

girl whom I loved to bear the burden of my failure. Now, when the moment came for me to make a clean breast of it all, my throat seemed paralyzed.

Yet there in the firelight I told it all, — God helping me, — all, the whole story, from the tiger-skin throne where we bade each other good-bye to the holocaust on Lynx Island, and back again to the yellow throne where I had honestly attempted to tell the King a little of the truth. Now and then Dulcine started, frightened; at times she clung to me in utter fear, and again she buried her face in her hands. But at the end she grew wondrously calm.

We sat then in silence, and I knew she had gone from the gloomy past to the dark future, and so I outlined briefly the ruse I had conceived. The plan was as fascinating as the recklessness of its deceit. My words fairly raised the girl to her feet. Trembling hand and foot, Dulcine looked at the fire, at me, and then, like a guilty person, around the dimly lighted room. We both looked into the fire and then steadily into each other's eyes. I am sure the same thoughts passed through our

DULCINE

minds. To-night (for it was the nineteenth, the booming of the Great Bell had sounded the midnight hour) the King would look upon his Queen for the last time, as the Sarcophagus lay in state on the great catafalque in the Throne Room.

“It is all too late now to prevent or postpone,” I went on impetuously; “for the sake of the Russian protectorate about to be announced in the morning, for the sake of Colonel Oranoff, whose reputation is at stake, for the sake of my own name and honor, the Imperial Funeral must go on *over a counterfeit body!*”

I sat down in a chair, my head in my hands. Dulcine stood quiet by herself a moment. Finally she whispered:

“Robert, you are right. It must all go on without quibble. You have done your full duty, now let me do mine. I know a woman who will play this part for us.”

This took me utterly by surprise. And yet the girl was right. After those hours of struggling it was plain that my dummy queen would be too unreal. Dulcine misunderstood my silence.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“You can trust me, Robert?”

It was not lack of trust, God knew, that made me hesitate.

“You can embalm the body?”

“Apparently.”

“You know a woman you can trust?”

“I do.”

“Who would dare to die, if necessary, for us?”

“Yes.”

“You can have the antechamber cleared and place her in the Sarcophagus?”

The girl steadied her eyes into the fireplace and then answered slowly, “You can do that for me, Robert, and better than I.”

Then I paused to think. Dulcine found questions to ask in her turn.

“And where would the woman be freed?”

“At the Altar of Spices,” I answered, after a moment’s thought. “At three taps of my scabbard on the Sarcophagus let her raise the lid within, and I will slide the cover. Until then let her move not.”

“At five o’clock the body will be lying at the end of the hall leading to the antechamber of the Throne Room, behind the curtains

DULCINE

of the alcove. You will place it where it belongs.”

I offered Dulcine the chair again, and she took it, and we sat many minutes in silence, thinking.

Anon we spoke of dangerous possibilities and discussed them rapidly in low tones. I asked Dulcine once more of her purpose, and again she gently chided my lack of faith in her, and I said no more. I then told her that my own command would guard the bier on the long journey to the Mausoleum. More than once the possibility of her being betrayed occurred to me, and I could not help saying:

“If your woman plays us false?” And I spoke slowly, for I hoped the girl would interrupt me.

“Kill her where she lies!” Dulcine whispered, trembling. Evidently the thought of my taking the woman’s life overcame the girl, for she hid her face on my shoulder. Then she admitted it was possible that under the terrible strain an involuntary movement might be detected and prove disastrous. But when she arose presently, there was no sign of tears in her dark, steadfast eyes. I kissed her good-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

night; but then she did not go. All our happiness, even our very lives, it seemed, hung in a trembling balance. Dulcine was to join a house-party at the British Legation in the morning, and attend the funeral with the Legation ladies. I knew I might never see her again, for accidents happen in desperate games.

“When we meet again —” I said. But I could not complete what I had begun. A great gulf seemed to yawn between us already.

“We will never part, Robert.”

At last I took her arms from my neck, for she clung to me tenderly — as though she were praying. Thank God for the tenderness of that farewell!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AN EARLY MORNING'S TASK

ONE by one Dulcine Oranoff placed upon her arm the scattered pieces of raiment that lay about my room, and at last swept bravely through the curtains which the Cossack sentry held aside for her.

That was a picture worth remembering! A lithe, comely girl in black, her arms laden with a Quelpartienne's filmy white wardrobe, going frankly and swiftly to that task she had impetuously struck out for herself. I let her go willingly, though aching yet that my failure had brought her this wild night's work. Mind, I never once doubted Dulcine Oranoff's ability or daring; I only regretted that things had come to such a wretched pass. I knew she would find her woman (I made a shrewd guess as to which servant it was) and I knew the woman would surely play the part. But I knew, too, that Dulcine would be in terror for

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

forty hours until I had freed the woman at the Altar of Spices.

Keyed up to the wild business of the night, I could not sleep, and no sooner had the orders of the day been issued than I sent for mine. For a long time I studied them and the general proclamation which was sent with them touching the pageant of the night. It was all as I hoped: Dejneff had ordered me with the best troops to guard, through the whole day, the main entrance of the King's wing, and to close in about the Sarcophagus when it was brought from the Throne Room. Dejneff was in general command, and rode near the King. Andorph was at the Mausoleum.

Thus I killed an hour in living over the day to come; then I got into my uniform, and calling a boy who could speak English I went out into the night which was, even now, growing pale at the thought of day.

I shall hereinafter try the reader's patience with the description of Keinning on the night of the Imperial Funeral; therefore I will make shorter work with the city as I saw it now, — awaiting, with fevered dreams, the great day now dawning. Yet it is no less worthy his

AN EARLY MORNING'S TASK

attention. The city slept, and yet did not sleep. The braying of asses tied about the new palace, where the King's Cabinet was in session, kept that portion of the city awake; the Great Bell had aroused all who slept at the center of the city with its booming at midnight, and no one found his rest again; at all the gates the cantering hoofs of horses and the tread of the many weary sandaled feet of belated pilgrims kept those portions astir; there were thousands now in Keinning who could not find room nor roof. These sat and smoked and slept wherever and whenever they could, — getting up in their shaggy white garments from an hundred unexpected places, and wandering aimlessly out and back again. In passing only to the Barracks I met scores walking to and fro, seeking protected corners in which to lie, their arms shoved well up into their loose sleeves, — the Quelpartien method of keeping warm. If any of these (save the proportion who were pleasantly drunk) were awake, it was the unfortunates who not infrequently collided and jammed into each other's throats the long pipes they smoked. One poor inebriate we passed had fallen on a doorway

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

while tacking around a corner and driven his two-foot pipe clean through the back of his neck. At another house a countryman had fallen asleep on a doorstep; as we came by, a wandering fellow-rustic pulled him gently from the haunted threshold upon the ground beside it — where the Devil could not “sting him in his dreams,” according to my boy.

Near the little gate we passed the belated cavalcade of the Governor of Chal-dong, who had arrived the evening before. This worthy Governor was notorious for a rapid rise to his place of prominence, the secret of which my boy Kell told me as we passed on down the wide avenue.

When a mere lad the Governor of Chal-dong determined to leave his home in the little mountain village where his parents lived, and go to the capital and take the examinations for a government position.

The boy studied as he journeyed, scarcely looking about him until he reached the Great Buddha, — an immense stone image of great height. Upon the Idol's head, which towered into the skies, he saw the famous pear-tree, and the one fine pear upon it which the youth

AN EARLY MORNING'S TASK

of his land had vainly striven to secure for years and generations.

As the boy scanned the ragged stone side of the Idol's jaws and cheeks, and the precipice of the straight forehead (at the base of which hundreds had been killed), he wondered that no one had endeavored to find another course to the top of the head. The path around the ear to the base of the precipice of the forehead was deeply worn — but that precipice had never been scaled.

As Song Do (for such was the lad's name) sat looking upward, thinking of the high position in the Government the first possessor of the pear was prophesied to reach, his eyes rested with fascinating intentness upon the great black gorges of the Idol's nose. Had no one sought a passageway to the head through those great caverns? The idea was soon burning Song Do's brain, and, eating the dried fruit he carried, and otherwise lightening himself by throwing off his flowing white cloak, he was soon threading with feverish haste the worn path which led to the steep ascent up the Idol's side.

It was like climbing the steepest hillside in

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

his native mountains, and the muscles hardened by mountain-climbing through all the years of his boyhood were now put to their stiffest task. Large clusters of bushes were growing wherever there had been earth enough to catch and nourish wind-strewn seeds. Those nearest the path were worn by the hands of thousands of aspirants as high in hope and as excited by glowing dreams as Sang Do. Then he stopped to rest and look down; the Image had now lost its accustomed figure, and from his high perch the boy could identify no feature save only the two great caverns of the nose above him. On these he kept his eyes, and, when the great path turned away from them, he left it and began to pick out a new and dangerous course.

Thus he approached slowly into the dark cave on the right. Here he found the stone sides were not smooth, as he feared they might be, but rough and as easy to mount as the sides of the Image without. And when he stopped a moment to rest, he looked upward and thought he saw a dim light, as though there actually existed an opening to the top of the head! This awoke all his tired muscles and

AN EARLY MORNING'S TASK

on he scrambled, up through toward the light. Then suddenly a terrific wind burst through the gorge carrying poor Song Do with it. His climbing in the nose had made the great stone god sneeze!

But when the bruised lad came to consciousness, he found that the giant's sneeze had loosened the pear which lay in the road beside him; and the Quelpartiens still say, "It's a bad wind that blows not good for some one."

We had journeyed to the Great Bell and were now back at the Barracks, and, as I went forward to get the son of old Ling to help me, I thought of our own adage so like the Quelpartiens'; but of all the ill winds of which I knew, what wind blew good for me?

Once in the officers' quarters I ordered out my troops and sent for Kim Ling. A strong, sober youth of perhaps eight and twenty answered my summons. I was pleased even the moment I looked upon him. The quiet, grave face assured me that the father had not misjudged the son. I told the lad of his father's prayer to me, and of my words to the King. The youth drew from his breast an appointment he had just received. It was

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

that of Secret Chief Guardian of the Queen. He had been informed of his father's death and that he was raised to his father's position. Just what that position was he had not, as yet, been informed, though he was to begin duty the day of the funeral, — to-morrow. Meantime he was under my control and — as I admired his stolid presence and sober intelligence — I ordered him to accompany me. I needed aides then, if ever!

I marched my company to the Russian Legation, halting at the entrance of the King's wing. Entering, I ordered the antechamber of the Throne Room to be cleared. The Sarcophagus stood in the center of the darkened room. As the last eunuch disappeared, I led Lieutenant Kim to the curtained alcove.

There lay a figure in gray cerements, still and rigid, on the floor. Kim raised it and bore it to the antechamber and placed it in the Sarcophagus. Instantly the room became heavy with the sickening odor of spices and balsam. But as I turned away a figure in spotless white stood at my shoulder.

It was the King.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE KING

WHAT may have seemed to Whang-Su abject obeisance was little less than a swoon, for, though I sank to my knees, the action was wholly due to the weak condition of my nerves, suddenly unstrung at the sight of His Majesty.

It was a moment before the King spoke, but a moment long enough for me to determine to hold fast to the hand we were playing until I knew it had been exposed. I rose with clinched teeth and hands, even saluting with a closed fist. I placed one hand irreverently on the Sarcophagus, and I had a dagger in it. If our woman played her part poorly, through fright or hysteria, I was determined that her genuine corpse should grace the occasion!

The King's first word, spoken in that jaunty, leering tone with which I was familiar, dispelled my fears, and I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

"I slipped in, Captain Martyn, while the room was cleared. I like cleared rooms."

I wondered if the King of Quelparte was ever serious. "I was taking a turn before bedtime," he went on, after laughing covertly at his own jest, "and heard you were here. I want to thank you for ably completing Colonel Li's mission."

He was looking at the Sarcophagus now, and my hand curled tightly over the blade it obscured from view.

"But permit me to warn as well as thank. The announcement—"

He paused again until I nodded significantly.

"Yes, this announcement. It may make trouble. You should be on your guard. Certain so-called patriots, imbibing your Eastern ideas, pose as statesmen and breathe revolutionary sentiments. Usually they only breathe—sometimes more. But, more or less, be on your guard."

I bowed. For a moment there was utter silence in the room save for the pounding of my heart. What if the King should come to the Sarcophagus? I determined to block his way even at the risk of my life. I would say

THE KING

my orders were to let no one look upon the body, and that I should obey the order literally at any cost. Our game had cost too much to be broken up now. And the woman, maybe, had heard the conversation. I feared for her if she thought the King's own eyes were resting on her.

But instead of coming nearer, the King moved backward to the wall and beckoned me to his side.

For the first time in his life, for all I knew, Whang-Su's face was serious. He had produced his cigarette box and offered one to me and lighted his own from my plebeian match.

It was not until after two or three nervous puffs and a spasmodic inhalation that His Majesty spoke.

"You had no trouble?" he then asked swiftly.

"No, Sire," I answered.

The King looked long into my face and I thought I could see a pathetic thing there, — the questioning look of one to whom the real truth is never told. But I lied on right and left, and the King believed all I said. And his face grew more serious still. I thought

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

perhaps I could venture a probe or two, and so I too went straight to center by saying:

“You were fearing Prince Tuen; Colonel Li told me.”

He started and put his finger to his lips. But then he laughed and whispered:

“Yes; the old boar has been trying to find her,” and he jerked his thumb toward the golden casket. “But we fooled him,” added the King, with his only English oath and a chuckle.

Here was my chance.

“And would your Majesty fear the myth if he had destroyed the Queen’s body?”

“‘To hell with the myth,’ as Oranoff says—no; but the people would; oh, the people!” and the King held up his hands with an expression of pity I cannot describe.

Now, if I had thought Whang-Su would look thus upon the matter, I should certainly have told him the whole truth before undertaking the stupendous deception now on hand. But it was too late. I could have confessed failure and Tuen’s success, but I would not confess to this deceit. It would lay bare the whole string of my lies for one thing, and, after all, the King

THE KING

might fear the myth more than he had confessed. At any rate, we should have to deceive every one else and he was only one more. So I held my peace.

But the King was still serious and worried, as could be seen with half an eye. Again I jumped to a conclusion:

“You fear Tuen yet?” I suggested.

He blew a cloud of smoke, looked at me gravely through it, and nodded.

“I shall fear him until she” — blowing a straight column of smoke toward the Sarcophagus — “is in the tomb, and the great tablet has fallen upon her.”

“Faugh!” I exclaimed, “trust that to us, Sire; your best troops will surround the bier at all times. It is safer than ever it was at Lynx Island.” I could tell the truth — at times.

The name suggested other things of which he wished to ask.

“Ling and Li were both lost?” he asked suddenly.

“Both.” He looked at me searchingly now, and I was ready with more lies. “The fire was premature.”

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“H—ll,” exclaimed the King, smoking furiously; but then he laughed:

“Old Ling was a fox.”

That was all. With one glance at the Sarcophagus, he went to the door, where his bodyguard instantly surrounded him again.

Throughout the long day preparations for the event of the night went on. The city was crowded with countrymen, and troops were needed everywhere. Nobles and rural governors with their attendants kept pouring through the gates, with the throngs of commoner type from every portion of the kingdom, — all anticipating keenly the great event “treasured up in talk and dreams” since the death of their Queen. At sundown the Great Bell of Keinning would be struck for the initial ceremony in the Throne Room, when the King would close the glass lid and draw on the golden cover. Then the march to the tomb would begin.

I had hurried to the Japanese quarter of the city to quell, with a show of Cossacks, a slight irruption in the never-ending feud between the Japanese and the Quelpartiens, and was returning to the Barracks when Lieutenant Kim

THE KING

came to meet me with a note given him by a Legation boy who had hunted for me futilely all day.

I tore it open and read :

Remember the Altar of Spices and the Signal of the Scabbard. For a day I am Queen of Quelparte incognito.
D.

I sat utterly speechless on my horse. With Kim's own hands he had laid Dulcine Oranoff in the Queen's Sarcophagus !

Dazed, I cursed myself for a fool for thinking Dulcine would have intrusted such a secret to another. The degree in which she had deceived me testified to the degree in which I trusted her,— for what more is love than faith, after all ?

I hurried Kim to the Barracks to bring my troops, and I set off at a gallop for the Legation. I rode as though I could undo what had been done. Perhaps in my bewildered state of mind I believed I could. If so, the idle thought was suddenly banished from my mind by the booming of the Great Bell.

This, I had been told, was to be the signal for the King to close the Sarcophagus,— the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

initial ceremony of the Royal Funeral in the Throne Room.

Now every fear I had became tenfold fearful, and every danger seemed tenfold dangerous. Things which before had seemed trifles or had not been considered at all became gigantic with terrible possibilities. Was there sufficient breathing room in that glittering cell in which I had left Dulcine? Would not the journey of three miles to the tomb over those rough streets in a cart cause her to faint and then suffocate. If the King was still fearful of the dreaded Tuen, why was I so brave? Were there not possibilities of danger of which I had not dreamed? I had really taken little definite thought about freeing the woman at the Altar of Spices as I had so heedlessly promised. Would this be possible? Would the Sarcophagus be veiled from sight or be exposed to the view of all the people?

As I dashed forward, these and a hundred other questions drove the hot blood to my head.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A QUEEN INCOGNITO

BUT the beginning of the pageant, the crowds of people, the holiday skillfully prepared, came none too soon! The government "Gazette," published at noon, announced the agreement reached between the King of Quelparte and the Czar of Russia. It was diplomatically stated that, for reasons best understood by the people of Quelparte, Russia, out of the kindness of her great heart, had assumed, for the moment, at the request of the King of Quelparte and his Cabinet, the management of the financial, commercial, and military departments of the kingdom. This was done from two humanitarian motives: to take some of the burden from the King's shoulders, and to bring Quelparte into such a relation to Russia that she might share her civil and commercial advantages.

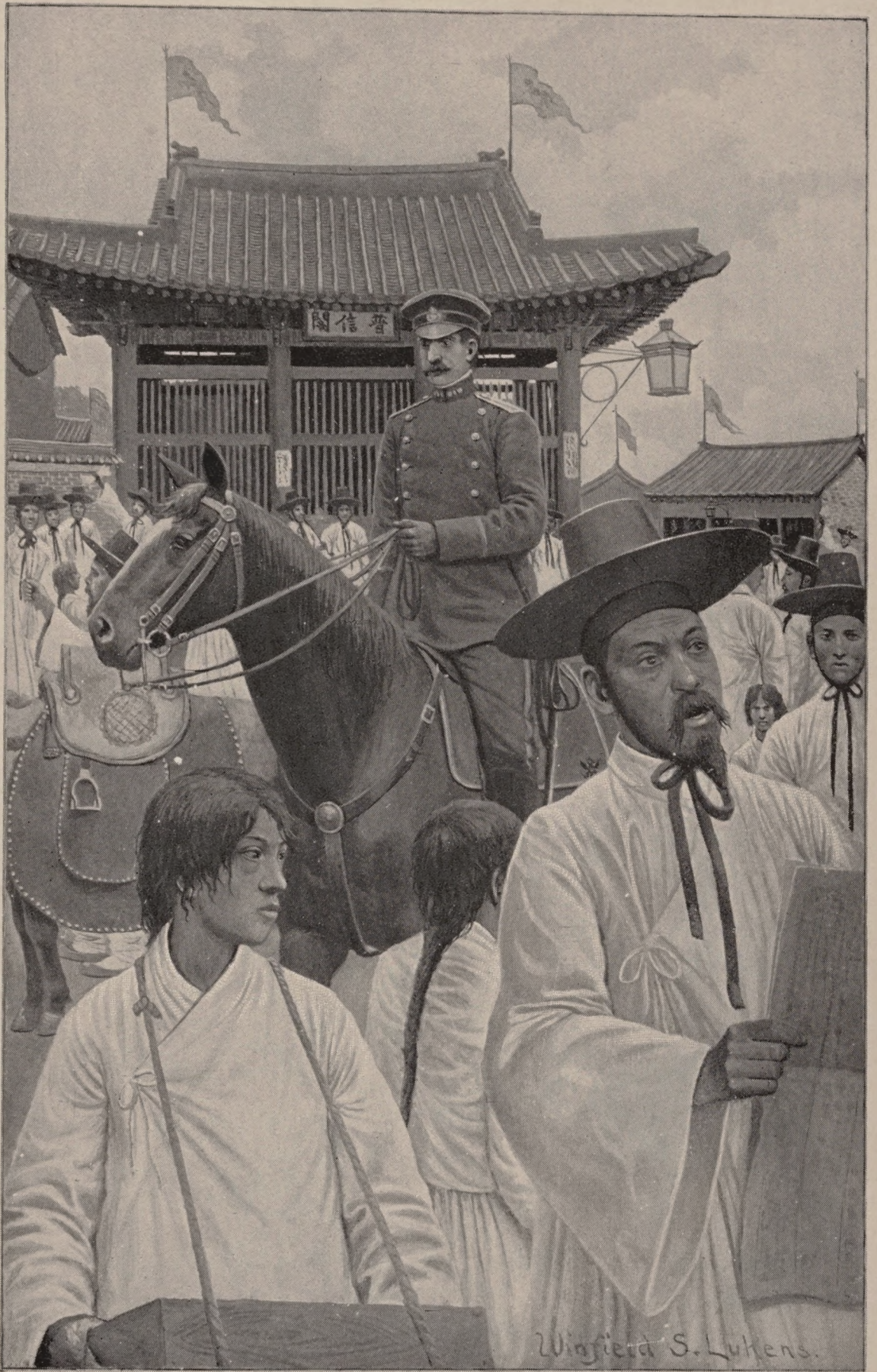
As I struggled on through the thoroughfares, these papers were now getting into general

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

circulation. Many who could not read were gathered at the corners of the streets, where men of commanding stature and voice read the proclamation aloud. Here and there single white-robed citizens were reading it apart by themselves. Some, whose angry faces showed plainly their bitterness, were crushing the white pages and growling aloud. Others were folding the sheets and placing them thoughtfully in their garments for future perusal and study. Inside the houses I heard loud talking, and now and again I could see through the black doorway a white-robed orator angrily issuing an invective before other inmates who sat silently on their heels listening.

But it was a nation's holiday, and the Russian ruse held good! Holiday clothes, an abundance of regalia and drink, and a national conscience drugged to indifference by centuries of oppression, — all these had their influence, and the patriot orators shouted in vain. They were as powerless as rats in a doomed ship which they can no more save than leave, — though running speedily toward a maelstrom of Russian despotism.

Behind the scenes all had been working well.



A QUEEN INCOGNITO

If friction showed anywhere, the "parts" were quickly lubricated with gold roubles and — well, the King of Quelparte was shaved.

But this funeral, which was the saving of the Russian plot, was now the wrecking of Tuen's. It made little difference whether Russia had Quelparte if the world did not know of it, for how then could it be thrown over when Port Arthur was taken? And it made little difference to the Chinese Prince whether the body of the murdered Queen was whole or in a thousand pieces if the world did not know of it, for how then would the myth come true? Could it be depended upon to accomplish its own deathly end without the fact of the destruction of the body being known?

I could not believe the Tuen agents would thus trust blindly to this ridiculous old wife's fable. I remembered the King's face, grave and stern; he was still fearing Tuen; and what could he fear but an interruption of the funeral procession? They certainly knew that no Queen's body was in Keinning; they knew the pageant was a stupendous hoax. Yet I did not believe they would interrupt the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

funeral procession, — since it would be heavily guarded, — but I felt sure that by some terrible means the crowd would be led to believe it was all a sham and demand a sight of the Queen's body. And Dulcine would better be thrown to Siberian wolves than be exposed to such a multitude maddened by the knowledge of this unholy deception.

My wild ideas galloped on through a host of fears and sickening doubts, even as my fine charger broke on through the great tides of white-robed humanity that blocked his way. If I could have confided the terrible danger to another, I might have borne my anxieties more easily; but I could not. If I could have reached one single clear conclusion concerning the next move of Tuen's people, I might have prepared to thwart them; but I could not. It all resolved itself now to a fight for Dulcine's life with an enemy whose power and tactics could not be guessed.

And the King's fears now increased my own an hundred-fold!

When I galloped up to the plaza before the Legation, I heard the steady tramp of my columns, hastened by Kim from the Barracks.

A QUEEN INCOGNITO

I knew my control over them. While the ammunition dealt to others might be blank cartridges, my men carried heavier shells. The men knew it and respected themselves and me the more. And we were to surround the bier on the march to the tomb.

We are apt to go to extremes in times of trying suspense. As I rode forward at the head of these hundreds of well-armed men who respected me, I tried to laugh at my fears.

We drew up in hollow square on the plaza before the King's wing. Within, the ante-chamber and the Throne Room were seething masses of servants, Royal eunuchs, military officers, palace officials, and aides, — all hurrying to and fro silently, but, to the eye, in utter confusion. Far up the room, before the Throne, stood the elaborate catafalque banked with lotus leaves and chrysanthemums. Upon it lay the magnificent Sarcophagus glittering and resplendent in the swinging lights. Around it moved three stalwart eunuchs in gorgeous apparel. To it my eyes ran, and on it they rested long.

It seemed as if I had not begun to realize Dulcine's situation before. As I looked over

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

the heads of the concourse of people upon her glittering cell I groaned in anguish. For twelve hours she had lain as one dead, without a crumb of food or a drop of water to moisten the parched lips. But the physical strain was nothing, perhaps, to the mental. With eyes bound over with flaxen bands she could not know whether she was plain in view or completely screened from the gaze of the people.

Was a woman ever so placed? A sneeze or cough might cost her a father's and a lover's reputation and doubtless her own life too. And yet I could have trusted no one else there as I could the dauntless, stern Dulcine. While the perspiration streamed from my face I sank on a chair, my head in my shaking hands, and prayed God to guide and guard.

A roll of drums brought me to my feet. The King was coming! Impulsively I began to press forward to be as near Dulcine as possible until my troops could surround her. Of the ceremony now begun I knew absolutely nothing more than Dulcine herself had told me, — that the King was to close the lid of the Sarcophagus. I wondered anxiously if the girl was right. Would His Majesty attempt to

A QUEEN INCOGNITO

identify the remains? This I doubted, since they were embalmed. No, that fear was groundless. But fear of Tuen hung over me like the sword of Damocles. I felt it might fall any moment at the raising of a finger.

My very audacity in approaching near the Sarcophagus was the best credential I could have had, and Dejneff's uniform now stood me in good stead, and I advanced unchallenged until I could survey the golden, flower-strewn casket.

It seemed strange that I had only given it a passing notice before. But how different it seemed, now that I knew what a precious charge it contained. It was a very long, deep case, beautifully ornamented with gold and mother-of-pearl inlaid. It measured, as I ran my eye over it, perhaps nine feet in length by four in depth, and was three feet wide; the great ornamented cover which the King was to draw on was hollow, and was at least two feet in height. Dulcine could even stand up in her golden prison-house. The cover locked itself automatically when once shot into place, — this much I had ascertained when Kim placed Dulcine in it that morning, — and it

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

could only be opened from within. Thus when the King drew the cover on, he locked the Queen's remains in their eternal cell, making them proof against all but violence. This was the significance of the present ceremony and directly pointed to the popular fear of that terrible legend of Quelparte.

Pressing still nearer, I could at least see within the flower-strewn casket. Far beneath a long glass cover, which lifted on golden hinges, a form in musty gray cerements lay still and calm. So loose was the upper robe that the motion of breathing could not be detected. The face, bound closely in flaxen bands, seemed calm as in death. As I looked, the matchless bravery of the girl overcame me, and for a moment I delighted in the daring of the farce.

Amid another roll of drums the procession entered the Throne Room, the King sauntering behind his head eunuchs, and beside him walked the Crown Prince. I stepped down quickly from my position of vantage on the steps ascending to the Throne, and by me as I knelt passed the Royal party, the King taking his seat upon the Throne. Finally, after an

A QUEEN INCOGNITO

age of heathen mummary, Whang-Su descended the broad steps to the catafalque, dropped the glass lid and drew on the golden cover,—gracefully, jauntily, as His Majesty did all else. The girl lay as dead before him, but I felt sure that when the heavy cover shot into place her nerves gave way from the terrible strain. I was glad the great cover was hollow, allowing the prisoner air, for she could raise the glass lid herself and sit upright within her magnificent cell.

My heart, too, was in the Queen's Sarcophagus, smothered by the dense fragrance of flowers and spice.

As the King passed out, the Imperial watch, dressed in the brilliant uniforms of Quelpartien army officers, took its stand around the Sarcophagus; but I saw at once that they were gendarmes in disguise. Dejneff was with them, and I spoke to him as he handed me my orders for the night.

“Those men are armed?” I asked in French.

“To the teeth.”

“With powder and ball?”

“Powder, ball, rapier, and dagger,” said the man, swiftly, and I saw he, too, sensed trouble

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

in the wind. And he looked at me significantly.

I did not realize that I looked like a ghost, and so I read into his searching glance more than he ever meant. But to talk a moment with another did me a world of good.

“You look for trouble?”

“You look as if you had already seen it,” he replied evasively.

“How do we get to the Tomb?”

“Through the West Gate; the King’s Trail of Earth is laid that way.”

“My God, Dejneff, not through the Chinese quarter,” I gasped.

The Russian shrugged his shoulders and tapped his orders significantly and then moved away.

With a groan I gave one longing glance at the golden Sarcophagus and rushed out into the open air.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE TRAIL OF EARTH

I QUICKLY made up my mind to go to the King and demand a change of the route, but I paced up and down in the hollow square formed by my companies considering a worthy excuse. I did not wish to frighten His Majesty, yet, if it lay in my power, the route of the procession should be altered. I also needed to have an alternate course on my tongue's end; on this latter point I needed help and sent for Lieutenant Kim.

When he came I pulled him out into the dark.

"The route of march is out the West Gate?" I asked.

"So the orders read," answered the youth.

"Is there no better way, Kim?"

He looked at me in surprise.

"Why better?"

"Well — safer, then!" for I felt I could trust this serious lad.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“Oho! so you are troubled too,” he said thoughtfully: “there will be few sorry when this business is over.”

“Answer me,” I ordered; then I added encouragingly, “I do not like that Chinese quarter, Kim.”

“Nor I!” he put in quickly; “it’s dark as night.”

“You mean — ”

“I mean there are no lights burning in it; even our lanterns in the silken nets which line the Imperial route have been put out by boys who are throwing stones into them.”

All this chilled me.

“But can we go another way?”

“Yes,” answered Kim, thoughtfully, “through the Little West Gate.”

“A roundabout course?”

“Very.”

“But a possible one?”

“I think so.”

“And we could evade that quarter?”

“Entirely — but — ” and Kim looked away across the dimly lighted city.

“But what?” I asked sternly. “Tell me anything you know, Kim. I dread going into

THE TRAIL OF EARTH

the Chinese quarter; if we do, I am sure there will be the devil to pay."

"The orders are out, and I do not think they can be revoked."

"Is that all?"

"That is all, Captain." He saluted, and I strode on across the plaza toward the King's wing.

There I ran upon Dejneff, issuing the orders of the night to the cavalry officers flaring in their great red silk sleeves.

I called him, and he stepped back into the gloom with me.

"We must change this route, Dejneff," and I pointed to the orders.

"Why?" broke out the old soldier, holding his breath.

"Because this parading up and down in the Chinese quarter is nothing but senseless bravado. Look you," and I pointed toward the West Gate, "the whole quarter is in darkness. Even the boys are pelting the silk lanterns with stones. And the commonest coolie knows Prince Tuen would rather miss the tribute from a dozen Quelpartes than have that tablet dropped over the Queen's corpse.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

If, as the King has said, he 'has pawed Quelparte over for her,' do you think he will let us carry her body safely through a thirty-foot street in a Chinese city at midnight unopposed?"

With now and then a grunt of a Russian oath the old warrior listened to me to the end, and then stood looking away across the city toward that black spot on the horizon.

I saw he was moved, so I did not press him. At last he spoke, and softly, for him.

"You mean go out the Little West Gate," he mused, nursing a knuckle in his beard. "It would be roundabout, and a more difficult journey; there would be some rough bridges to cross, and the cart the coffin travels in might come to grief." He was talking to himself — only incidentally to me.

Then suddenly he answered as though he had not spoken a word before: "Now, Martyn, I don't like this more than you; but it's too late to change the orders. This circus is a mighty big affair, and everything is located with reference to the route selected. More, the route has only been known for an hour or two, so they — er, well, no one could have planned

THE TRAIL OF EARTH

much of a — er — attack. Suppose we go down on our own responsibility and order the coolies around from the Chinese quarter and let them line the course to the Little West Gate. It will seem as though the line of march had been changed. At the last moment they can hasten to their former places.”

I doubt if old Dejneff ever made so long a speech before, and I doubt if he ever will make a longer one again. It was plain he was greatly influenced, and equally plain, now, that his plan was the best that could be adopted at this last moment. So I urged him to give the order; he did so, and I started to return. But as I went my old doubts came back in flood-tide. With the route now marked to the Little Gate, why not try the King, after all?

I knew something, now, of Tuen's desperation — aye, more than any living man. And Dulcine's life was at stake!

Involuntarily I pushed through the crowds to the King's antechamber and asked a passing eunuch for the King. He pointed me to another eunuch who understood English.

“He is in the Mourning Chamber,” the latter replied.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

"I must see him," I said with a significant gesture.

"*Cherum!*" he exclaimed in the vernacular. "He worships in the Mourning Chamber until the march to the Tomb, Captain."

I moved impatiently.

"Can you get my name to one of the eunuchs of the Mourning Chamber?"

"I can do that," the man answered. He took it and left. Since the King had deigned to recognize and counsel me in the Throne Room, I did not believe he would refuse me a hearing at this time.

Nor was I wrong, for in a few moments the man returned and beckoned me to follow.

I went on through a maze of smaller rooms, being conducted by one official after another, each more elaborately dressed than the other, until a last door was opened from within.

I entered, and there stood the King. When he saw me he turned and waved his hand behind him, and two female inmates of his household went giggling into a further room. The place was thick with cigarette smoke.

Thus Whang-Su worshipped in the Mourn-

THE TRAIL OF EARTH

ing Chamber during the last hours before the Imperial Funeral!

Yet the King's eyes grew serious as he bade me enter, and I knew he had not thought I asked Audience for nothing. I decided before I saw him to come straight to the point. There was little time in which to make changes, however great the despatch.

"Sire, is the Trail of Earth to be laid through the West Gate?"

"I believe so," he answered blandly.

"Through the Chinese quarter?"

To this he nodded while he drew at his cigarette. "What!" he then cried through a cloud of smoke; "you laughed at my fears in the Throne Room and, boasted of our strength." He saw my point quickly, at least!

I did not tell him what I thought. It was another kettle of fish now that I knew who was in that golden Sarcophagus.

"But strong as we are, Sire, is it not foolhardy to tempt Prince Tuen unnecessarily?"

Then I told the King of the situation in the Chinese quarter and of Dejneff's plan. He seized upon that instantly.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“The ruse is good, and it is all we can do; the old palace is on the road to the Little Gate,” he added; and I realized that he could not order the funeral pageant to pass the spot where the Queen was murdered.

As I moved away the King looked at me thoughtfully; then suddenly he stepped forward.

“I have ordered that your company surround the bier on its journey; be watchful and do not spare the lead.” Then he added with something of his old swagger, and a fresh cloud of cigarette smoke to frame it in, “There will be promotions for this night’s work, Martyn.”

I saluted and went back slowly to the plaza. I had accomplished little or nothing; yet Dejneff’s ruse was a good one and must be trusted now.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL

THE aspect of the heathen city had been wonderful by day. The great crowds, the flying pennons and banners, this nation on a holiday, was a sight never to be forgotten, unless one had seen the night which followed, — this nation on a holinight.

The crowd became more dense as the sun went down. To the quarter of a million inhabitants was now added a visiting quarter of a million. Cities and towns were deserted for a space fifty miles around. The gates of the city had been crowded all day, the grinning monkeys on their gables admitting governors and beggars, dukes and mountebanks, priests and criminals, indiscriminately, from seashore, mountain, and valley.

The sight presented by this half-million people was indescribable. The absence of lights made the appearance of the city doubly

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

significant, for there were no lights save the candle each man carried in a little paper lantern, for the moon shone only fitfully.

And so there was light, — a burning glare, but low down as a man's knee. From where I stood on the plaza of the Legation it seemed that the city was illuminated by red-hot pavements, a ruddy glare distinctly marking the direction of all the main avenues.

The sound of this moving host was indescribable. The hard limestone streets were covered with tiny pebbles which rolled and crunched under each falling foot. What was the tumult arising from a million moving feet? It was a sound unknown even to the sea. It was not the continual grind of gigantic glaciers. It was like nothing that ever met my ears. I stood entranced a space, looking on those streets of flame, and listening to the murmur of that million of sandaled feet.

My orders were to flank the Imperial route from the Legation to the center of the city, where the Great Bell hung. The crowds had already divined the route, and this avenue was the seething center of the city. It was men's work for my column to plough through to the

THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL

Bell, but they went through like men. My lines once established on either side the avenue, the crowds were admitted, temporarily, between them. Here and there along the route elegant lanterns were suspended from staves thrust into the hard ground. The silken network of each was four feet long with a center of red and a border of blue at the bottom and top. Within each, thus thoroughly protected from the wind, a candle burned on a sharp iron finger.

It may have been nine o'clock when my lines were established from the Legation to the Great Bell. The funeral procession was advertised to start at nine. I was advised to expect it promptly three hours later, at midnight.

For three hours — though they were anxious hours — I was an interested spectator of the scene before me. Through my lines surged the countless throng. Now it was brushed lightly aside, as a company of Quelpartien infantry trotted down on the double-quick, formidable in appearance and sound. No sooner was it again in motion, in aimless "pursuit of happiness," than a shrill scream rent it asunder, as a Quelpartien nobleman on a spotless pony, preceded by busy henchmen, paced

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

to his place in the Imperial cortége. A sack-cloth Quelpartien hat covered his netted hair. A rope an inch in diameter surrounded his waist; another, smaller in size, was caught about his hat. Such was the Imperial mourner's habit.

Beyond, in the plaza of the Bell, was the vortex of the surging human billows which were sweeping the city. In that maelstrom, peddlers with trays, supported by strings about their necks, were reaping a rich reward, and thieves a richer. The native soldiers guarding the plaza had broken ranks (their officers were in the neighboring drinking houses) and were seated on the ground nodding before their fires of sticks and grass, their rifles stacked about them. Gambling being legalized for the time, many were playing games of chance. Thus the hours dragged on.

The first sign of the approaching pageant was the arousing of the soldiers to clear the avenue. It was soldier's work too. Piercing the street in the center, the multitude was crowded back to the houses. The forward lines were pushed out by those behind, and the soldiers pounded the faces of those in the rear with the butts of their guns.

THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL

Slowly a way was cleared. In some places it was twenty feet in width; here narrowing, there widening. Then, in the center of the opening, was laid a thin line of earth, all the way from the Russian Legation to the Imperial tomb,—for in Quelparte it is beneath the dignity of the King to walk upon earth that has been desecrated by other feet. Thus wherever the King goes, fresh earth is strewn which no foot may touch until he has passed.

The sight of this faint trail had a miraculous effect upon those surging thousands. They became quiet and expectant, each suggestion of the coming pageant being greeted with delight. Heads of departments began flying back and forth on official duties; a Quelpartien general and staff tittupped along the route, inspecting, at a proper distance, the line of fresh earth, to see that it was laid properly to the destination. And when at last the old Ringer entered the Bell house and the beam was swung twelve times upon the Great Bell, a hush fell over the city, and every heart knew the appointed hour was at hand. Instantly a Cossack trumpeter on the balcony of the Russian Legation blew his clear signal, and when the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

echoes of the bugle had died away in the ravines of the mountains, the funeral cortége was in motion.

Believe me, I saw all that I have described. Believe me, also, there was not a moment in which I was not thinking of Dulcine. It is also quite as true that in this crisis my mind wandered back over the past week and recalled its strange experiences to prove to myself I was awake and not dreaming. Again I saw Wun Chow and heard the chanting in the Temple of Ching-ling, and again the tragedy of that subterranean vault was enacted. Now I was running madly down Lynx Island in the dark; now shouting to a telegraph instrument in delirium; now I was walking on from a fallen horse through a valley from which the tide had just gone, and bargaining for a loaf of bread from an unknown friend. Once more I tried to tell the King on his throne that Li and Ling were lost, and that the Queen's body was still on Lynx Island. I talked with Dulcine before the fire; Kim laid the body in the Sarcophagus; I watched the King draw on the great golden cover. If I needed more proof, my anxious heart could have given testimony, for

THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL

I had been subjected to surprises — and no sleeper is surprised in his dreaming.

No, this was not a dream.

Before the Great Bell struck the hour of midnight, I had taken my station at the door of the King's wing. Within the King's apartment confusion had reigned during the last hour before the pageant started. But without, behind the Legation, where the pageant was forming, confusion was worse confused. The rendezvous of any circus parade is a trivial affair compared with what was enacted there. For blocks in each direction spread the outlandish paraphernalia, — banners, carriages, carts, ensigns, flags, shields, lanterns, horses, troops, — the most illustrious collection of horrors human eye ever viewed: attendants fighting for precedence; coolies struggling to maintain position against new-comers; men with bannerless poles and men with poleless banners, fighting for that which each lacked; horses frenzied with fear; mules richly caparisoned, braying for water, and supervisors of the pageant, at their wits' end, charging about reckless of life and limb.

From this pandemonium of heathendom, I

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

passed by the guards at the door and entered the Throne Room. All was quiet here. In the dim light I saw the Imperial watch, standing motionless by the catafalque. Though I knew they were Cossacks, I went no nearer, for there was nothing I could do, however much I longed to make my presence known. And so I, too, stood watch over her.

As the night wore on, I became calm and resolute. The trying scene in this room, following immediately upon the receipt of Dulcine's note, had played havoc with my weakened nerves. The cold night air and the exercise had strengthened them.

At the first boom of the Great Bell I went out into the plaza and mounted my horse. One company in my command which flanked the four sides of the plaza was to surround the bier and guard it. At the head of this company I took my place, as the glittering line of the Imperial cortége rounded the further wing of the Legation and came slowly by.

Two Quelpartien dukes on great white horses led it. Twisted ropes surrounded their waists and hats. Men at their sides bore silken banners, some in plain and some in mixed

THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL

colors, flying on long poles raised high up in air.

All kept wide of the little trail of earth in the center of the road. Even the horses seemed to know it meant death to step there.

Then came a host of yellow lanterns — Imperial yellow — borne by coolies for whom it was the event of a lifetime, a memory to be handed down to children's children. Behind the lantern came prominent Quelpartien generals. Immense red plumes fell back from their glittering helmets. They wore no sackcloth. Behind them rode a squad of cavalry officers in their flowing scarlet sleeves. The sleeves of their uniforms are of this color, so that, when charging, sword in hand, the spurt-ing blood of the enemy will not disfigure their apparel to sicken the brain. Then came the Royal eunuchs of the palace — in heaviest sackcloth. The splendid horses of the cavalry officers were not better than those ridden by these Imperial household officials.

All these went wide of the earthen trail.

The great guilds of the land were represented in the pageant by monstrous banners thirty and forty feet in length, borne on veritable

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

masts under which the most powerful men staggered painfully but proudly. The banners contained tributes to Her Majesty. Streamers fastened to the top tended to steady them and ease the labors of the bearers.

The coming of the King was heralded by a swarm of yellow banners carried by footmen. Behind them a body of Cossacks surrounded His Majesty, who was riding a white horse with characteristic grace and jauntiness. The white stallion walked fairly in the center of the narrow trail of hallowed earth, and proudly, as though conscious that before his own dainty foot none other had touched it. Whang-Su seemed as unconscious of danger as his horse. Now and then he talked with Dejneff, who rode watchfully behind him, a hand ever at his belt.

Behind the King, at a proper distance, swarmed a host of coolies wearing yellow coats. On their backs rested a platform made of bamboo poles. Upon this rested the covered chair used by her to whom this raree-show was a tribute. I am sure I never saw such a thing on the streets of Washington or on the boulevard to Mt. Vernon, but I repeat what the

THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL

honest Kim affirmed, who stood at my elbow explaining to me the signification of all the insignificance of the passing pageant. The four silken sides of the chair were covered with bangles representing peacocks' eyes, which in Quelparte are always used to denote the presence of the gentler sex. Behind the chair came a crowd of coolies bearing yellow silk parasols on elongated handles. The fringes of these parasols were of rarest lace, and the spectacle afforded by their bearers the most ridiculous conceivable.

If Dulcine was enduring a thing no mortal was ever doomed to experience before, she was certainly missing a spectacle no mortal could ever forget.

Interest now became intense as the resounding foot-beats on the hard avenue announced the coming of the army, in the center of which the Royal bier would be borne. Rank after rank passed by and in good order, for in the past fortnight the troops had been drilled hourly for this review. It was plain the result was satisfactory to the crowd, if not to the officers.

But at last the funeral car was caught sight of, and the soldiers were forgotten. No sooner

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

was this before the door of the King's wing than the Sarcophagus was borne to it on the shoulders of many servants. About it my company closed instantly, and we were on our way to the Mausoleum after hardly a moment's delay. The rear was brought up by the cavalry regiments.

The funeral car in which the Sarcophagus was placed would have added renown to any procession. It rolled on two great golden wheels, being drawn by ropes each fifty feet long and in the hands of scores and scores of coolies in mourning dress. Upon only those nearest the car did the work fall, for a few of those in front on either side drew the vehicle, and those behind nearest steadied it on an incline. All the rest marched proudly, holding the slack rope in their hands and gazing to the right and to the left. The car was perhaps seven feet in height. Above it in the center was a great golden ball, an imposing crown piece. Its length may have been ten feet; its width four. At the corners of the fluted roofing, large golden lotus leaves curled upward from beneath, and upon them golden dragon heads were fastened. From the open

THE IMPERIAL FUNERAL

mouths great silken cords hung down, and heavy tassels at their ends swept the ground twelve feet below. But all this beauty was not for the vulgar eye, for beside the car (when they could keep up with it) marched tall men carrying poles, to which were fastened long silken screens to shield the bier from view. Before, beside, and behind, came coolies carrying poles with flying banners on which were inscribed the graces and virtues of her within the car. Some of these Kim translated to me. They were all new to me, though she had graces and virtues unnumbered, I knew.

The pageant was a splendid success. Before we passed out of the gate it was evident that the nation saw and was pleased. Even as we marched breathlessly through the Chinese quarter of the city there was no outbreak. Darkness, an absence of holiday regalia, and hundreds of sober faces only greeted us there. I breathed more easily when the city gate was reached.

Just beyond, now in sight, rose the Mausoleum and the City of a Night about it. My heart leaped at the sight of it, reflected in the glare of the thousand lanterns. Once safely

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

there, my forebodings and anxieties were at an end. Dulcine would be easily released, and the drama in which we were more prominent actors than was generally supposed, or than we wished to be, would be over. Already I thought of Japan — and home.

The inspiration of these blessed hopes gave me strength to play my part to the end. And I needed strength, for the strain was telling on me. Kim, even, spoke of the pallor of my countenance, and I knew my hands and knees trembled.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE SIGNAL OF THE SCABBARD

IF the city of Keinning, three thousand years old, was marvelous in appearance, the City of a Night, at the foot of the Imperial Mausoleum, was no less wonderful.

Looking from the eastern gate, an avenue of fire led through darkness to an illuminated mountain three miles distant. Here and there in the gloom on either side of it little lights shone like will-o'-the-wisps in the paddy-fields, where lonely travelers, coming from the north or south and skirting the crowded city, made their way by candle-light toward the great white Tomb. The avenue of flame was a moving wall of humanity, — a nation going to the grave-site chosen by the Imperial soothsayers. The line of red lanterns and the trail of fresh earth left the main avenue as it neared the goal, swinging out and around to the mound and the Hall of Spices where the Sarcophagus would rest before being entombed.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

The sight was of bewildering beauty.

The army encamped around the outskirts of this magic city, the stacks of arms making a glittering wall about it. Avenues were left open between the camping companies, where thousands wandered and warmed themselves by the soldiers' fires.

Nearer the Tomb and around it stood the temporary buildings erected by the King, at an expense of many thousands and for but a single night, in which to house himself and the guests invited to his Imperial wake. Beside the mound and altars were buildings for his cabinet, the Legations, and a general guest-house, and in each building a dining-room was provided where elaborate dinners were served immediately upon the arrival of the pageant. Every person was fed, from the ambassador to the poorest coolie, who had been freezing beside his sputtering red lantern.

At the very center of the perfect circle of stacked rifles arose the mound of earth which I had passed on my journey with Colonel Li to Wun Chow. This I have described as an oval mound fifty feet high, within which was built the solid granite Tomb. On the summit

THE SIGNAL OF THE SCABBARD

of the cone of earth could be seen the great tablet poised on end; and on the side of the Mound, toward the Hall of Spices, an inclined track of smooth wood was laid, up which the loads of cake and spices and fruits were to be drawn; after them the golden casket itself.

My company marched to the Hall of Spices and surrounded it; the Sarcophagus was borne within, where mountains of cake and spices, which were to be placed within the Tomb for the soul to feast upon, arose on every side, flanked by great piles of fruits. Masses of candy and spices were ranged behind the cake and fruits. I wondered where all this was to be stored, and, while personally stationing my guards, I entered the staging which held the great poised tablet, and looked down. Eight feet below I saw the mouth of the Tomb. This was a round room perhaps thirty feet high and as wide. A low marble pedestal was erected in the center, upon which the Sarcophagus was to be placed. Around about ran a wide marble ledge upon which cakes and candies, fruits and spices, were already being arranged by black-gowned servants.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

No one was permitted to descend into the vault but these grim-looking men, who, Kim informed me, built the Tomb. They spoke not to each other, but signaled like dumb men. One yawned in my face, and I understood. Their tongues had been cut out.

No one might enter that vault and tell its secrets to another!

I hastened back to the Hall of Spices. The time was fast approaching now when I could give the signal and release Dulcine. However, the Household Ministers were still busy about the Sarcophagus, and the final honors to the dead were not yet performed. The palace women came by, heavily veiled and moaning loudly. After them came the Cabinet led by Prince Ting. Then followed the ambassadors of the foreign nations, stepping forward one by one, and bowing to the casket which lay behind parted yellow curtains. This over, the curtains were dropped.

It was still an hour before sunrise, and the Tomb was not to receive its Imperial burden until that time. More rites to the dead were to be performed by priests in another portion of the building, and soon the dais before the

THE SIGNAL OF THE SCABBARD

Sarcophagus was quite deserted. The releasing of Dulcine behind the yellow curtains would be but the work of a moment. My time had come. I took the hilt of my sword in my hand and mounted the steps.

At that moment a voice spoke my name. I started, frightened, for I thought I was alone. I looked in the direction of the sound. On the lowest of the three steps which surrounded the building, and holding back the long silken curtain by one hand, stood Colonel Oranoff. In the dim light I thought I must be mistaken. I closed my eyes and then opened them, shading them from the light of the nearest sputtering torch. And yet there he stood, dressed in the greatcoat and silk hat I had seen often on the streets of Keinning. The face seemed so pale that my throat choked with fear and my heart stopped beating. Did he know our secret? Had others discovered it? That face so changed and altered—oh, what could it mean?

I was left but a moment in anguish. Then he spoke again. The voice was equally unreal:

“She is not there. If you love her, follow me.”

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

If I loved her! Then she was elsewhere, and in danger? I could not have believed those words from any other lips than those which uttered them. I would have left that dais for no other man on earth than Oranoff. The curtains came together. I knew he was a man of few words, and the retreating footsteps were his. "*If you love her!*" I hurried after him.

I had not seen Dulcine's father since I marched before the King and virtually told a lie by failing to tell the truth. I had heard him speak to Dulcine across my bed when she told the lie I acted, but I looked only at her. I tried to believe he had sought her in the British Legation party, and, missing her, had come to me. But his few words implied that he knew where she was. His face showed he was crazed with grief.

I attempted to overtake him, but I quickly perceived he did not desire this, for he regulated his paces with mine and remained in the lead. We passed around the mound. Now I saw he also took the precaution not to be recognized by others and carried himself peculiarly, one shoulder being carried higher than another.

THE SIGNAL OF THE SCABBARD

I dumbly followed his example, thinking of nothing save the danger which had come to Dulcine. With this fear in my heart I seemed bereft of every sense.

At length we reached the soldiers, and Oranoff chose one of the darker avenues or spaces between the companies and passed swiftly through the stacks of burnished rifles and out into the gloom beyond. I could now see the dim forms of several persons beyond us. There were ponies with them.

Now and not until now did I in the least doubt that I was following Colonel Oranoff, blinded as I was by my awful fears. I looked again upon those shoulders, and suddenly the scales fell from my eyes.

It was the man of the crippled shoulders. Menin had caught me at last!

But even as I turned and reached to my side, a blow on the head from some one who was silently following felled me to the ground.

The sun was rising when again I opened my eyes. Perhaps the torture of the cords which bound me to the pony hastened the return of consciousness. For a moment I gazed blankly

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

into the valley from which we were climbing, just as the sun was gilding the crest of the far-off rocks. Below was Keinning, the valley of the Phan, the plain wherein stood the Queen's Mausoleum.

Then a strange sound came up through the fog. It ran along the cliffs like a roll of tiny drums. At last the echoes beat themselves to death on the rocks and dropped lifeless at their base. The sound was as though a gigantic hammer had struck a mountain cliff. It chilled the blood in my veins, and started my staggering brain from its dreaming. My reason returned.

The great tablet had dropped forever upon the Royal Mausoleum, burying Dulcine Oranoff within it, alive!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE MASQUERADER

WHEN I regained consciousness, the sun was in the zenith. The horse to which I was tied was climbing upward slowly, and behind me rode two men. We were still ascending rocky ridges toward the mountain crest, which I now saw was not far distant. The men behind me talked excitedly; now and then they laughed. My capture evidently meant much to them, yet they may not have been thinking of me at all. At any rate, all I knew was that they talked Chinese — and perhaps I could not have known anything worse. Of course I knew nothing of their destination, though I recognized at once the stony by-road on which I had come up from Han Chow to Keinning.

I think no one ever cared less about the future than I did then. I remember I wished to “go to my Gawd like a soldier,” as the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

English soldiers sing — not to be tortured to satiate the hate of a Chinese mandarin.

I was bound with ropes made of twisted straw; now and then by raising myself on my hands, or by straightening the muscles of my limbs, I was able to lessen the pain, but when eased thus I thought of Dulcine smothering in that marble tomb. Then I relaxed my muscles and let my bonds cut and tear me. Yet, as time passed, the same thoughts came in spite of the pain. I remembered the distracted Oranoff, and prayed God he would believe we had run away together; and I swore, so far as I was concerned, that he should never know otherwise.

But what of Dulcine? Could she live? Had the concussion of the falling of that tremendous tablet killed her? If not, was she not alive? I remembered the great size of the Tomb and knew she could not exhaust the air in it in an hour or a day, — no, not in a week. As for food, she was buried in it, — food to last a soul's lifetime; yet the fragrance of that cake and spice, would not that suffocate her? And I really wondered if it would not be a blessing to her to hope that it would, and speedily!

THE MASQUERADER

With these thoughts came hope, — a hope quite as agonizing as the despair in which it was conceived. There was chance enough of the girl's living, I believed, to warrant any attempt to escape, even though I had to thread the finest needle in the world to do it; if alive, Dulcine could not live very long, and if I would bring assistance I must work quickly. The measure of my life measured hers, and the least I could do now was to risk my life generously in the attempt to save hers.

We hid that day in a deep valley where my guides treated me with better favor than I had hoped, and at dark we started on again. It was midnight before we came up to a hut on the mountain near to the rocky road where my legs were unbound, and, supported, as I had need to be, by a servant, I was taken into a lighted room and dropped upon a stool at the end of a long table.

The light blinded me, but I knew a man sat opposite. Slowly his features became distinct. I started, for I thought at first it was Oranoff. Then it was all plain — I was facing the masquerader who had lured me from Dulcine's side.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

He had replaced the false imperial, — to give me a better welcome, and obviate an introduction, — and he grinned a hellish grin as I stared aghast. Now I saw that his face was too wide for Oranoff's and lacked, on closer view, the Colonel's color; the black hair and eyebrows, however, helped the deception.

"Mr. Robert Martyn, I believe." The wild grimace returned the moment the words were spoken.

"At your service," I answered sharply; I would not have the devil outdo me, and then I blurted out quickly and angrily enough: "By God, you shall pay dear for this outrage, Sir."

"*Jamie*," he replied, drawling the Quelpartien oath like a native, and drew the false beard from his face. Then he rolled a cigarette and lighted it, looking at me out of the corner of his eye. Sore as I was, and exhausted, I looked this man over as I had never looked at another. That he was surely the tool of Prince Tuen I knew; beyond that I could not get; his nationality could not have been guessed, though I felt he was no stranger to Calcutta. His short, crisp hair was that of an Indian's, and he often stroked it quickly with his hand as if to brush

THE MASQUERADER

down its kinky ends. But to know he was Tuen's agent was to know a very great deal, for I had served the ambitious Tuen a hard turn in carrying through the Imperial Funeral.

Menin sat drumming the wooden table and looking at me searchingly now and then with his small black eyes, and his manner served only to arouse my anger, and again it got the better of me.

"And what am I, Sir," I snarled, "the captive of a bandit or a prisoner of war?"

"That will be for you to determine, my dear Martyn," he said with a yawn; and he called a boy who brought a bottle of cognac and a wine-glass. At a word my wrists were freed, and a glass was filled and placed before me. The liquor gave me strength to be sensible and keep still. It made the exasperating smile on his face return; at last he threw back his head and laughed outright and heartily. I glared across the table, insane to seize that white throat, but I kept still. Finally when he realized I would amuse him no longer, he sobered and drank again.

"No, Captain, I am no bandit, nor are you a prisoner of war. In fact, this is quite irregular,

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

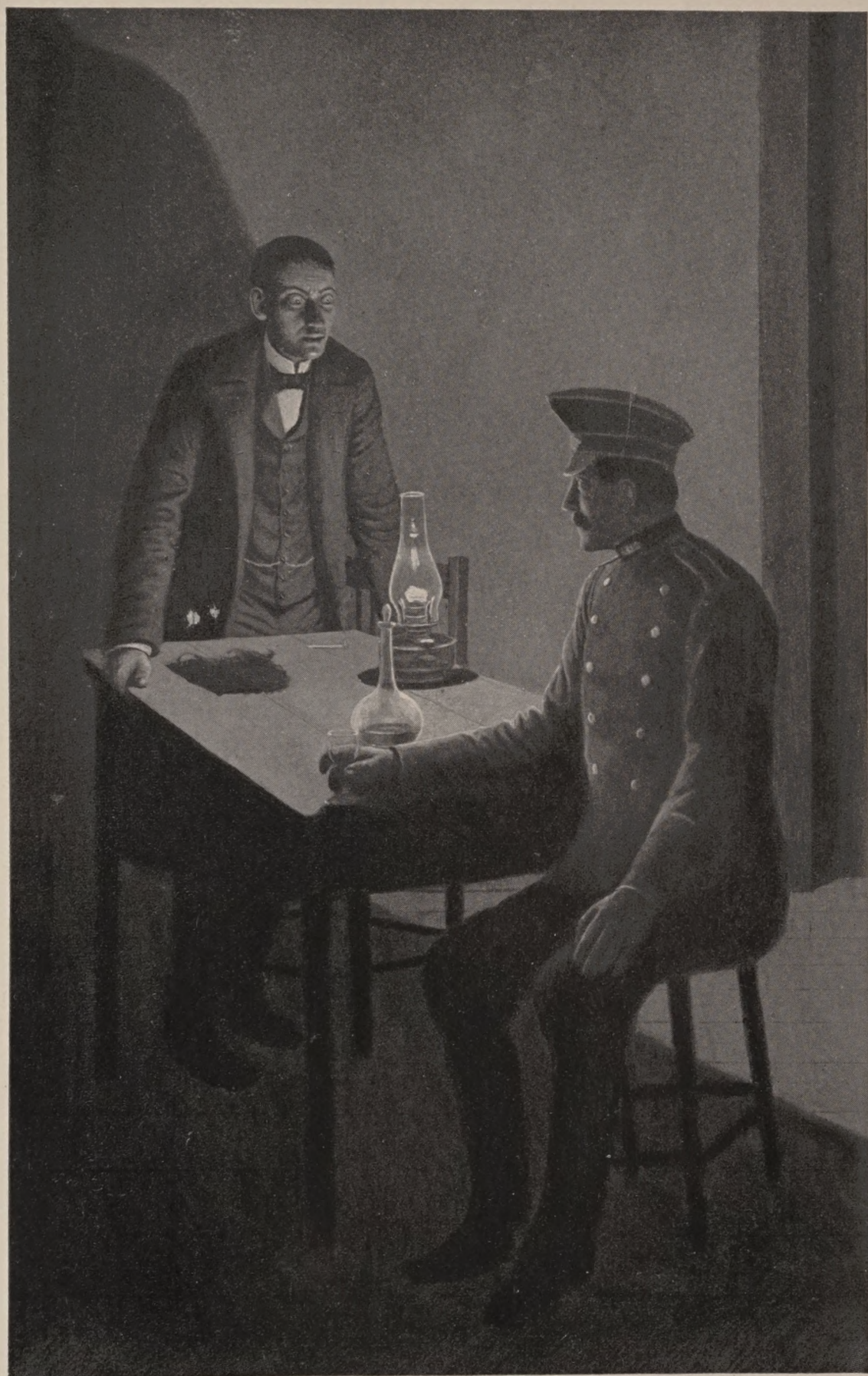
but you will allow me the liberty to say that you have a propensity for getting in the way;" and he smiled and put his cigarette to his lips, cocking his head to avoid the smoke, and looked at me.

"A bad habit of trying to do what I am bid," I answered hotly, though I was attempting now to meet him on his own ground of supercilious indifference; "I do not play impostor, though," I added casually; "I know something besides deceit."

"*Par Dieu,*" he growled suddenly, "but I thought that your long suit," — and I knew he meant the travesty of the funeral just completed. I had, at least, touched the man to the quick. I probed deeper now, mad with fear for Dulcine.

"You corrupted the priests at Lynx Island; you destroyed the Temple, and the blood of a score of better men than you is on your head. You are now murdering a helpless girl by making way with me. And by the God in Heaven your quarters shall swim in blood for that."

The man began laughing again, and it was plain now that my fear for the girl I had buried



THE MASQUERADER

alive was the cause of his hilarity. I certainly had gotten myself in a devilish plight, the more so as my captors had much to avenge themselves for. But then, suddenly, the black eyes narrowed on me, and the light of laughter died down, smothered by hate.

“*Jamie*, boy, how came you into all this? What have you been doing? I will tell you, so you may know with whom you are dealing. You sailed from Lynx Island in the night to Han Chow. The coward Kepneff failed you, and the wires. You went on to Keinning. You told Oranoff the Queen’s body was in the new Sarcophagus. At midnight you met Dulcine Oranoff and induced her to make good your failure. Lieutenant Kim and you placed her in the Sarcophagus at daylight that morning.”

Aghast as I was at this man’s knowledge, I played my part as best I could and smiled, when he paused, indifferently.

“And what have you gained,” I sneered presently, “for all your spying?”

He started up quickly, for this was a tender spot — his failure — and he cried:

“I have gained all you have lost.”

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I knew he meant Dulcine, and I trembled. Did he mean anything more? "My God!" thought I — and here I sprang to my feet with a gasp — "did he release Dulcine himself and take her captive too?"

Promptly the villain laid a revolver on the table before him and I sat down, my head in my hands. It was bad enough to believe Dulcine to be in that marble tomb, but held a captive in a den of this man's choosing — oh! this broke my spirit utterly, and I groaned aloud.

"Come, come, lad, groans will not save fair lady," he said presently with mocking hilarity; "but follow me, and I will tell you what will."

We went out, "Sahib," his servant, and myself, and mounted three Korean ponies. I was sent on in front, and for half an hour we followed a little path over a mountain, and up to the summit of a rocky hill beyond. Before we reached its crest I heard the booming of the sea!

"You see that light," and Menin pointed to a lantern swinging at the mast of a launch anchored half a mile from shore. "Dulcine Oranoff is there, a prisoner like yourself."

THE MASQUERADER

“You are a liar,” I interposed promptly, unwilling to believe this to be the truth. He had not known the Signal of the Scabbard! The Sarcophagus could not be opened — once the King closed it — save from within. Dulcine would have answered no summons but that agreed upon, though she paid the penalty with her life. Yet the man, ignoring my interjection, went on undisturbed.

“Now, Sir, the King of Quelparte must hear from your own lips that the funeral was a damned hoax, and that the Queen’s body was utterly destroyed on Lynx Island. He will believe you,” he added significantly: “you will go back to Keinning to-morrow, under the care of two of my men. If you make one move to escape you are as good as dead. To-morrow night you will go with them and demand an Audience and tell the King what I have said. If you do this, you are a free man, and Dulcine Oranoff will be found safe and well with her father who has gone to Chefoo. Do you understand?”

It did not take me a moment to determine my course.

“I will start for Keinning at once,” I answered.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“All is well, then,” replied my captor. And at a sign from him the servant discharged a revolver three times in succession. In a moment two lights glimmered from the little vessel. Then Menin dismounted and handed the bridle of his pony to the servant, whereupon he turned to me.

“Dulcine Oranoff’s life hangs as truly on your keeping faith with us as your life depends on the air you breathe, Sir.” With that he went down the mountain-side, and his servant put himself behind me, and we too went homeward alone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

A RUDE AWAKENING

AS we went on back to that hut in the mountains my words, "You are a liar," came back to me, and I repeated them again and again, and no words ever fitted my lips so snugly. For I felt in every nerve that I was right. Sahib Menin, for so his servant called him, was throwing boldly now on the strength of the effect of his knowledge of what I had done, but I believed more and more each moment that his was a stupendous deception. He had not released Dulcine! She would have obeyed none but that preconcerted signal—and that signal he could not have known! In all else I might be wrong, but at such a time as this Dulcine would keep faithfully her word. "Remember the signal of the scabbard," she had written; how then could she forget? Leastwise if she had been false to our agreement she must now pay the penalty,—for I

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

purposed to act as I would, had I known she was in the marble Tomb, where, unless she had broken faith with me, she surely was.

So I simply determined to get to Keinning the quickest and best way I could, then slip my guards, and go about the task of releasing Dulcine.

It was graying into day as we put back the briery path. I forecast we could not reach Keinning before midnight, and I resolved to play every hand slowly in order to make it later than that, too late, in fact, to see the King that night. At the hut one man guarded me while the other prepared some rice for our breakfast, and it must have been an hour after sunrise before we were on the road again. I was now so exhausted that the jogging of the pony put me to sleep, and I awakened only when he stumbled on the stones.

But I seemed to think and plan even as I slept. My chief anxiety was first to escape my guards, and I soon began to believe this would be no easy trick. They were powerful Chinamen, and their faces said they were fit tools for such as Menin and Tuen. They would hold no manner of conversation with

A RUDE AWAKENING

me; indeed, they talked by signs to each other, though I could see in a moment both understood what I said to them.

Yet we were late in our start, and for that I was ahead. In coming from Keinning we had traveled one whole night and half a second, — at least fifteen hours. At our best we could not reach Keinning before midnight, and I set about the task of seeing that we did not do our best. When I awoke from each successive nap I asked painfully for water, and my guards stopped always at the nearest spring. I groaned not a little, and once begged to rest on the ground. I found it an easy rôle to play exhausted, for I was nearer to it than probably I realized myself. At this spring they let me sleep an hour at least, for which I was proportionately thankful.

I am sure they did not penetrate my ruse, and I knew if we did not reach Keinning before three o'clock in the morning, there was no hope of seeing the King before the evening following. In those twelve hours I felt sure I could get free.

Menin had so skillfully mingled what I believed to be lies with what I feared was the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

truth that I was in a maze of perplexities; for instance, he had said incidentally that Oranoff had gone to Chefoo. Now this was a matter about which he would not have lied to me lest an unimportant fib should menace the fabric built up on his greater falsehood. Oranoff must have attended the Imperial Funeral and then gone straightway to Tsi and Chefoo; how Menin could know this, when he had preceded me to that hut in the mountains, was a baffling mystery — yet was it not welcome news? If out of the country, Oranoff would not know of Dulcine's disappearance or mine; perhaps he need never know, if Dulcine could be saved within a few days. So I worried and planned and argued all day long, fighting my fears away like a swarm of stinging gnats; but ever holding with dogged tenacity to the belief that Dulcine Oranoff was in that marble Tomb, since no one else had known our Signal of the Scabbard.

I was dozing as the afternoon faded into twilight, when suddenly the ground seemed to give way, and I was dropping through air. When I first became conscious I was lying on my horse, and we were both shooting swiftly

A RUDE AWAKENING

down a smooth precipice of sandstone, the rope by which I was tied to my horse being severed as we shot along. My guides had stopped for some reason, and my pony had evidently gone to the deceptive edge of the precipice to browse. We brought up with a crash in tall bushes, which had taken root in a wide, natural catchwater, through which I was thrown by the force of the impact, and lay sprawling on the rock, quite breathless, as my guards, wild with excitement, rushed to the point where my horse had fallen.

They were not more surprised than I; but they were a deal more unlucky. For a moment I lay still to get my breath. Then I arose as best I could, and ran along, keeping behind the shrubs. A rifle snipped on the ledge above me. Its companion repeated the command, and blood trickled from my hand, for the ball went between my fingers. I ran on, bending lower, and soon I was out of sight. Resounding hoof-beats along the crest announced that my guards were hurrying around to head me off.

Then I turned about and went leisurely back up the cliffs to the spot where my horse had

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

fallen. I crossed the road and went down on the opposite side of the ridge.

I use the word "leisurely" without flippancy. I could not have gone otherwise, and I found I could not go far, even leisurely. I had done this much on the strength of desperation, and other strength I had not. Yet I stumbled on, looking only for a place to hide. My legs were benumbed by the thongs which had bound them; the blood ran easily from my hand. I did not care where I went, — and I knew I was caring less each step I took. It was easier going downhill, and I went on somehow to the bottom, to the brook where Kepneff's servant and I had drunk. I saw an overhanging bank, crept under it, and thrust my hand, wrist-deep, into the cold mud.

I was awakened by the monotonous thwack-thwack of a Quelpartienne's paddle, for these people wash their clothes on the stones of the brooks, beating them with boards. I was faint for want of food; it was coming on night, and I was worse than lost. I arose and followed the bed of the brook toward the resounding paddle, conscious that I should be very much safer in a Quel-

A RUDE AWAKENING

partien hut that night than lying about the mountain-side.

When the woman saw me, she dropped her paddle and ran screaming up the bank out of sight. I fancy I did look ghastly, though I had tried to wash the blood from my face and head; such clothes as my captors had left me (they had confiscated my coat and hat) were bright enough with gold and silver to attract attention. I had torn the lining from my heavy vest, and had bound up my hand; truly I must have looked like a warrior wakened from his sleep on a forgotten battle-ground. I did not blame her for running.

I went on to the path up the bank which the frightened woman had taken, but before I reached the top of it I was on the ground again. If I remember correctly I had not eaten since the noon of the day before, nor slept for a week, save my naps at Han Chow, at the Legation, and on the horse to which I had been bound.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER

I WAS awakened by some one softly bathing my face with a cloth. For a moment I lay still, half fearing to open my eyes. When I did so, I looked into the face of a young girl who was wiping the blood from my cheeks; she held out the crimson cloth before my face to explain her action, and smiled as she did so. I saw she was no Quelpartienne; her short skirt of red, and cap of green, and an open, thin, nut-brown face made this plain. And I felt instantly that she knew I, too, was a foreigner. When I raised my hand I found it was neatly bandaged, though I still lay in the path where I had fallen.

I sat up quickly and pointed to the summit of the mountain.

“Chinamen,” I stammered, trying to express my fears by voice and expression; then I repeated it in French:

“*Chenois? Chenois?*”

NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER

The girl understood. She smiled and shook her head and pointed down the mountain.

“Not come *chop-chop* [quick-quick]?” she said in a soft, low voice.

“Chenois go *chop-chop* whole top side?” I asked.

The girl nodded again and laughed in her sleeve as if enjoying the despair of my guards.

“By-and-by, bottom side *chop-chop*,” said I, and I looked around me anxiously. The girl saw what I meant and sobered thoughtfully, as she motioned me to let her continue bathing my face. Gladly I sank down again on the cool earth, it seemed so good to lie still. And despite my fears and growing anxieties I went immediately to sleep again.

I awoke to loud talking, and in the dim light I saw a stalwart old Quelpartienne, her arms akimbo, arguing with the girl who had befriended me. It was going poorly with my little champion, for, at the moment I opened my eyes, the great woman in baggy white trousers swept the mountain crest with her extended arm and completed her invective with a disturbed, querulous growl. It was plain they feared the return of my guards. So did I!

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I lay still, knowing another language would only confound their confusion, neither one understanding half the other said as it was.

For a moment the girl — whose name, as the old woman spoke it, is perhaps best described by the five letters Nsase — remained silent. Then suddenly she drew her two forefingers around her temples and asked a question.

After a long pause the old woman gave a reluctant grunt as her answer, and in a moment Nsase was at my side binding the wet cloth, with which she had bathed me, over my eyes. I was to be taken blindfolded to a hiding-place of her choosing!

At times it seems strange to me now that I trusted this girl so implicitly, but it did not seem extraordinary to do so then, at such a crucial time. There was nothing I could do that night save rest and fit myself for work, for the work I had before me was to require a steadier brain and nerve than I should otherwise have. The only question with me at the time was one of expedience. At last I went like a lamb, blindfolded, where this strange girl led me. If I thought to question her fidelity it was only as the failing swimmer questions

NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER

the strength of the rope thrown to him ; in my condition, I would have died on the mountain in the open air.

I was taken uphill for a distance, then carefully over a level spot until Nsase stopped and signified for me to lie down ; the smell of earth and the distant drip of water made me believe — as it turned out — that I was in a cave. My eyes soon became accustomed to the darkness (the bandage having been removed) and I saw a bowl of rice beside me. From the moment I saw Nsase I believed that it was she who befriended my servant and me as we passed this way before, and that now she had brought me to her hidden home to save me from my captors.

Some one lit a candle in the outer room, and an unsavory supper was eaten from wooden bowls.

I was just going to sleep again. The soft mat under me, the strange feeling of safety, the nourishing rice, made me content for the moment to stop thinking and to try to recover my strength for the journey to Keining — for I was confident that I was in the hands of friends who would see me through.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Then a rough, harsh voice brought me quickly to my feet, my hand to my beltless waist. The women screamed.

I knew that voice. I knew what the screams meant. I backed mechanically against the wall of the darkened room, and cursed the scoundrels for having taken my sword. For I was ready to fight — yes, with the dark cave behind me I fairly ached to fight them. I groped along the wall. It was covered with matting. Then I cut myself on a sharp edge. I felt, and it was a sword-blade. As I tried to take it down, another beside it cut me again. And beyond this were more — each sharper than an adder's fang. What did this mean?

My question was answered, for Nsase came to me in the darkness. Finding me by the swords, she led me back to my mat, where I lay down again at a whispered word of command in an unknown tongue. Fast quarreling in the outer room had been succeeded by violent rummaging about. The noise came nearer and nearer. By this time another girl had entered the cave. She brought some glowing substance like phosphorus which the two divided between them; then, side by side, they took their sta-

NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER

tion just within the matting, a glittering sword in each hand.

Then I knew I was hidden in a Quelpartien sword-dancer's cave. I was where no man had ever been before or would ever come again. The girls waited patiently, supremely confident in their magic power. They expected intruders, and intruders came.

Instantly, as by magic, the heavy mat curtains moved aside on the wire from which they hung. The girls, hardly visible to those without, were more plainly revealed to me. Their black, sequin-studded hair fell loosely down. A young tiger's skin enveloped each of them, thrown over one shoulder, caught together on the opposite loin, and hanging down on one side a hand's breadth below the knees. Their black hair was long and was wrought into tiny snake-like braids which writhed about as the arms were put in motion, or darted off swiftly with the flames of the glistening swords which in an instant were whirling in their orbits.

Such a dance! My regiment could not have protected me more securely. A man's life was not worth even the dimmest ray that came from the swords. No battlefield ever was so deadly

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

as the blazing zone through which those swords writhed and hissed. Though I had seen the secret of the illumination employed, nevertheless I utterly forgot my danger as the wild dance went on. It would have made any man forget anything.

Each broadsword was a flame of light: two thrown together with a practised hand wrought a sheet of flame; the four, when they cut the semi-circle together, sent blinding blasts of fire straight forward and straight back. Now a bolt of chain lightning fell from the right or left, seeming to cleave the ground. Now a flame poised overhead a second, then descended as the glittering blades came down. The fine black braids of hair curled lovingly about the white arms, or, flying in the wake of the sweeping swords, stood extended. Often a descending blade severed them, and numberless braided ends lay on the ground beneath the softly stepping sandals. Now a ball of fire rolled spluttering around each form as the swords were whirled on a finger; then each white face was surrounded by a flame of light, the dusky eyes flashing beneath a thousand wayward wisps of hair.

NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER

I could not see into the room beyond. But all had become deathly still. The intruders now knew the nature of this hidden hut in the mountains, — knew they need not look for me in that cave, had I even dared so much as to approach it.

All this I read in the demeanor of the dancing girls. And as my baffled guards turned themselves into sight-seers rather than spies, the quick-witted dancers turned their cunning into an exhibition rather than a continuation of it as a menacing defense. They came back, sweeping the cave with light; they came forward in perfect unison and swiftly, throwing the great swords about them to a weird song which now became a feature of the performance. The new development of the fiery drama — the melody of the monotone and the more elaborate scenic display, the circles and squares of flame, and other nameless convolutions — rendered the close of the exhibition as marvelous as the beginning. Next to the last service at the Temple of Ching-ling, I shall ever remember the dance of Nsase, the sword-dancer, which saved my life on the mountains of Quelparte that night.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

At the end came a tumult of applause from the delighted spectators, now utterly at the mercy of my friends. I saw at once they meant to stay all night; and I also saw, with disquietude, that they were being received with hospitality, to say the least. Perhaps anything else would have aroused suspicion.

Food was prepared for the visitors, and the jars of *sul*, or native beer, clinked as they were raised and lowered. There was more laughter than talk, and more *sul* than rice. The girls, still fantastically dressed in the scant raiment in which they had danced, led in the laughter and did most of the talking; and Nsase out-talked and outlaughed her sister. The soldiers answered with many a coarse guffaw, which grew louder for a while — and then quite ceased.

I had grown despondent. I did not know what the strange carousal of the dancing girls meant, and I feared what might happen when all became drunk. I took down a forbidden sword and lay quiet on my bed.

I must have dropped asleep, and I knew not when the scene changed in the other room, nor just when Nsase and her sister ceased playing the tragedy they acted so well. I

NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER

awoke when Nsase aroused me by unclasping my fingers from the sword. She was dressed decently and heavily, as for traveling. She smiled as I sat up, and instantly helped me to my feet. I saw she intended to start me on my way. In an instant I was ready, but I paused and pointed to the sword. I wanted that. But Nsase took my outstretched hand and led me into the other room.

Her sister and the old woman were gone. By the light of a paper lantern we picked our way along by the overturned pots and jugs. Nsase paused as we neared the door, looked at me, and then glanced behind her. She still held my hand and now she pressed it. I looked over her shoulder.

The two Chinamen lay stretched on the floor. The color of the liquor was on their bloated faces — *and another color too!* In searching for me they had found the sword-dancers' hut, which no man may know, much less enter. And yet into it they had broken, rough and furious. They would trouble them and me no more!

Before we went out and mounted their horses, Nsase wrapped me in a long white robe, such

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

as that she wore. She took the lead, and we pushed the horses on silently from ten o'clock until dawn. As it began to grow light we were getting down deep into the mists of the Phan valley, and I knew that when they lifted Keinning would be in sight. When it became light enough for us to see each other, Nsase dropped back, and we rode side by side. Now and again I knew the girl was looking at me from between the folds of her white head-dress. We had not spoken — for good reasons. And yet amid all else I was thinking, I had not forgotten her; she was not a girl easily forgotten. In a hundred ways she had shown that she had seen the world and knew it. Where had she come from, that she should now be found in the mountains of Quelparte, a past-master in the outlawed profession of sword-dancing? And now, her wild lessons learned from the old woman with whom she lived (for Quelpartiens are known as unrivaled in this soldier's art), what strange land would claim her, what cities praise her, — Singapore or Rangoon, Lhasa or Port Said? Strong, handsome — oh, well; something set me to humming "Mandalay."

NSASE, THE SWORD-DANCER

At last the mists did lift. And there was Keinning just at our feet. Nsase had come farther with me than necessary, but I think she would have gone farther, much farther.

She drew up her tired horse on the last range of foot-hills, and dismounted. She pointed to the distant city, then, with a sad smile on her face, up the road which she must return. I dismounted, too, to rest a moment. It seemed good to feel safe again. We stood still awhile by our horses. I was more grateful to her than I could ever tell, could we have spoken the same language. It was a relief not to be able to try.

After a while Nsase reached under her long robe (she had taken mine off) and drew out a long, beautiful scabbard containing a finer sword than many more exalted officers than I carry. With an attempt at laughing the girl surrendered to me, and then girt the belt around my waist. For a second she held the scabbard. She was very close to me, and looked away at the distant city. Then she dropped it and went to her horse.

I was greatly moved by the gift, remember-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

ing that she took a sword away from me as we left the cave.

Though now more deeply in her debt, I was utterly helpless to repay Nsase, however much I longed to show my gratitude. But I could not in any way, and I only pressed her hand as I gave her the bridle, and bade her "au revoir" — for, if God was good to me, I would yet repay her kindness. She sat quiet a little while on her pony, then, as I moved aside, she rode off slowly and never once looked back.

With aching heart I watched the still figure till it was lost amid the great boulders by the side of the mountain path. Then I turned to my horse in haste to pass Nsase's good favor on. My life was saved, and there — yes, the mists had just lifted from it — stood the mound of the Imperial Mausoleum.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB

AS I descended into the great plain in which Keinning lay, my eyes rested steadily on this conical mound of earth. No one gazing from those heights could have overlooked that peculiar formation.

But as I neared it, rejoicing in my freedom, the terrible fear that Dulcine was not there, — that she was something worse, even, than buried alive, returned. No matter how frequently I crushed down this awful fear, it would return, and I would again hear the devil Menin's sneering words of triumph, —

“*I have gained all you have lost!*” But I was determined to stand fast to my course. The fears, the sneering threats, — nothing should alter my trust in Dulcine. She had known the signal, and I had certainly never given it, and that another could have accidentally given it was a possibility too remote to be considered now.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

But if ever I had a hard problem it was a kitten's plaything to this: How could that Mound, made impregnable by the best of human skill, be entered, and the prisoner released?

The Mound was about fifty feet in height. The diameter of its base was equal to its height. The gravel sides had been turfed with grass since the Imperial Funeral. The magic city which had been at its base had disappeared with the army and the great concourse of people. All the temporary buildings had been taken away; but the Hall of Spices remained, for it was not temporary. It was to be the Temple of the Tomb, where services to the memory of the Queen would be celebrated. As I pushed my horse down from the hills, I felt the fever of fear fill my veins. Was it, verily, a tomb?

As I came nearer — for I had to pass the Mound to reach the East Gate — I saw workmen on its summit erecting a diminutive Temple roof to shelter the face of the great tablet. My spirits rose at the sight of these men, and I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse of a familiar form; for, during the ride from

THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB

the sword-dancer's cave, I had decided that my hope lay in one man, — old Ling's son, Kim. Not until then had I thought of him, and remembered his appointment as Secret Guardian of the Queen in his father's place. I congratulated myself on having kept my hasty promise to the father, for as I thought of it I was surer than ever that Dulcine Oranoff's life was in his hands; but I dared not think what the grave youth would do or say. I knew the penalty of an attempt to mock the terrible legend and enter that Mausoleum: the body of the ghoulish vandal would be divided among the capitals of the twenty provinces, to be displayed in a public place.

If Kim could not help me, there was but one man left to ask. That was the King, and asking him would be to tell the whole miserable story of Lynx Island and Prince Tuen's victory. And yet, had not a week passed without the fulfilment of the terrible myth? Was the King not sane still, and the dynasty still secure? And might not another week go by like this — and many?

I pushed my horse on as fast as it could go, knowing each moment was an eternity to

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Dulcine. I passed within a hundred yards of the Mausoleum and watched the score of men who were at work upon the little Temple roof. The material for it was being brought up on the very car and track upon which the golden Sarcophagus had ascended.

As I looked again upon these scenes so indelibly impressed on my memory, I thought of the terrible experiences Dulcine had endured since she bade me that last farewell. How the poor girl must have waited and waited and waited in her narrow cell for the signal that never came! How her exhausted nerves must have trembled! How her very life-blood must have been wrung from her heart as the moments passed! Did she know when the service of the priests was over? Could she have known when she was placed upon the sliding car? Did she realize that she was beyond the Altar of Spices, — aye, beyond all human power to save? Did she feel herself being lowered into the Tomb — or had the stunning, deafening shock of the falling tablet first told her that her lover had proven faithless and had sent her to a living tomb after failing to bring back the real body of the Queen?

THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB

I ached to hurry now to the Mound, but I could not, dressed as I was. And so I pushed on into the city. But here another question arose. Where should I go? I could not go to the Legation. Already Colonel Oranoff might have given out the news of Dulcine's absence, and of mine. Yet I was sure he would believe we were together, and that he would not quickly make public our disappearance. I could not help wondering if in all his diplomatic days he had ever faced a riddle more difficult to solve than this.

And so I turned toward the Japanese settlement, as I went into Keinning, and lodged at a Japanese inn. From there I boldly indited a letter to Colonel Oranoff, saying that for reasons which he would fully approve when he knew them, Dulcine and I had left Keinning together. I dated my note from Tsi, the morning after the funeral, for I learned from a paper that a boat had sailed then for Port Arthur.

By this time I was ready to return to the Mausoleum in search of Kim, and a fresh horse quickly carried me over the three miles, driven by the anxiety that filled my heart. The place

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

was still under guard, and it was only by good luck that I was able to approach the Mound. Andorph was not there, but one of his captains knew me and let me within the lines.

The moment my foot touched the Mound, up which the officer led me, I was beside myself with excitement. I asked anxiously for Kim Ling, but the man could give me no information. I was surprised at this, but never for a moment doubted that the officer in command could do so.

The whole of the great basin of the Phan lay at our feet as we ascended this Mound so beautifully set in the midst of the plain. The view was more charming from this spot than from the hills about, for the fog had lifted, and things before shrouded in it now took on their true outlines. But to my tired eyes it was common enough,—the great sweep of the Phan, the crowds of huts that lay along its banks, the odd boats, some of them of large proportions, which went up and down carrying the strangest sails winds ever encountered. Far beyond, the Silk Worm wound along on the crest of the mountain very like the crawling thing the Quelpartiens took it to be. Above it great buzzards

THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB

were circling, and on its side a dozen forms in white were raking grass for the winter fire. Keinning lay flung wide over the valley, the gray walls, some of the Legations, the Pagoda, a new American house, being all that could be seen, save the dead level of the graceful tile roofs or the bushy straw roofs of the poor. On the other side lay Pukhan, with the great wall of a mountain fortress, surrounding on its summit a space as great as that occupied by Keinning in the valley, a refuge for the kings of Quelparte who should be brave enough to dare to run away—should there ever come one so brave.

“Good-morning,” I said eagerly to the officer in command, who was overseeing the erection of the roof above the Tablet; “may I see Lieutenant Ling?”

The man started at my words. “Ling is not here,” he replied; “I have nothing to do with Lieutenant Ling.”

“Kim Ling not here?” I cried out.

“No.”

“Was he not appointed Secret Guardian of the Queen?”

The man gazed at me open-mouthed. But

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I burst on, regardless of his surprise. I could not lose Kim now. I could not go to the King!

“You are mistaken, Sir,” I pressed him. “Ling was appointed to office here; I saw his appointment, after asking the King myself that it be given to him.”

The man fell backward from me, his eyes strained open wide; then he answered me firmly and gravely (and I admired him for it):

“He is not and has not been here, Sir; but I am only Keeper of the Tomb. Have you looked for him at the Barracks?”

The Tablet had fallen fairly into its place upon the sunken Tomb, without sign of crack or other mar. Directly upon it were laid the light sleepers of the little building now being erected. It was a handsome little structure of cedar wood in which the memorial tablets would be kept for inspection. The building was not intended as a temple, for the Temple of the Tomb had been built to be permanent, and there the sacrifices and incense would be burned. Thus I gazed around me while I tried to think of my next step. It was plain that this man, even if he knew, would not tell me

THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB

where Kim Ling was; I doubted if he knew. But I made one more effort to get something out of him :

“ Yes, I have been to the Barracks,” I replied with great lack of regard for the truth, “ but he left the Barracks on the night of the funeral. His commission took effect when the Queen was buried; where else, then, would he be save here, — on Lynx Island? ”

But even my sarcasm was of no avail with this sturdy man. Yet the two talked a moment behind my back. Then one said gently :

“ Kim Ling’s Uncle Kysang is Ringer of the Bell; he can tell you where Kim lives, and no doubt you can get scent of him there.”

I was indebted to the men for this information, but I lingered for — well, for strength to take up the search. I leaned heavily upon the sweet new timbers just brought from the far-off mountains; I prayed to God then as I never had before, and as I prayed for the strength to find *Dulcine* and save her, there came, in the scent of the cedars, the memory of my boyhood home in dear old Vermont. I saw the hills and forests and heard the chatter of those clear brooks where the trout played; I felt once

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

more the sweet damp of the woodlands, and a touch of the breeze which fans those cool Green Mountains from which I was now so far removed. And when I had thus rested a moment I wiped my damp eyes and pulled myself together.

I left the men in as good humor as possible, though I saw they thought I knew more than might have been expected, and rode carelessly back to the Barracks. I would find trace of Kim even if I met Oranoff himself. I called for Kim's captain, but when he came I found he knew less than nothing.

Kim Ling had disappeared from human sight!

From a soldier I learned where his mother and sister lived, and bolted out of the Barracks on that slight clue. At the gate I met one of my Legation boys. He knew me almost instantly, and ran up saying:

"Go slow; I bring you *pinge* [letter] from Colonel Oranoff."

"Bring it to the Great Bell," said I, and I galloped on.

The house of the Great Bell was locked, and the keeper was away. I was turning to leave

THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB

for Kim's house, when my boy came hurrying up. He brought this letter:

MR. ROBERT MARTYN: Your commission as Captain in the Czar's Cuirassiers is handed you herewith. I leave Tsi at daybreak for Port Arthur. There is some bad plotting going on here by Tuen. I shall be better off in China, and there is much to be done there. I shall return on the "Genki Maru," touching Tsi the 27th. Shall return to Washington with you. You need not report at St. Petersburg before the spring manœuvres in May. Hastily but gratefully yours,

IVAN ORANOFF, *Colonel.*

This was dated the night of the Imperial Funeral.

Then Oranoff had not received my deceptive note. He was out of the country; and there were five days in which to get Dulcine from the Tomb, and to meet her father at Tsi. I hardly paused to thank the man for obtaining for me such an enviable commission in that most wonderful body of horse in the world. I know he was thinking as much of Dulcine as of me in doing so.

I told my boy where I wished to go as nearly as I could, and he became my guide. At last

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

he paused before a door and spoke to a little girl playing near.

It was Kim's house. The girl called her mother, who told my boy that Kim had gone away the night of the funeral and would return home at stated times. He had not come yet, and they did not know when he would come. They were happy in his fortunate appointment; but the news of the father's death, though they had not seen him for two long years, brought a gloom which even the son's promotion could not dispel.

Here was the end of my last rope. I could learn nothing further of the disappearance of Kim Ling.

I asked that news of his return be sent to his uncle, the old Ringer of the Bell, and I turned gloomily away.

I would wait a little for Kim before I went to the King. Passing by an inn, I stopped long enough to write a note to the Russian minister, saying that I had gone on a little journey to the mountains, and would return to Keinning in time to take the boat on which Colonel Oranoff and his daughter would return from China. I also explained that Dulcine had

THE KEEPER OF THE TOMB

joined her father at Tsi and had gone to Chefoo with him.

Had a scorpion crawled out of the words, I could not have started more suddenly. The white lie I was telling was the very black lie the devil Menin told me! And Oranoff had gone to Chefoo, as the trickster said! I had not thought of that before. Now I thought and trembled.

I am sure I should not have been blamed for doubting Dulcine here; but I did not. Menin may have been right regarding Oranoff, and wrong concerning his daughter. No good liar fails to season his falsehoods with a pinch of truth.

With half an oath and half a sob I — spent hound that I was — determined to cling to the track of the lost lad Kim, and I plodded on, trembling and exhausted, to the Bell House to wait.

By only one thing was I cheered, — Colonel Oranoff's absence. The feeling in that great city against us was growing intense. It would have been all his life was worth to walk these streets now. Yet I believe I wished a little that I could confess everything to him. This suspense was slow poison.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

EMMILÉ

THE old Ringer of the Bell was standing in the door of the Bell House as I came across the plaza to it. My boy told him something of me, which made him very friendly; to my surprise, he could speak some English. He had been an old servant at the British Legation before receiving his present appointment, which was, to all native eyes, a most honorable one. He had obtained it through the influence of his brother, General Ling.

I remained with old Kysang from that evening until the following night at midnight, and as I look back on them, those hours were by far the darkest in all my Quelpartien experience. Since Kim could not be found, I must await his return. There was nothing else to do,—that is, unless I went to the King. This I determined I would not do for at least one more night. I sent my boy again to Kim's

EMMILÉ

house to make sure that word would be sent me upon Kim's arrival. He returned affirming that my wish would be obeyed, bringing also the information that Kim's mother was afraid of me, and that Kim was now away longer than he had expected to be.

If Kim was delayed, for how long would it be? I trembled to think that Tuen might have entrapped the son as he had the father! If so, I was wasting each moment I waited for him, and would better go to the King this very night. By force of will I decided not to go until midnight of the following night. If Kim came not by that time, I would hurry immediately to the Russian Legation, where the King would be with his Cabinet, throw myself at his feet, and tell all.

And how did I live through the terrible hours intervening? In other circumstances my stay of thirty hours within that Bell House listening to the tales of old Kysang would have been of utmost interest. The house was, perhaps, fifteen feet square and twenty feet high. It was latticed on the sides, and roofed overhead. In one corner Kysang had a little room and a fire. Here I lay, sleeping or smok-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

ing desperately, while listening to the old man's talk.

In the center of the house hung the Great Bell of Keinning. It was twelve feet high, and more than half as broad at the mouth. It was made of a strange composition of metals, chiefly iron. It hung suspended from two heavy beams and had no tongue, being struck by a great beam hung on heavy chains. And when this beam was drawn back by the old Ringer and crashed down upon the Bell, a sound, the like of which one will hear nowhere else in the world, goes out over the great city, echoing among the surrounding mountains. The composition of metals in the bell, and the effect of being struck by a wooden, instead of an iron, tongue, give to its tone a peculiar quality, which is likely to preserve forever the terrible legend which has come down the centuries with it. The sound is plaintive and pathetic, from whatever part of the city you hear it, — as if it were, in reality, the death-cry of a child.

The dynasty to which Whang-Su belonged began one hundred years before Columbus discovered America, so old Kysang affirmed in

EMMILÉ

telling the story of the Great Bell. I thought I could have told pretty nearly when it should have ended, if myths be true, but I held my peace and smoked on. Each new dynasty must have a new capital; so the new King sent out three wise men to locate the site of his capital. These wise men, like all wise men, fell into a dispute, but on awakening one morning, they found a narrow line of snow which formed a circle just here in the plain of Phan River. Providence had settled the question, and had indicated the propitious spot by this band of snow.

On this circle the work of excavating for the foundation of the city wall immediately began. One day a workman struck his pick in a metal substance. Digging carefully around it, he soon brought to light a small iron bell of perfect proportions. The discovery was noised abroad, and the King ordered the bell brought to the palace. Immediately a proclamation went forth that a gigantic bell should be cast to hang in the center of the capital, each of the twenty provinces being asked to furnish one-twentieth of the metal, that it might truly be a national bell.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Messengers were sent riding forth to each province to bring the metal to the great mould which was being prepared at Keinning. Each province contributed its share gladly, and soon the King appointed a day for the casting. The nation assembled with the King and Court on the hillside above the molten mass of metal. At the raising of the Queen's hand the mould was filled. After a feast the Great Bell was lifted on mighty chains to hang before all the people. But, even as the cheers of the thousands went up, a loud report was heard which silenced the tumultuous applause.

The side of the Bell had cracked !

Confusion reigned in the Court, and the King's face was white with mingled anger and fear as he proclaimed that the Bell would be recast on the morrow, and sent the people running to their temples to pray.

On the morrow a greater concourse gathered ; a greater feast was prepared. Again the metal was heated, hotter than before. Again, at the Queen's signal, the great mould was filled, the feast was enjoyed, and the Bell was lifted from the mould.

And with a mightier report again it burst

EMMILÉ

asunder. The King and his nobles fell on their faces. The people rushed away now of their own accord, as fleeing from the very wrath of the gods.

Yet one of all those thousands stood still. With an agonized face upturned this man beat his breast and walked onward, alone, up toward his prostrate King. Nearing the great dais built on the greensward, he fell on the ground. A nobleman turned the King's eye to him, and at a signal he arose.

“Sire, I was a gatherer of metal in Rang-do. As I went through a little village I asked for metal at each hut. In one, darker than the rest, I uttered my request. Whereupon an old woman replied, from the gloom: ‘I have no metal, but take this,’ and she unbound a babe from her back and held it out to me. I laughed and went on. But as I went, the woman cursed the Bell.”

The Court arose at these words, and all exclaimed:

“*A witch has cursed the Bell!*”

Then the King set another day for the casting, and ordered that the witch and her child be found. The man was raised from the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

ground, to which he had fallen in anguish and terror, and, with a troop of horsemen, rode rapidly off into the mountains. The prayers of a nation followed them and brought them safely back.

And now the green hillside witnessed again the assembling of the nation, — for everywhere the strange tale had gone. Even the lame and the blind came, and the great white-robed concourse formed another semi-circle about the molten crater. On the dais, again spread with tiger-skins, sat the King and the Queen. The Court in gorgeous apparel again waited.

Just as the Queen arose to give the signal for the filling of the mould, a strange form was seen running through the crowds of people. All eyes turned to it.

It was the witch.

On she ran. Reaching the red-hot crater, she unloosened a babe from her back and looked upward to the dais. With a wave of her white fingers the Queen gave the terrible command, and the babe was cast headlong into the boiling maelstrom of heated iron.

As it went downward its plaintive cry rang out, and all the people heard:

EMMILÉ

“Emmilé, Emmilé— O mother! O mother mine!”

It is said that that cry was heard in every part of the kingdom, and not a mother but shuddered and turned quickly to her sleeping babe.

Then the great mould was filled, but the people waited in silence for the cooling of the Bell, and feasted not. The chains straightened and lifted it again in air.

A nation held its breath. The moments passed. But the Bell remained whole. The life-blood of the babe had proven the rare flux needed to cement its ponderous sinews. Cheer upon cheer arose, and the King proclaimed a holiday. A wooden beam was garlanded and hung to strike the Bell. At the King's command it was swung back and descended.

But what sound came forth? *Only the cry of the burning babe:*

“Emmilé! Emmilé!”

And the Queen fainted where she stood.

During a part of the time garrulous Kysang talked, I slept. There was nothing I could do before the time I had set to go to the King

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

but sleep, and there was nothing I needed to do more. The booming of the Great Bell at midnight of my first night with Kysang awoke me with a fright I had never felt in my life before.

“*O Mother! O Mother mine,*” the iron monster cried, and a thousand mothers of Quelparte unconsciously turned in their sleep, and drew closer the infants beside them. And old Kysang, believing implicitly that the cry was that of the murdered babe, lovingly stroked the quivering metal with his bony hand and crooned a plaintive lullaby.

On the second night I awoke with a frightened sob, as the great beam swept again through the air and announced midnight.

Yet I arose determinedly, shook old Kysang’s hand roughly, and started for the door.

There my Legation boy Pak almost ran into me.

“Colonel — Oranoff — has — come — hurt — very — badly —” he panted.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A NEW DEJNEFF

AT the Legation plaza I found Dejneff striding up and down in the dark consuming a black cigar. I needed nothing more to make me sure that something was wrong.

When I came up he stopped quickly in his tracks. While he was growling out some Russian oaths with his usual zest, I could see that he was not the same gruff old Dejneff. There were so many things I wanted to ask him that I was at a loss which to ask first, and yet I did not forget that there was one question which I must not permit him to ask me; I did not want him to mention *Dulcine*.

"Oranoff is here?" I seized his coat sleeve as I spoke the words. He took the cigar out of his mouth and nodded dumbly. The grizzled warrior, always ready before with an oath or gruff laugh, only nodded, now, to this the most serious question I ever asked a man.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Lights were moving up and down in the Legation, but the King's wing was dark as the night, and I wondered how it was that Whang-Su was not meeting his Cabinet as of yore.

The whole place seemed unnatural. I shook myself and repeated the question to Dejneff, and now he found his voice:

“Oranoff, or his ghost.” The man's breath left him with those four words. But soon he found it and continued: “We were coming in from the Imperial Mausoleum after dusk, a few Cossacks and myself, and near the Great Bell we ran into a street fight. The crowd scattered as we dashed up, and there on the ground lay Colonel Oranoff. We brought him to the Legation. For a time he was unconscious, and when at last he came around he did not know where he was, and attempted to get out of his bed and go away; the Cossacks pulled him back, and he lies there now like a tiger. I am afraid he has been hurt on the head, and it has struck in.”

Dejneff spoke like a child, and it was plain that he was all knocked up.

I was pushing on toward the Legation door as we talked, dragging Dejneff with me. I

A NEW DEJNEFF

feared that I could not see Oranoff. We had reached the great door now, and I felt sure that Dejneff had not told me all the truth.

“Come, old man,” I said, taking him sternly by the lapel of his great-coat; “what’s up? How did Oranoff come to Keinning, and how was he hurt?” I could not go on until I knew more.

“Damn me if I know, Martyn; go see for yourself.”

I dragged him into my room. I did not know whether I wanted to go to Oranoff yet or not. While Pak was getting the brandy and soda, we sat looking at each other in silence, though Dejneff swung himself around and around in his chair every half-minute with a deep sigh.

As we waited, the interior of that room brought back a score of painful memories. Here I had conceived and carried into execution this reckless travesty which, for all I knew now, was to cost several of us our lives. I remembered what Oranoff had once said about peace costing the Czar the lives of his best; if Oranoff had been permanently injured, a good life had surely been wrecked in Quelparte to

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

avert a war with Japan! Even the pictures on which I had hung some of those silk garments were still askew, and the chair stood before the fireplace just where it had stood when I told Dulcine that story of Lynx Island. As I thought of Dulcine I shuddered — for fear Dejneff would speak of her! What could they think of her absence with Colonel Oranoff in such a condition? But might it not be that even this was fortunate? I tried to think it was.

The liquor did something toward making men of us again, — being good for all poisons. Dejneff was quite himself, and my presence seemed to give him confidence.

“This protectorate business has been going all against the grain,” he said at last, with a nod toward the King’s wing of the Legation. I remembered that it was dark. “It’s set the people against us, which explains this attack on Oranoff.”

I was thinking it was Tuen’s revenge.

“Has the King heard of it?” I asked.

“No, the King has left.”

I started.

“What do you mean, Dejneff?”

A NEW DEJNEFF

“Oh, the people thought we had him here, and had put the screws on him to pull through this protectorate, and the Cabinet made him clear out for the new palace.”

“He has gone already?”

“He went to-night; we could n't keep him, and we did n't want him either.”

So here was the end of my plan to see the King to-night; in fact, I doubted whether I could ever see him alone now, hedged in as he probably was by the swarm of officials at the palace. But Oranoff could. I must see Oranoff!

While we talked of the King, Dejneff was quite his old self, but the moment I spoke of Oranoff he cringed and failed me. I could not be balked, and would not.

“I must see Oranoff, Dejneff, right away, *and I will*; I wish you would go and do what you can for me.” The words seemed to take the strength out of him, but he saw I was in earnest, and he arose unsteadily and started for the door.

“But, Dejneff,” I added, rising with him, “don't let anybody know I am here or have been here; not even Dulcine.” How I got

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

those words out my lips I cannot tell; yet I said them, and they stopped him in his tracks. But after standing still a moment glaring down his nose into his beard, he left me without a word.

“He does not dare to tell me Dulcine has not returned,” I said, as I dropped again upon my bed.

Pak came in some time after Dejneff had left and took away the empty glasses. When he came back I was donning my best and brightest uniform. Pak assisted me for a time in silence, but at last he could not contain himself, and the poor lad burst into tears, much to my surprise and to his own great shame.

I soon learned that the servants knew of the attack on Oranoff. They were all frightened; some had even left the Legation, fearing a mob would attack us. But Pak was weeping because Oranoff was injured, and more particularly because no one knew what was the matter with him.

“Won't you get Hu Mok now?” he at last said to me, drying his face on his coat-tails. “Hu Mok can tell what's the matter with anybody,” he went on, uninterrupted; “last moon

A NEW DEJNEFF

a man was very sick in Chulla province, and no one knew what was the matter. Hu Mok went down there with his stone and put it on the man and looked in and he saw a dog. 'Has this man been bitten by a dog?' Hu Mok asked right away. The man's wife said, 'Yes, he was bitten by a dog last winter.' Hu Mok says, 'Oho, the man will bubble at the mouth and bark like a dog and die; tie him down, and don't let him bite you.' And the man died barking and bubbling at the mouth that same moon."

"I will see about Hu Mok, Pak," I said, conciliating him; "I am going to see Colonel Oranoff now."

For Dejneff was at the door.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

“ORANOFF”

IT was beginning to grow light in the east as I went down to the room where Colonel Oranoff lay. I have often wanted to measure the length of the great hall of the Legation, for I remember it as being no less than a day's long march, measured by such thoughts as those which were in my mind that morning. I went as a man might walk to the scaffold, thinking of a year of his wasted life while he took each step toward that life's quick end.

Yet I went as a man justified at the bar of his own conscience. True, I might have adopted different courses than those I had chosen since the destruction of the Queen's body. I might have asked Kepneff to bring me straight from Lynx Island to Tsi, and then telegraphed Oranoff the whole truth; but the little “Dulcette” had not arrived yet from Han Chow, and I would not have

“ORANOFF”

come in time for the funeral! I might have told Oranoff the truth when Dulcine told him my lie in my very hearing; but I thought the lie was better and safer than the truth! I might have chosen not to let Dulcine find a woman to play the Queen, but that seemed then almost my only course, at least the safest course. I could have refused to follow the dare-devil Menin from the dais. But I could not have avoided the providential escape forced upon me by the falling of my horse, nor could I have done more than I had to find a way to release Dulcine from the dark prison where she lay — unless I had been willing to tell the whole tale to the King before first trying another alternative.

When I reached the door Dejneff held open, I was as ready to meet Oranoff as I had continually been ready to answer every question my conscience had thus far raised. True, I trembled; but innocent men do that sometimes. I trembled at the thought of Dulcine. I trembled for fear her father had been seriously hurt. How came he here? Had he failed to clear the country before the storm broke? Or had he learned of Dulcine's ab-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

sence and returned to throw his life away because I had lost her so completely? Was it any wonder that he was out of his mind?

We went forward softly through the salon to the dimly lighted apartment beyond. Several men — Russian army surgeons — were standing in the center of the room looking at the bed, their hands on their weapons. My eyes followed theirs, but at first I could hardly see, coming as I had from a darkened hall. Then some one turned up the lights.

A gendarme was kneeling on the edge of the bed holding its occupant under him. And he was having his way, for presently, with a strange cry, the man underneath sank back to the pillows. I heard the click of handcuffs and knew the struggle had been precipitated at the sight of such cruel fetters. Then the guard went off the bed and stood watch near by.

A way was tacitly made for me, and I approached the bedside quietly, though I never took steps before or since so regretfully.

For a full minute I gazed downward speechless and dumfounded upon the face of —
Sahib Menin!

“ORANOFF”

The werewolf had played Ivan Oranoff once too often!

For a moment I could not speak. Then, mad with revenge, I leaned over the man, who I knew was watching me through half-closed eyes, and I lifted the false imperial swiftly from his face, and holding it aloft, I turned to the astonished men behind me, saying:

“Gentlemen, let me present a hell-hound of Prince Tuen’s, Sahib Menin.”

Their exclamations were lost on my ears — but, oh! the oath hissed into that pillow did my heart a great good!

The daylight bade me hasten, for I could not remain in the Legation without Dulcine, and Ling must be found or I must go to the King.

“You made a fast run to Chefoo, Sahib Menin,” I said.

“*Peste!*” he growled, “as fast as your message went there.”

The villain was unmasked. He spoke now, as fierce and domineering as ever in that mountain hut. It made my blood boil! But I swallowed my anger and determined to play with my defiant mouse a bit.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“Instead, you came here, sharpened the teeth of your trap, and stuck your own leg in it;” and I laughed as heartily as though laughter and not groans had been my whole portion of late. But Menin laughed too,—that same hellish grin,—and I wanted to spring at his throat.

“Where is your launch?” I asked quickly, for I could not beat the bush longer; “tell the truth now for once; I promise you will pay dear for each lie.”

“At Chefoo,” he answered calmly.

“Then, Sir,”—and I had determined upon my course anticipating this lying reply,—“in an hour Admiral Holstrem of the Russian fleet will have your boat found and searched.”

The man’s eyes were coals of fire.

“Then he will find a dead woman in it.”

I had turned away, but this drove me back, mad.

“Then, by the Lord God, I will come back and shoot you where you lie till you are dead,” I cried and turned on my heel again.

“So my life is worth more to you than hers?” The reply, half a reflection, half a

“ORANOFF”

question, unnerved me utterly, but I strode on toward the door determinedly.

Did ever a man ache as I did at that moment? If Menin let me go now, it was because either his men did not have Dulcine or he was ready to die the death I named (if, as he had said, his life was worth more to me than hers!). And here he had me. By the Lord, if he, my prisoner, was not the master still!

I thought all this out as I strode to the curtains of the salon door, but there I turned and looked back. I could not help it.

And all the answer the dare-devil gave me was that hellish laugh. Hark! I can hear it now,—loud, clear, defiant, and ending in an unknown oath!

I went on, for I could not stop without confessing the mastery of his position. In the writing room I found blanks and began formulating my message to the Admiral. And I wrote and destroyed and rewrote that single message. The question finally resolved itself to just this: Did I dare to trust that Dulcine had refused to open the Sarcophagus at any other signal than the one she had promised to

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

obey? Of course it was possible that Menin had given this signal of ours accidentally, but I had long ago resolved not to consider this extraordinary fatal coincidence.

So I clung desperately to my theory that Dulcine had never been released, based wholly upon my faith in her. But it was foolhardy to run useless risks, and my hand dropped nerveless when I strove to sign Oranoff's name to the order I had written.

As I lay on the table perplexed, a happy alternative occurred to me. I could at least prove Menin's words concerning the presence of his launch off Chefoo, and in a moment I substituted this query for the order I could not dare to send:

ADMIRAL HOLSTREM, CHEFOO:

Advise at once if two-masted steam launch is anchored in either inner or outer harbor Chefoo.

ORANOFF *per* MARTYN.

I quickly reduced this to cipher and had it sent singing on its way.

Then I went back to my mouse. It would be an hour before I could nail Menin's first lie. And I thought of other things to ask him.

“ORANOFF”

“In an hour, Sahib Menin, your lies will be thrown back in your teeth,” I began; “in the meantime you will do well if you tell the truth.”

“*Jamie!* but you are a fool,” he growled; “think you Prince Tuen’s private launch will be overhauled and searched like a pirate’s junk?”

I ignored the words in proportion as they affected me. For the first time Menin confessed Tuen to be his master!

“Aye, and sunk at its berth, if your words prove true,” I retorted.

“Oh, but you are a fool,” the man snarled, and turned over to his pillow, ignoring my presence absolutely.

I began to feel now that I dealt, in truth, with no common villain, and also, with a gust of anger, that I played poor hands as master. However false Menin was otherwise, he was truly genuine in his disgust at my boyish bravado. I had the wit to retire to my own room and sleep until my answer came.

My boy brought it and aroused me; with shaking hand I translated the words one by one and glared at the result:

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

None but Tuen's private yacht, which just put out to sea. HOLSTREM.

With this in my hand I rushed back to Oranoff's suite.

"Your yacht has left Chefoo, Sahib," I ripped out now angrily.

"Because the message it was awaiting was not sent." The devil drawled the words without taking his head from the pillows or looking at me.

"Where has it gone?" I demanded, exasperated.

"To Shanghai."

"Are you ready to send word to have the prisoner delivered there to the Russian minister?"

"Are you ready to go to the King and tell him the Imperial Mausoleum is empty?"

"I'll see you in hell first," I burst out, crazed by the beast's impudence.

The man now sat up in bed.

"Hark, fool; Shanghai is the last place I can catch them; if they do not hear from me there, they will go up the river and peddle their freight in the opium dens of the Yangtse."

This was too overdone.

“ORANOFF”

Menin had played me for a youth to advantage, but this blasphemous threat was too plainly a desperate *dernier resort*.

It chilled the blood in my veins, but I was steeled against chilled blood now, and I sneered:

“Bah! you are too much of a coward to face the consequences of that.” With this cutting thrust — unjust, indeed, for Menin was as brave a devil as ever breathed — I left the room.

I was wasting time there and strength too. I had made up my mind to find Kim before I dickered more with Menin. Until I was sure Dulcine was not in the Imperial Mausoleum, I should believe she had kept perfect faith with me, and act on that belief.

I left the Legation as secretly as I had come, and went back to old Kysang.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

KIM

AS I made my way through the waking city, my bright uniform attracted much attention, and I was glad enough to find Kysang at the Bell House, and in the little room where Kim's uncle lived I found a welcome retreat. It was evident that I was not safe in Keinning now without a goodly body of Cossacks about me. Even the sly Menin, master-trickster, had been attacked and would have been killed had not Dejneff scattered his assailants.

Worn out utterly, it was not difficult for me to decide to rest for the day in Kysang's warm corner; and, anxious beyond telling though I was to reach Dulcine, I determined to gain a little of the strength I needed, and then, Kim failing me, I would go that night to the King. I knew I could not see him until night, and I did not know, I confessed with a sob, whether I could do so, even at the most appropriate time.

K I M

Kysang gave me his softest mat and I fell on it despairingly, for it seemed near a crime for me to sleep now. Yet there in the center of the great city, the tramp of hundreds of sandaled feet sounding continuously in my ears, I slept, and started into wakefulness with frightened cries, and then fell asleep again, throughout the long day. If possible, my dreams were as harrowing as my waking thoughts.

As often as I awoke, I found Kysang or faithful Pak at my side; Pak was indefatigable in my interest, bringing me, among other things, a basket of luscious persimmons which grow twice the size in Quelparte that they do in America, and amply repay one's effort to learn to like them. Whenever I see this fruit now I remember that dreary day I spent in the little Bell House in Keinning—and Kysang's watch.

Some oldtime friend of the Bell-ringer at the English Legation had presented Kysang with a cast-off watch which renewed the old man's desire of long life. It was a plain, silver, open-case affair, with a crystal monstrous thick, but no youth with his first stem-winder was ever so pleased as was Kysang with this. For the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

first few days he carried it in his hands, partly through fear that it would suffer accident elsewhere, and partly because the Quelpartien male attire is innocent of pockets. Whatever a Quelpartien wishes to carry with him goes into a little cloth, leather, or chamois bag which swings ever at his loins. Kysang was carrying it still in his hand, but Kim's mother had made him a little pocket in his under-coat, which came early in the day, and soon he was finding what a marvelous nuisance pockets were. Kysang was continually putting in or taking out his watch, for he could not turn about without looking at it. He timed himself at all tasks, and became enthusiastic when I showed him how to count his pulse, finding that it moved faster after he had been exercising than before.

There was a clock in the little brick hotel across the square, and often he would saunter over and compare his watch with it. In one of my waking hours he confided to me gleefully, but in a low tone, that the clock in the hotel did not "get around as fast as his watch," — a fact that elated him immensely. Before night he told me that in a week his watch would go

K I M

around almost twice as many times as that clock.

“Then they would be just together again, wouldn't they?” I asked him. This was a puzzler, and he pulled out his watch and sat down, looking at it thoughtfully. Finally he coincided with my notion and affirmed that he could, however, keep careful score and be able to tell just how many times around he was ahead of the clock. His idea seemed to be that the fastest watch, like the fastest horse, was the best.

I laid him more deeply in my debt by showing him the regulator and explaining that he could make the watch go faster or slower, as he chose. He could not understand why one could wish to make a watch go more slowly, whereupon I drew on his idea of fast horses, and he admitted that it was not best to keep a horse always traveling at his prettiest speed. Following my idea, he slowed his watch up once or twice a day, though this made him nervous, and he went over to the clock oftener for fear it would get ahead.

Kysang could not understand why there should be an arbitrary rule concerning the numbers on the watch's face. I once tried to

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

explain the length of the day and the rise and setting of the sun, but he objected so often and with such shrewdness, insisting, for instance, that some days were much longer than others, that I got out of the argument only by dint of a series of long words which completely silenced him. As to having twenty-four figures on the face, he could not see why this would not be a distinct improvement. The larger the face, the better Kysang said he would be suited. He was a little put out because the clock in the hotel struck the hours, and his watch did not. Could n't they put in a little bell? Another thing which troubled him was that the clock was wound up only once a week, and his watch had to be wound daily; this, on the face of it, was a reflection on the watch.

So I found myself delivering a dissertation on watch-springs. I told Kysang of the American sailor who took his fine gold watch to a Japanese jeweler to be put in order, and who found after getting it back that it would run in fair, but not in cloudy, weather. Kysang was as puzzled as the sailor; the Japanese had put in a bamboo main-spring which swelled when the air was damp.

K I M

Thus the day passed in a sort of waking sleep — with now and then a new development in Kysang's moving eccentricities. The watch made him forget his legends, even, until the night came. But no sooner had I asked him about the little lake in the palace grounds near by, than he began to tell of the strange Hon-pyung Sa-ryung-bu, or pond, near the Home Department, where the frogs have never croaked throughout the livelong years since one Kang Kam-ch'al gagged their mouths with straw.

Kang was only a clerk in the Home Department, but he was so good that even the beasts of the field obeyed him; consequently the highest men in the land feared him. At one time the frogs in the little lake beside the building croaked so loudly that Kang could bear with them no longer. He then wrote the following on a piece of paper:

“ This is a government office, where noise cannot be tolerated, for it interferes with work. Instead of remembering this and keeping silence, out of gratitude for our giving you this pond to live in, you keep up this horribly sad croaking, which seems to be the only voice Heaven

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

conferred upon you. But it must cease. If you do not stop, we shall have to discipline you.”

Kang threw this letter into the pond, and with it an armful of chopped straw. Straightway upon reading the letter every frog seized a piece of chopped straw and held it in his mouth, like the Quelpartien boy who is gagged in school when he does not repeat the characters well. From that day to this not a frog has croaked beside the Home Department, though the pond is full of them.

But poor Kang came to a bad end. At that time the King's son-in-law, Cho Ta-rim, was a shocking scapegrace who lived inside the South Gate under Nam-san. This youth had the effrontery to ask the King to build him a golden bridge from his house to one of the spurs of the mountain.

Shocked at the profligate's request, Kang boldly memorialized the Throne that he be put to death. This raised a tempest, and Kang was seized and condemned to death. He was bound to a cart to be driven to his execution, according to custom, with his crime pasted in great letters upon his back, "*Arch-traitor.*" But when Cho Ta-rim's friends attempted to

K I M

start the cart, the bullocks could not move it an inch. More bullocks were yoked on, but to no effect.

Then Kang, the criminal, laughed and said, "If you will remove this accusation from my back and write instead '*Arch-patriot*,' the cart will go."

For a time the angry crowd would not listen, but at last when they obeyed Kang's words the cart moved easily to the place of execution, where the villainous sentence was carried out with added zest because of Kang's laughter and his magic power.

"If you don't believe this," said Kysang, as he finished, "go some summer night to the Home Department and listen for frogs at the Hon-pyung Sa-ryung-bu."

As night came on, I thought more and more of my prisoner at the Legation, of his bold playing and his villainous threat. What would Oranoff say when he knew that Menin was in his hands? As I slept a little now and then, I even dreamed of Dulcine as prisoner on Tuen's palatial yacht; yet when I woke I was surer than ever that to trust her perfectly was my only course, and I felt a new courage com-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

ing into me as the night thickened and the hour of action came nearer.

How little I knew into what sphere my activities would be called!

No word came from Kim's house, and as midnight drew near (Kysang's brave watch hurried it on apace!), I was planning another meeting with the King. I waited patiently until Kysang's old bell gave its thunderous alarm to the sleeping city, and then arose and went to the door without a word.

But there stood a woman in white. Oh, I shall never forget that face, blanched with the most deadly fear.

I looked, and saw it was Kim's mother!

I went quickly toward her. Kim had come! She had brought me the good news! The one man who must know of Dulcine and her condition was now within reach, and I knew he would tell me of her safety and help me release her.

I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving from a thankful heart.

But all the time that white face stared wildly upon me. What could that mean? The woman came nearer, then quickly ran round

K I M

me and entered Kysang's room. She fell across the threshold as the old man was coming out, and lay sobbing her message in his arms.

Then he rose and came tottering forward. The little lantern partly lighted the space between us, but I could see the man's face was very pale.

"Kim has come, has he, Kysang?" I cried in anguish. The man groaned.

The woman sat up and leaned against the partition of the room, and I never saw a sadder face.

"Aye, yes, boy; Kim has come," the old man sobbed.

And then he burst into tears, and, putting his face in his arms, groaned and spoke to himself as though he could not believe it. Then he looked up, feeling, I think, the misery I felt. And he did not lessen it as he said:

"Yes, Kim has come, but it is Kim no more. Emmilé!" he sobbed, "Emmilé! Emmilé!"

Kysang picked up the woman and went out, and I followed the two through the black streets, though I could get no further word from them; they groaned at every step.

It was all too strange, almost, to frighten me

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

—and yet I was frightened. What were their groans but words of fear and terror? What did they mean by saying Kim had come but it was not Kim?

In my despair I fled on the faster through the smoky blackness, pressing upon their heels. I had waited in most poignant distress all these hours, and at the end had come this wild scene in the bell-house, these groans and tears, these signs of terror and despair!

The fresh air and exercise aroused the woman, and taking the man's hand she now pressed on faster through a perfect maze of narrow streets filled with smoke. As Quel-partiens build their fires beneath the floors, the chimneys empty into the gutters, and on damp nights the narrower streets are choked with smoke.

Yet the smoke smelled better than anything else.

As I pushed on, I asked many questions. Some I asked of the man before me. Some I asked myself; but to none could I get or give any answer. I wondered if this tumult could have been occasioned by Kim's loss of position. Might it not be that the boy already had sacri-

K I M

ficed himself and his station for us? Had he already found Dulcine and saved her? This was too good to be true by any possibility. He could not have known the identity of the white form we together had borne into the Throne Room that night, nor would he have read the message he brought me from Dulcine. He could not have known that the fall of the great tablet had buried her within the Queen's Mausoleum. And yet I remembered with a start that Prince Tuen's wily servants had known all this, at least they had guessed it all and had acted swiftly and triumphantly on the basis of their supposition.

But while I struggled with these fears and hopes, we came to Kim's house, where an excited crowd had gathered. Talk ran high and was sensational in its nature. I told Pak, who followed behind me, to remain without and listen to all that was said.

I pushed on after Kysang and the mother. First I saw the little sister lying on the floor shrieking loudly. There was no one else in the room. The mother led Kysang to a doorway beyond, and the two looked through, but neither crossed the threshold. Soon Kysang turned

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

back with a terrible groan. He came to me, and as he came he sobbed pitifully:

“What have you done — what have you done?”

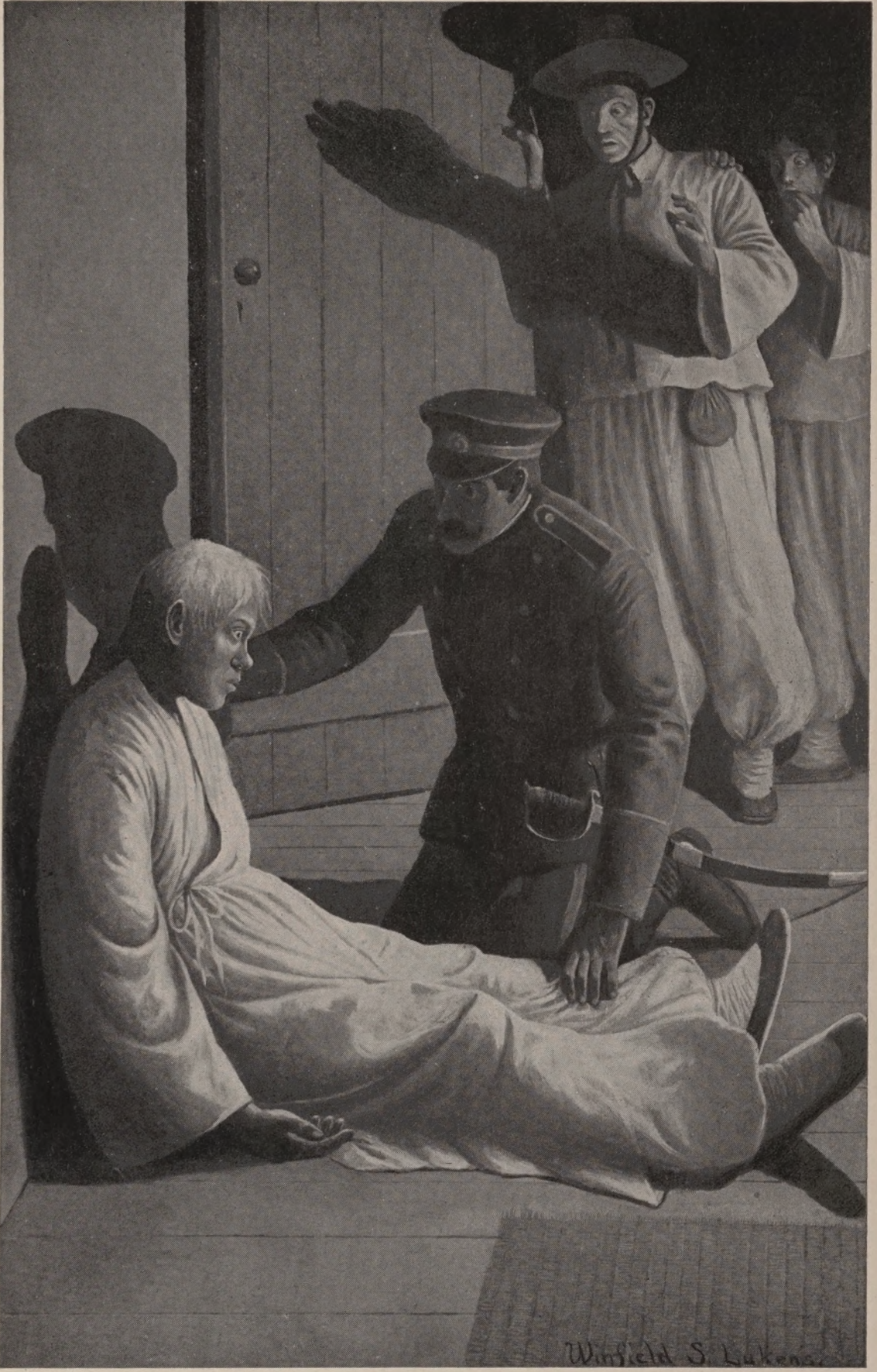
I saw he at once associated my relations to Kim with the youth's present condition. I was utterly unnerved, but I went forward quickly when once they made way for me, and I entered without stopping at the door.

There Kim sat on the floor leaning against the wall — and they were right; it was not Kim. His hair was as white as snow. His eyes were staring dully out of distended sockets. The fine, grave face was distorted out of every original proportion. He had gone away a sober, manly servant of the King. He was now returned, — a white-haired, gaping idiot!

My anguish was of a selfish tinge, but it was no less genuine. Beside myself with terror, I fell prostrate at the man's feet. He had looked up at me, as I entered the room, with a perfectly blank expression of face. As I sank before him the head tipped forward foolishly.

“Kim, lad, you know me, you must know me!” I cried.

The boy answered not a word. I grasped



K I M

his ankles — and they were trembling. I felt his hands — they were cold and were shaking, too. He was trembling all over. Fright had unbalanced his mind.

I kept on pleading with him, but to no purpose. He sat in a trembling lethargy, and I could not arouse the staggered brain. But I remembered my only alternative, and stood up quickly and shut the door in those staring faces.

I was desperate. Failure here and now meant a confession to the King. I could not, would not, fail. I felt if I could get one hint from Kim, Dulcine might be saved. I felt instinctively that his condition was attributable in some way to the terrible farce we had played. He must have seen Dulcine, and the shock had unbalanced him. I knew a mind unhinged by fright could be aroused again only by a like shock of equal violence, and I acted on this theory.

I put the lantern on the floor before the huddled, trembling form of the youth. I backed quickly into the farthest corner, and the silly face followed me. Here in the darkness I drew Nsase's sword. I had not looked upon it before save in daylight, and now it shone like the very

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

sword with which she danced. I had not swung it once over my head before the dull eyes opened wider. Noting the advantage, I whirled the blade bravely before me and rushed down upon the prostrate form of Kim Ling. He cowered back, displaying, by so doing, the first sign of mental activity. I threw the sword in the ashen face and shouted in the lad's ears. I seized the back of his long coat and threw him to his feet. Then I spoke sternly, even fiercely, my mouth not an inch from the quivering eyelids:

“The Queen lives, Kim; tell me she lives! Long live the Queen!”

The next moment seemed an eternity to me. Physicians never watched the action of a potent drug, when life was hanging by its slenderest silver thread, with more anxiety than I watched the effect of these words upon that disordered brain. I could see them burn deeper and deeper, as the seconds passed. One by one the quivering muscles relaxed. One by one each wild light died out of his eyes. Then the lad slowly raised his hand and saluted me with his first particle of sentient strength, murmuring thickly:

K I M

“Aye — the Queen lives — long live the Queen!”

Then he fainted, and I laid him in his mother's lap. But she saw the change in the face, listened to the regular, quiet breathing, and wept over him for very joy.

As for me, I called my boy, and went quickly out into the night. I knew I need not look for more help from Kim. It would be days, perhaps weeks, before he would recover. What was to be done I must do alone and do quickly. I pulled Pak into the dark and asked him how Kim had come home.

“He was brought by the Men in Black who are priests at the Temple of the Tomb.”

Those tongueless men in black! Why had I not guessed it all before? They were priests at the Temple, and Kim had been somewhere there holding watch over the Queen's body even as his old father had watched it at Lynx Island. I must reach that Temple of the Tomb before the Men in Black reached it. I did not doubt that they would have other business in Keinning, and with haste I might out-ride them and reach their Temple first.

I did not stop to wonder what had unsettled

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Kim, — though his condition was not a hopeful omen. For aught I knew he had looked upon Dulcine's dead body, but I fought such fears away with desperate hope and laid out quickly my next step.

Sending Pak to the Legation for horses, I followed him back to the Bell House to wait, and while there I made a large bundle of white strips of cloth from a couple of Kysang's coats I found on his wall.

Pak came and we were off at a gallop.

As the cathedral chimes rang out two o'clock, we were tying the horses in a clump of bushes half a mile from the Temple. Then circling around, we made our way softly through the gloom. I know not what Pak took for a guiding star, but with great certainty he brought me to the foot of the little rise of ground on which the building stood. We then climbed upward and entered the building.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

A QUEEN'S SOUL RAMPANT

THE chime at half-past two rang out from the city. We lay still as Indians, — my boy Pak and I. We could not even see each other, for it was the darkest hole I was ever in. Yet my plans could wait, if necessary, until morning light. And what I was hoping for might happen before then — if we were not too late.

I spent my time trying to remember the details of the Temple. But all I could recall was the dais upon which the golden Sarcophagus had rested behind the yellow curtains. I think we entered the building nearly where the hideous impersonation of Oranoff had stood and lured me away. I shudder even now as I remember that face! If I was right, then the altar was beyond; I trusted to luck, and we crawled far along and stopped behind a screen which had been discarded since the funeral.

It struck three. In the first dim gray of morning I could make out the outline of the

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

pillars of the Temple. The coming of morning would change my plans. Yet while I was waiting I undid my heavy bundle and took out a quantity of white bands. These I wound about my arms and legs, Pak assisting me, wondering but silent. Then I wrapped my body closely, and, lastly, my neck and head, leaving a slit to see through. I took Pak's long white cloak, such as all Quelpartiens wear, and bound it about my waist for a skirt, winding the scabbard of Nsase's sword in white and hanging it at my side. We worked desperately, and it grew lighter. Finally I lay quiet — and ready.

Only a moment after, Pak seized my arm convulsively. I leaned toward him. He did not even whisper, but with his hand turned my head. I looked into the blackness beyond, but could see nothing. Then the soft tread of sandaled feet sounded outside the Temple. The sounds came nearer. They mounted the steps. The matting was drawn aside, and two men entered.

The Two in Black had returned from Keining!

My dearest hope was realized! We crouched

A QUEEN'S SOUL RAMPANT

lower, but I watched the Two intently. In the dim gray light their black gowns could be easily followed. They stealthily crossed the large room to where the altar stood. There they stopped, but then as I looked upon them, plain to be seen there in the dim light, they vanished from sight!

I leaped to my feet. I could see more plainly now; no one was near the altar, and with a stern word to Pak, I drew Nsase's sword and rushed forward. The hideous image stared down upon me as though frantic with fear. I did not blame it. The candles on the altar were burned out, but around it on each side I felt the hangings of heavy tapestry. I pushed one of these, and it gave way. Instantly I bent down and nearly fell into a hole through the floor, which had not been closed up.

Sheathing the sword, I crawled under the hanging and let myself down. My feet reached a step, and I stood and turned about. The step rested on a floor of stone flagging. It seemed lighter at my feet, and I bent over. Then I saw a narrow passageway four feet high and thrice as long, with a torch burning at the end.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

And it led straight as an arrow toward the mound!

Drawing my sword again, I crouched down and went swiftly where the passage paved with stone led. No wonder it took time to build the mausoleum if a stone-ballasted underground railway was a necessary adjunct! By the torch was a paper door, standing ajar. I looked beyond and saw the Two were standing in a hallway beside an open door with others near them. The hall was some six feet in height, and extended on into the dark, but ever straight toward the Tomb.

My plan was not to be achieved by remaining unseen. I waited just a moment. Then I threw the door open and rushed upon the group, waving my sword. With gestures of alarm, the men fell across the threshold and shut a heavy door as I flew by. The moaning which came from that room has not yet ceased to ring in my ears. I pitied men so superstitious—and yet I must have made a wild sight as a Queen's soul rampant!

I did not stop here, for I knew that door would not be opened soon. I went on. I

A QUEEN'S SOUL RAMPANT

came to a flight of stone steps, almost a stone ladder, ascending very straight.

A cry of joy rose to my quivering lips. I sheathed Nsase's sword, and ascended silently. The steps were in a round shaft dug in the soft limestone, perhaps five feet in diameter. As I slowly ascended, the air became heavy, and I caught the dense scent of spices and balsam.

I breathed a prayer and crept upward softly, for I remembered how I was dressed — there were no others I cared to frighten!

At the top was a little room some eight feet square in which was a couch lying along the wall. Before it on the floor a paper lantern lay on its side; the flame had burned a hole through it. The candle was still long and would have lasted Kim all night, I thought — for this was surely his room. The lantern, lying where he had knocked it, proved the room had not been entered by the Men in Black, and I knew they would not come now!

All this passed through my mind ere I mounted the last step. My face was even with the curtain of the wall, and my eyes did not fall upon the heavily barred window in it until

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I was fairly at the top of the stairs. I sank quickly to my knees and crawled to it. The light cast by the bright candle fell downward, and, panting, I raised myself to the corner of the window and looked down. At first all was darkness, but then, as once before in the Temple of Ching-ling, a long, bright, shining object appeared slowly in the gloom, and my eyes rested full on the golden Sarcophagus of the Queen!

It was only by exerting my utmost strength that I kept from leaping to the window and crying out, but I feared the shock of the sudden greeting. Besides, my hands were around the great iron bars, and these tempered my exultation and set me to thinking.

The window was two feet square, four great bars two inches in diameter being planted in the solid masonry, in the hope of keeping the Queen's soul in its gloomy cell.

I crept to the couch on which Kim had lain, where I sat still, thinking, for my plans had now to be readjusted. As I sat there I remembered Kim and thought how nearly I had guessed the truth! The boy, like the father, sat facing the King's precious treasure — never

A QUEEN'S SOUL RAMPANT

to leave it save for short visits to his home. What a life that had been for the lad to look forward to! Would that white-haired boy ever return? I doubted it. For this must ever be to him the most dreadful place in the world. Here he sat in the dim light, gazing idly, perhaps, through those heavy bars. Suddenly the golden cover, closed by the King's own hand, started. I wondered if the youth had detected its first movement. Then a white hand was laid, perhaps, on the golden curved side. He must have seen that, and I groaned as I thought of such a spectacle in such a place. Then slowly, maybe, the murdered Queen, asleep two years, sat up in her cell!

Oh, with what terror the lad must have thrown himself headlong down those stone steps; little wonder the Men in Black heard his awful cry; little wonder that, when they found him, it was not Kim. No mind could have endured such a strain and retained its delicate equilibrium.

All this scene passed through my mind in a moment's time. Soon I had altered my plans to meet the new conditions, and I righted the lantern, looked once more upon the golden

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

casket, and leaned for a moment in prayer against the heavy bars.

Then, placing the lantern on the couch, I drew my sword and went down out of the room swiftly.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE FLIGHT OF A SOUL

RUNNING down the narrow hall, I passed the door of the priest's room. It opened as I came to it, but was quickly closed, and I heard a man fall to the floor with a groan.

This suited me exactly, for I needed a little time, and I knew that the door would not be opened soon again. I crept forward quickly to the altar, and came out to my boy Pak.

Behind that discarded screen a transformation took place. Tearing the bandages from my arms and legs, I quickly donned a brilliant uniform, and soon, after a few touches from Pak's practiced hand, I stood forth as unlike the Queen's soul, in which rôle I had been an undoubted success, as darkness is unlike light. Of the great bundle I brought, little was now left, and we hurriedly brushed the white rags into a corner.

Then I walked to the center of the room, making a loud noise with my boots, and there

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

I uttered a long halloo. I repeated it soon vehemently, but I had to wait some little time ; it took courage for them to open that door again !

A door finally opened slowly on the far side of the building, and those twelve tongueless creatures dressed in black entered, paralyzed with fear, even holding one another's hands. The door blew shut behind them, and every one whirled about with a gasp.

But they knew me, or at least my uniform quieted them, and I treated them as roughly as any Russian as they filed to the long bench to which I pointed.

Pak was my interpreter, but, on my oath, I knew not what to say first.

“ The great King,” I began at random, but in a very loud voice, “ desires to know if all is well in the Temple of the Tomb.”

The row of liars nodded affirmatively, looking sideways at each other to see if they agreed.

“ Your rooms are comfortable ? ” I queried.

“ Yes.”

“ The service and appointments of the Temple are complete ? ”

THE FLIGHT OF A SOUL

Again they nodded.

I was still playing for time, but I now gave up in despair and blurted out:

“Send for General Kim Ling.”

As Pak repeated this, the poor men shook like beech leaves in March. One of the two attempted to talk on his fingers, but gave it up quickly with a groan. Then he arose and pointed toward the city.

I interpreted the gesture by asking:

“Keinning?”

And all the gaping heads nodded.

“He is satisfied with His Majesty’s arrangement?”

I put this lie into the tongueless mouths and they swallowed it whole, each looking blankly at his fellow as he wagged his head.

There was something ghastly ridiculous about it all, and I kept from laughing only with effort.

But I saw Pak was growing pale and, alarmed, I cut short this scene by coming to the point.

“His Majesty feared lest, in the commotion caused by the funeral, the Temple might have been neglected and might now be wanting for

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

some necessity, or that actual use might have shown the need of change. He is particularly anxious" — and I whispered the words and made Pak do so — "lest the bars of the Queen's window are so far apart that her soul would attempt to escape."

The words told awfully on the trembling men. They fairly writhed. One arose to speak, forgetting in his excitement that his tongue had been removed. He sank to the floor. Another attempted to talk with his fingers, but they shook beyond all reading.

The Quelpartien idea of a soul's taking human form is matched nowhere, perhaps, save among that tribe of American Indians who leave a space in their funeral procession where the soul of the deceased may walk before the corpse.

I remembered that these Men in Black were the masons and carpenters of the Imperial Mausoleum, that they planned and built the Tomb, — the watcher's cell, the window, and the passageway thither from the Temple of the Tomb. At last, after a confused wrangle, one man arose, stood before me, and held his quaking hands far apart, nodding wildly.

THE FLIGHT OF A SOUL

“Are the bars too wide?” I asked.

Pak repeated my question, and a dozen heads began bobbing violently.

Then I reprimanded them severely (not asking for further proof), and roughly ordered that the error be corrected.

Holding the package I carried more tightly under my arm, I started for the door through which the priests had entered the room, and when I saw they stood aghast at my presumption, I turned to Pak and told him that the King had ordered the altar passage closed up.

These words had their effect. They knew I was about my business. Then I ordered them to get their tools to remove the heavy stone in which the bars were planted, since double the number of holes must be drilled in it. This work could not be done in the Tomb, so the stone must be carried away. Fortunately, like the Great Temple, the sound of a hammer and mallet must not be heard here.

I led the way, entering the higher hall by a passageway I had not noticed in my previous hasty incursion and no one being near me, I mounted the stone steps, as careful now to step

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

heavily as I had been careful before to step lightly. Once at the top, I ran to the barred window and cried:

“Dulcine — it is Robert — lie still until I come.”

Utter silence reigned in that dim room. I wondered if Dulcine had fainted. Oh, the agony of that next half-hour!

The priests came up fearfully, and went to work. The activity made men of them again, and soon the base stone was loosened, and they looked at me for the order to remove it, wondering, no doubt, if I would guard the window while the change was made. I gave the word by an eager gesture. They lifted it, and all went with it down the steep stairs. They were glad to get away from that black, open hole.

And, oh, was I not glad to have them?

In a moment I had rushed headlong through it, down, down into that mass of cake and spice. My first thought was of the chill of the room as I floundered down into the space between the wall and pedestal on which the Sarcophagus rested.

Then I was up again and over the Sarcopha-

THE FLIGHT OF A SOUL

gus. It was closed. With a groan I fumbled at the cover, and as I wrenched at it, it slid along. It was not fastened within.

My eyes were now on the long glass lid. I opened it, and — the Sarcophagus was as empty as the Tomb.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

A HELPING HAND

I REMEMBER going down the stone stairs and finding Pak and telling him to take me home. I remember coming back on the horse, but Pak must have done most of my riding for me. When I reached the Legation old Dejneff took me into my room, and before I lost track of things entirely, I know I asked him to telegraph Colonel Oranoff to return to Keinning.

I believed then that Menin had really won! I believed that Dulcine was where he had told me she was, — on that yacht of Prince Tuen's. What would be done to save her I could not tell. I had done all I could do, and I felt that my mind was letting go of the problem with which it had struggled, and vainly, for so many hours. It was hard to think that Dulcine was in that cold Tomb suffering I knew not what; but to think that she was a captive on that

A HELPING HAND

boat — well, I could not, for my brain refused to be urged further, and sank down under its load like a spent horse.

I fell asleep as the sun began to redden the windows, and it was not until the morning of the day following that I awoke. For a time I lay still with my eyes aching at this first glimpse they had of the light. I felt too weak to open them again, and for a few moments I was only conscious of the pain in them.

Then a hand touched my brow!

I felt that some one was leaning over me, for shortly after the hand became lighter and began moving softly back and forth. Its tender touch ran deftly like a woman's from one burning temple to the other. It lingered anxiously now and then on my forehead, and again grew heavy as though its possessor was looking intently over me. Now it brushed back my hair, which was wet with perspiration; it held the damp, hot mass away, and then it came back to the old course from one hot temple to another.

I knew that hand — but I feared I was dreaming or in a delirium. I opened my averted eyes, and, braving the bright sunlight, I looked about the room. Pak was in a far

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

corner spreading down a tiger-skin which had been having an airing; I turned my head slightly, and there before the fire sat Dejneff, looking as ever into his great beard and humming a song softly as he studied. Then suddenly he sat up, and I closed my eyes as he arose and came over toward the bed.

“Miss Oranoff,” he said (and, oh, I ground my teeth in agony that the dream should be so real!), “I believe I’ll shave.”

A cheery laugh arose behind me.

“You could then sing much better, I am sure,” answered Dulcine Oranoff as sweetly as in real life.

Dejneff grunted, for the men always taunted the old soldier of his fine “barrel-tone” voice; but he called Pak and went out of the room.

Dejneff shave! It was too real, too true, — too good to be true! I fell back and looked the other way. While the vision lasted I would look upon the one who laughed and spoke behind me!

And Dulcine Oranoff clasped me in her arms repeating those brave last words, “We will never part, Robert.”

After a sweet, long silence together I began

A HELPING HAND

to realize my dream was real. During that time even the crowd of questions that soon after came to my lips were swallowed up in perfect joy. The one great question was answered; my great, killing fear was dead! I sobbed while I kissed her hands, and at last drew her own wet face to mine and held it there until the doctor's soft step at the bedside aroused us. When he had looked me over and prepared his glasses and gone again, his eyes twinkling all the time, I gave my hungry questions the right of way.

"Who released you, Dulcine?" I could not think of any smoother introduction, and the question came bluntly, crowded by the host of other questions behind it.

"Father, of course; who else could, and when did you tell him, Robert?"

Her "father"! "Oh, Menin," I cried out in my beating heart, "you good mixer of lies and the truth!"

"He forgot the signal, though, Robert, and rapped twice; but then he rapped three times a moment after. He was very nervous, and the moment Dejneff came he told him to take me home."

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“Dejneff came?” I asked, breathing a prayer that the faithful old soldier’s days might be long and happier ones than these had been.

“Yes; the moment I was out and on my feet. Father was just taking me in his arms. He trembled so I was glad Dejneff came, for Colonel Oranoff was in a hurry to catch the morning boat to Chefoo.”

“He took you in his arms?” I murmured through my teeth. Then I cursed the man under my breath. But, oh, how boldly he had played. What hellish hopes were Menin’s when he held in his arms the daughter of Ivan Oranoff—through whom he was sure of driving me to the King with my confession!

But now Dulcine was over me, and the light in her eyes, as I looked up into them, told me the secret her lips tremblingly withheld. But only for a moment.

“Robert, you came to the Legation the other night,” she then said.

“I thought you were in that Tomb, Dulcine.”

“No—but—whom—did you come to—see?”

“Sahib Menin, Dulcine, who impersonated Colonel Oranoff at the grave that night, lured

A HELPING HAND

me away from you and sent me a prisoner into the mountains; who came back to free and take you prisoner too, in order to compel me to go to the King and tell the truth."

I saw I was not surprising Dulcine; she had guessed the whole truth when she had learned of the impostor who lay in her father's room. She knew something of Menin and his past.

"The night you came here, Robert, we believed that it was father whom Dejneff had found in the streets; the shock of the affair, coming at the time of your mysterious absence, overcame me completely, and I could not have seen you."

Then I remembered how oddly Dejneff had acted and how I feared he would ask me where Dulcine was, — when he was fearing that I would learn that she had been prostrated at the knowledge of her father's injury. How we both feared that the other would mention Dulcine!

It was three days before Colonel Oranoff could come; but three days' time was not too long for Dulcine and me to put together the mazy story of those mad hours now past. It seemed as though the days were not long

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

enough, there was so much to tell and such happiness in the telling. Dulcine told me of her decision to play the Queen's part and of her difficulty in preparing herself for the unusual rôle; she told me of the hours in the Throne Room, — of how she would have given anything she possessed to have been able to laugh in the King's very face! Blinded as she was, of course nothing of the pomp and majesty of the mummary impressed her, and she only saw the absurd side of it all. She told me of the long journey to the Mausoleum and the terrific jolting she received within that rude cart; before the Tomb was reached she had removed the light bands from her face and hands and the white robe which she wore over her own fur coat. When the signal came she was ready to step out and go away in her most ordinary costume; no, she was not frightened and had never once thought of not being released; the fear of this had never come to her! The only unusual incident had occurred when she opened the Sarcophagus; a young Quelpartien army officer was hidden behind the curtains, evidently a secret guard. When she lifted the glass cover and sat up, the young man fell

A HELPING HAND

with a groan through the curtains upon the floor. Dejneff had drawn the body aside and left it there.

Poor Kim! The first shock had been a cruel one, which, through each hour in his own cell, watching a casket he knew was empty, preyed upon his mind until he became what I found him.

In my turn I told of meeting Menin in the mountains, of his threat, of Nsase and Kysang and Kim, of finding Menin at the Legation and of my escapade in the Temple of the Tomb.

It was during one of these long talks in the salon that Colonel Oranoff arrived. He kissed Dulcine fondly, holding my hand the while affectionately. Then he turned.

“You sent for me, Martyn?”

“Yes,” I replied simply; “come, and I will show you why,” and I led him to Sahib Menin.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE PASSING OF IVAN ORANOFF

THAT hall was not so long to-night!

The room at its end was dimly lighted, but the occupant of the bed fully recognized me when I entered, and he knew, I am sure, the man who came wonderingly after me. The Cossacks stood erect as we came in, and Colonel Oranoff went straight to the foot of the bed. I turned on a full flood of light.

The snarl from the pillows was not more suggestive than the soft "Oho" that broke from Oranoff's lips as his form straightened and his hands clutched the heavy foot-board.

There was silence a moment as the two looked each other face to face.

"He laughs best who laughs last," I said with my usual triteness. Then Sahib Menin turned and looked at me. The glance was worth having lived long to see! Dulcine had been under this very roof when he had boasted

THE PASSING OF IVAN ORANOFF

of having possession of her, and he knew I did not know that it was false. He had staked as heavily on my evident ignorance of the fact that he had released Dulcine and turned her over to Dejneff, as he had on making me believe that he sent her away on Tuen's yacht. He looked upon me as the criminal looks upon the hound that has brought him into the fiercer clutches of the law.

"Wrong again," the wretch answered, even now no whit dismayed; "he laughs best who laughs most!"

"Silence!" burst out Oranoff, and Menin's eyes narrowed to a slit and went to him.

"Robert, what of this man?" said Oranoff to me.

"Everything?" I asked, knowing only too well that I could tell nothing unless I told it all.

"Everything, if so God gives you breath."

I began with Lynx Island, though acknowledging freely that I was not sure Menin was there; I told of the accident which gave us our first warning, then of the destruction of the Temple. Oranoff sat down and listened with his head in his hand.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

“I reached Keinning too late,” I went on, holding myself sternly to the bitter truth, “to tell the King that the Queen had been destroyed, and I found a woman who would play the Queen’s part. I promised to release her from the Sarcophagus in the Temple of the Tomb.”

Menin’s eyes were on me as I spoke, and the old leer was in them; now and then he spoke as to himself. I felt—and it made my blood boil—that he hated me most because I was young and ignorant and chosen for a part which I graced poorly, and not because I had balked him. “But you are a weak actor,” his eyes continually said.

“As I was at the Sarcophagus to open it, this man, dressed as Colonel Oranoff, called me away. Mad with fear at the words he spoke, I followed him,” here Menin laughed and I ground my teeth, “and in the dark, beyond the army, I was struck down from behind and taken into the mountains lashed to a pony’s back. This man returned, opened the Sarcophagus, and released the prisoner, intending to take her captive and hold her until I would go to the King and tell him

THE PASSING OF IVAN ORANOFF

the truth. But Dejneff came up at that moment, and he turned her over to him."

Here Oranoff moved for the first time. With a sigh he turned and threw his face into the other hand.

"This man then came to meet me in the mountains and said he had brought the prisoner from the Sarcophagus to a yacht which he showed me was anchored near us, and promised faithfully to make way with her if I did not go to the King in the presence of two of his men and tell him that the Queen's body had been destroyed on Lynx Island. I escaped the guards, came to Keinning and found this man had been attacked by a Quelpartien mob while again impersonating you in Keinning, and had been rescued by Dejneff and brought here as Colonel Oranoff."

The room was very still when I ceased speaking, and it was Menin who broke the silence.

"The fly caught the spider," he said, looking now at Oranoff. My nerves had been put on edge to tell the story I had just completed, and the man had angered me steadily throughout its recital. The sting of these words drove me mad, and with an oath I lunged

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

forward toward the bed. The nearest Cossack blocked the way and pushed me back. In a moment I had myself under control and I begged Oranoff's pardon.

Colonel Oranoff had arisen and was standing now at the mantle, his fingers in his hair, his eyes upon the coals in the grate beneath. I knew he was coming to some definite conclusion with regard to Menin. How would he deal, I wondered, with this man who had followed him closely half around the world?

I went over and found the brandy and soda and as I drank leisurely I looked through the room. "What a pretty picture," I mused, "at the end of the play," — Oranoff, two heavy-armed gendarmes, and the handcuffed Menin! Though Menin was surely thinking of Oranoff, his eyes followed me. What would he have given to have had the "fly" once in his hands!

At last Oranoff came swiftly into the center of the room.

"Martyn, I will give you an hour," he said, looking at his watch, "to restore to 'Colonel Oranoff' everything he wore when he was brought here. Dress him as 'Colonel Oranoff' and call him by that name."

THE PASSING OF IVAN ORANOFF

I was dumfounded, and as Dulcine's father left the room a new light came into Menin's face. For once, perhaps, he felt outwitted, and the light of fear that was now unmistakably present neither looked nor felt natural. His hands moved nervously; the fingers twitched.

I went mechanically to the table where I had thrown the false beard, and the poor wretch accommodated me by raising his head that I might adjust it on him.

"Isn't this imposing on an impostor?" he asked, with something of the old recklessness in his voice; yet the tone died away pitifully before all the words were out. One pities the wildest and fiercest of animals when once brought hopelessly to bay.

I felt that Colonel Oranoff would move swiftly now this man was once in his hands. I could not guess, though for three hours I thought intently, what course he could pursue. But the one fact that Menin was now "Colonel Oranoff" was a thrilling omen of what was to come. I remained at the bed, and it was not until near midnight that there was any noise in the building save the low rattle

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

of the telegraph instruments in the telegraph room across the hall. I knew Menin heard these; he held his head cocked above his pillow, and it was plain he was studying the messages through the thick wall. But he could not read them, so I let him listen and trouble himself with the code of the Russian secret service.

I was not mistaken in Oranoff's moving quickly. It was after midnight when he returned; and with him came M. Grouchy and Admiral Holstrem and a body of marines who had accompanied the Admiral in his fast night ride from Tsi.

When all were in the room Grouchy stepped quickly to the bed, and producing a despatch, held it up to the light and read:

COLONEL IVAN ORANOFF, — For treachery to your country and your Emperor I exile you for life to the Kranstoff mines in Siberia, and God have mercy on your traitorous soul.

NICHOLAS II., *Emperor.*

Though just as a decree from Heaven, yet I ached with pity for the brave devil caught in the death-maw of his own trap. He was

THE PASSING OF IVAN ORANOFF

not defiant now. For a while he seemed unable to grasp the meaning of it. But when he did, he only turned on his pillows and hid his face.

Before morning he was taken by the marines and Cossacks to Tsi, looking for all the world like Ivan Oranoff. He had avoided a hundred traps set by others and fallen heavily into one set by himself. He had no redress; for the Indian Menin had disappeared forever from human sight and knowledge and recollection in that Quelpartien hut from which "Colonel Oranoff" emerged!

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE CAMEL'S HEAD

COLONEL ORANOFF was compelled to return to Chefoo and go on from Chefoo to Port Arthur; anxious as Dulcine and I were to be off, I had some matters which in conscience demanded my attention before I bade good-by to gray old Keinning and to Quelparte. It was arranged that we, with Captain Dejneff, should follow on a later boat and go on to Port Arthur with Colonel Oranoff.

As affairs political quieted, Dulcine and I rode out once more into the bright sunlight, over Silkworm's Head, or far across the valley of the Phan into the brown hills beyond. One morning we rode out early with Pak, who led, beside his own, another horse. We passed through the Chinese quarter of the city, and on by the Queen's Mausoleum. For a time we stood in silence looking at the great Mound and the Temple of the Tomb

THE CAMEL'S HEAD

at its base; neither of us spoke, though little Pak's eyes, as he glanced now and again at me, said many things. Then we cantered on and climbed the steep foot-hills to the spot where Nsase gave me the sword. The narrow path beyond was rough, but I pushed the horses on; and when noon came we ate our lunch on the summit of one of the gigantic boulders that stood beside the path.

Then I gave Pak explicit directions, and we watched him go away up the mountain; by midnight he had returned to Keinning, bringing Nsase with him, and leaving a goodly reward with the old woman who had taught the girl that dance that saved my life. Nsase could not express her delight at being brought to us, and Dulcine has found in her a serving-maid as faithful as she is interesting.

On the day following I took M. Grouchy to the house of Kim Ling; the lad had slept almost continuously since the night I had forced him to say that the Queen was yet alive. He happened to be waking as we came, and when I knelt down beside him he smiled feebly. I had had Pak take the doctor to him at the first moment I had been able to order it; as I

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

knelt, Kim reached and took my hand. M. Grouchy arranged at once with Kim's mother to have him come to the Russian Legation when he had recovered, where a quiet, but lucrative position would be made for him. Another watches now, in Kim's stead, that golden Sarcophagus in the Mausoleum, — one whose hair, I trust, will never turn as white as poor Kim's did, one who will never see the Queen's Soul rampant again in those cold corridors as have the tongueless Men in Black, who not at all envy him his appointment!

Dejneff had kept his word and wore his long "shave" no more. I cannot say — for I am learning now to tell the truth once more — that it has improved his voice, but I can say that it has improved his appearance. I thought of this on our journey to Tsi that bright day when we bade good-by to old Keinning. In a fresh uniform and on a spirited horse, a six months' leave of absence in his pocket, he looked the brave young cavalier Dulcine affirmed.

We met Colonel Oranoff at Chefoo, and Admiral Holstrem's private launch took us merrily over the eighty blue miles to Port Arthur, — the prize we had won!

THE CAMEL'S HEAD

That afternoon we were on deck when Colonel Oranoff suddenly pointed to the blue waves with a significant gesture.

“Blue water,” he said, “how much that means to us!”

“How, Colonel Oranoff?” I asked.

Then he drew from his pocket the large card upon one side of which was written the menu of the luncheon to which we had done ample justice. He turned it over, and on the reverse side was a map of the Yellow Sea. He turned this cornerwise and folded it, striking the crease across from Shanghai to Tsi (Chemulpo). Then he held this up before us all and pointed to the outline of the Yellow Sea.

It was the very image of a camel! The Head was the Gulf of Laitung; the Neck, the Straits of Pechilli; the Back and Breast, the body of the Yellow Sea.

“You see the Camel's Head?” he asked quietly.

It was exceedingly plain.

“The great rivers of China and Korea” (Quel-parté), he went on, “empty into the Yellow Sea the sands which give it its color. We are now running into the blue waters of the Straits of

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

Pechilli — and here at the Camel's Gullet stands Port Arthur, the Gibraltar of the Yellow Sea over which to-day the flag with the Emperor's eagles was flung at sunrise. Japan's exceptions to our lease of this port were removed upon our promise to throw down the protectorate established lately over Quelparte. Russia now is on the Pacific," here the voice strengthened, "at an ice-free port; at the Camel's Gullet she will hold by the throat all the commerce with northern China, — all approach to Pekin."

And before night fell, there arose from the water the hills of Port Arthur and on the great mast, above the basin of solid masonry in which the huge dredges lay, floated the double eagles of Russia, — Peter's Dream had come another hundred leagues nearer its realization!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

ENSEMBLE

WE find life in St. Petersburg exceedingly pleasant, and my duty as Captain in the Czar's Cuirassiers is not the prosaic thing that I had anticipated "after West Point," as we were wont to say, as though expecting to be buried alive! Colonel Oranoff is with us frequently, though now I must call him Prince Meranoff; he has a fine estate to-day far down on the Danube. His bold stroke in Quelparte, which gave Port Arthur to Russia without costing an ounce of powder, was a final triumph, and the Czar — that "hardest and best-served master in the world" — amply repaid his servant.

The Prince's busiest hours are spent in the foreign office here in St. Petersburg, for he is a high officer now in that silent army which is forwarding fast old Peter's Dream.

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

When I read a story, I like to have it close quickly at the end, and now I have told mine my aversion to overtold stories rises up to bid me pause. Yet there is one scene that belongs to this little drama which began in far-away Quelparte, that was acted here in St. Petersburg, which I cannot omit. We had not been settled here long before Dejneff came, and then to our great surprise Prince Meranoff brought us one day an invitation to dine with the Czar, — to whom this story of Quelparte had been told. Of course Dejneff was included in the invitation — and even Nsase! All the details of the visit I left gladly to Dulcine and her father.

And there, to the Czar and Czarina, Mrs. Martyn told her story, while the rest of us put in our parts as we were appealed to for them. Emperor Nicholas was particularly interested in the myth of insanity coming upon relatives of desecrated dead. I remember he was silent while we were laughing at a sober comment which Dejneff put in, and which the Czar plainly heard.

But when Dulcine had finished, the Czarina came and kissed her passionately, though Nicholas said slowly in French, " But the end

ENSEMBLE

is not yet." Then he told of the later plotting of Tuen against Whang-Su and other things of which even the *Times* does not tell. At last Dulcine forgot host and hostess and arose unsteadily from her chair, and when she spoke her voice sounded like a child's cry, —

"I do not care for sequels, your Majesty."

Nicholas sat looking quietly at the flowers as the ladies moved away, the Czarina's arm thrown around Dulcine, but he murmured low, as to himself, "Nor do I, Madame."

In an adjoining room, heavily curtained at the center, we found happier themes for conversation, when, to my utter surprise, the room suddenly became darkened. Dulcine pressed my hand assuringly, and I saw the surprise was for me. The heavy curtains instantly parted, and there in the half-light stood Nsase, a shining sword in each hand — to dance before the Emperor!

In the mountains of Quelparte she had danced for my life; now Nsase danced as for her very own. The tiger-skins, her only raiment, her long black hair again wrought into those snakelike braids, the swords bewildering in their myriad convolutions, were again won-

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

derfully beautiful. Though the tragic element, so vital in her performance in that mountain cave, was missing, yet there was an added glory here. The luxurious room, the deep carpet, the heavy hangings, the gilded tinsel of the ornate frescoing, were much in keeping with the brilliant performance. The wavering lights, which, as I saw them before, were lost on the dull sides of that mountain cave, were now flashed back from a thousand glittering surfaces.

I sat at the end of the little semi-circle and could look unobserved upon the distinguished little audience. The Czar and the Czarina now saw a thing new even to their eyes; they lost not one curling ray of fire, not one reeling bolt, not one bright crash of flame.

Beyond sat old Dejneff, — looking as though he had seen the Tiger-woman at last! He nursed his knuckles seriously, and now and then mechanically stroked his missing beard, whereupon he stirred uneasily. The flickering light played hide-and-seek in the furrows of the man's face, and I knew he was far away in Quelparte. If I never see Dejneff again, I have this vision of his sturdy, honest phiz to remem-

ENSEMBLE

ber — and the memory will ever be a precious one.

Nearer me, just beyond Dulcine, Prince Meranoff leaned forward in a great armchair, his face thrust into his hand, the steady eyes upon the writhing blades and lighted by the reflected fires. In the position he had happened to assume, one shoulder was higher than another, and a tinge of the old fear of Sahib Menin ran through me as I looked covertly at him.

Beside me sat Dulcine, and I looked at her as I felt for her hand in the dark. She was gazing intently upon the mad dance, but as I found her hand she looked up at me quickly — even as she looked that night in my room in the Russian Legation in Keinning when she had arisen so strongly to such a deed of infinite daring. My thought became her own, and we kissed each other there in the gloom.

And as I looked again for a last time from face to face, and then once more upon that thing of fire before us, Quelparte with the tender vistas of its paddy-fields, its white-robed inhabitants, their myths and superstitions, gray old Keinning and its secret which the broad

THE QUEEN OF QUELPARTE

river Phan still bears with sealed lips to the sea, came back to me as it can never come again until I see those same faces lighted as they were that night by the trembling flashes shot from the sword-dancer's blades.

THE END



LITTLE, BROWN, & CO.'S

New and Popular Fiction

IN THE COUNTRY GOD FORGOT

By FRANCES CHARLES. 12mo. 338 pages. \$1.50.

Of this original and engrossing tale of the Southwest the *Louisville Courier-Journal* says: "Arizona was never more truthfully described than in this book."

It is essentially a rugged book. The particular woman and child whose destinies are followed in this story are the wife and son of Bax Weffold, whose father, old Carl Weffold, has cherished toward him a lifelong and implacable hatred. — *New York Commercial Advertiser*.

A GIRL OF VIRGINIA

By LUCY MEACHAM THRUSTON. Illustrated by Ch. Grunwald. 12mo. 306 pages. \$1.50.

Frances Holloway, the daughter of a professor in the University of Virginia, is as lovable a heroine as any one could wish for. There is something wonderfully attractive about her, — she is so pretty, proud, and high-spirited, and, at the same time, so intensely real and human. It is a pleasure to say that the author of this "love story of the university" has given us a picture of modern girlhood that goes straight to the heart and stays there. — *Commercial Advertiser*.

By the Same Author

MISTRESS BRENT. A Story of Lord Baltimore's Colony in 1638. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

NEW & POPULAR FICTION

LAFITTE OF LOUISIANA

By MARY DEVEREUX. Illustrated by Harry C. Edwards.
12mo. 427 pages. \$1.50.

The remarkable career of Jean Lafitte during the French Revolution and the War of 1812, and the strange tie between this so-called "Pirate of the Gulf" and Napoleon Bonaparte, is the basis of this absorbing and virile story, — a novel of love and adventure written by a skilled hand.

This work is one of the most ambitious of its class, and it has in the introduction of Napoleon as Lafitte's guardian angel a picturesque feature which makes it of rather unusual interest. — *Philadelphia Record*.

By the Same Author

FROM KINGDOM TO COLONY. Illustrated by
Henry Sandham. 12mo. \$1.50.

UP AND DOWN THE SANDS OF GOLD.
12mo. \$1.50.

THE GOD OF THINGS

By FLORENCE BROOKS WHITEHOUSE. Illustrated by
the author. 12mo. 288 pages. \$1.50.

Of this novel of modern Egypt the *Philadelphia Telegraph* says: "It is a tale of fresh, invigorating, unconventional love, without the usual thrilling adventures. It is wholesome, although daring, and through its pages there vibrates a living spirit such as is only found in a few romances."

The *Boston Herald* says: "Engages the attention of the reader from the skill shown in the handling of the subject," — divorce.

NEW & POPULAR FICTION

THE HEROINE OF THE STRAIT

By MARY CATHERINE CROWLEY. Illustrated by Ch. Grunwald. 12mo. 373 pages. \$1.50.

A romance of Detroit in the time of Pontiac, of which the *Philadelphia Times* says: "A very interesting work, and one that gives a vivid picture of life among the early settlers on the frontier. It is full of local color, and the story is told in a clear and straightforward manner that should give the volume a high place among current historical fiction."

Through the story runs the gayety of the French-Canadian, with its peculiar flavoring. — *New York Times Saturday Review*.

By the Same Author

A DAUGHTER OF NEW FRANCE. Illustrated by Clyde O. De Land. 12mo. \$1.50.

A MAID OF BAR HARBOR

By HENRIETTA G. ROWE. Illustrated by Ellen W. Ahrens. 12mo. 368 pages. \$1.50.

A fascinating tale of Mt. Desert before and after society had taken possession of the island. The heroine, Comfort, says the *Boston Courier*, "is an example of a pretty, womanly, determined down-east girl, whom it is a real pleasure to know."

SIR CHRISTOPHER

A Romance of a Maryland Manor in 1644. By MAUD WILDER GOODWIN, author of "White Aprons," "The Head of a Hundred," etc. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50. 12th thousand.

NEW & POPULAR FICTION

IN THE EAGLE'S TALON

By SHEPPARD STEVENS. Illustrated by A. Russell. 12mo.
475 pages. \$1.50.

A romance of the Louisiana Purchase which the *Buffalo Commercial* says is "A lively story, a pretty romance, and interesting, as it throws a strong light on the private character of Napoleon Bonaparte ere he realized his ambitions."

Mrs. Stevens has felicitously related an absorbing story and has re-created the atmosphere and scenes of the first days in the history of this region, as well as of the stirring times in France under the First Consul. — *St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

THE PHARAOH AND THE PRIEST

From the original Polish of ALEXANDER GLOVATSKI, by Jeremiah Curtin, translator of "Quo Vadis," etc. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.50.

No novel of such interest and power as "The Pharaoh and the Priest" has been written about ancient Egypt thus far. In this book the Egyptian state stands before us as a mighty living organism. The author depicts vividly the desperate conflict between the secular and the ecclesiastical powers during the career of Rameses XIII., in the eleventh century before Christ.

TRUTH DEXTER

By SIDNEY McCALL. 12mo. \$1.50. 50th thousand.

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO.

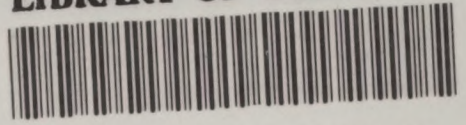
254 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON, MASS.

FEB 27 1904

COPY DEL. TO CAT. DIV.
FEB. 27 1904

MAR 3 1904

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014949185