

***THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING, Rudyard Kipling
TAJIMA, Miss Mitford A CHINESE GIRL GRADUATE, R.
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Etext prepared by Dagny, dagnyj@hotmail.com

and John Bickers, jbickers@ihug.co.nz

STORIES BY ENGLISH AUTHORS

THE ORIENT

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THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy

BY

RUDYARD KIPLING

The Law, as quoted, lays down a fair conduct of life, and one not easy to follow. I have been fellow to a beggar again and again under circumstances which prevented either of us finding out whether the other was worthy. I have still to be brother to a Prince, though I once came near to kinship with what might have been a veritable King, and was promised the reversion of a Kingdom--army, law-courts, revenue, and policy all complete. But, to-day, I greatly fear that my King is dead, and if I want a crown I must go hunt it for myself.

The beginning of everything was in a railway-train upon the road to Mhow from Ajmir. There had been a Deficit in the Budget, which necessitated travelling, not Second-class, which is only half as dear as First-Class, but by Intermediate, which is very awful indeed. There are no cushions in the Intermediate class, and the population are either Intermediate, which is Eurasian, or native, which for a long night journey is nasty, or Loafer, which is amusing though

intoxicated. Intermediates do not buy from refreshment-rooms. They carry their food in bundles and pots, and buy sweets from the native sweetmeat-sellers, and drink the roadside water. This is why in hot weather Intermediates are taken out of the carriages dead, and in all weathers are most properly looked down upon.

My particular Intermediate happened to be empty till I reached Nasirabad, when the big black-browed gentleman in shirt-sleeves entered, and, following the custom of Intermediates, passed the time of day. He was a wanderer and a vagabond like myself, but with an educated taste for whisky. He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the Empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days' food.

"If India was filled with men like you and me, not knowing more than the crows where they'd get their next day's rations, it isn't seventy millions of revenue the land would be paying--it's seven hundred millions," said he; and as I looked at his mouth and chin I was disposed to agree with him.

We talked politics,--the politics of Loafersdom that sees things from the under side where the lath and plaster is not smoothed off,--and we talked postal arrangements because my friend wanted to send a telegram back from the next station to Ajmir, the turning-off place from the Bombay to the Mhow line as you travel westward. My friend had no money

beyond eight annas which he wanted for dinner, and I had no money at all, owing to the hitch in the Budget before mentioned. Further, I was going into a wilderness where, though I should resume touch with the Treasury, there were no telegraph offices. I was, therefore, unable to help him in any way.

"We might threaten a Station-master, and make him send a wire on tick," said my friend, "but that'd mean inquiries for you and for me, and I've got my hands full these days. Did you say you were travelling back along this line within any days?"

"Within ten," I said.

"Can't you make it eight?" said he. "Mine is rather urgent business."

"I can send your telegrams within ten days if that will serve you," I said.

"I couldn't trust the wire to fetch him, now I think of it. It's this way. He leaves Delhi on the 23rd for Bombay. That means he'll be running through Ajmir about the night of the 23rd."

"But I'm going into the Indian Desert," I explained.

"Well /and/ good," said he. "You'll be changing at Marwar Junction to get into Jodhpore territory,--you must do that,--and he'll be coming through Marwar Junction in the early morning of the 24th by the Bombay Mail. Can you be at Marwar Junction on that time? 'T won't be inconveniencing you, because I know that there's precious few pickings to be got out of these Central India States--even though you pretend to be correspondent of the 'Backwoodsman.' "

"Have you ever tried that trick?" I asked.

"Again and again, but the Residents find you out, and then you get escorted to the Border before you've time to get your knife into them. But about my friend here. I /must/ give him a word o' mouth to tell him what's come to me, or else he won't know where to go. I would take it more than kind of you if you was to come out of Central India in time to catch him at Marwar Junction, and say to him, 'He has gone South for the week.' He'll know what that means. He's a big man with a red beard, and a great swell he is. You'll find him sleeping like a gentleman with all his luggage round him in a Second-class apartment. But don't you be afraid. Slip down the window and say, 'He has gone South for the week,' and he'll tumble. It's only cutting your time of stay in those parts by two days. I ask you as a stranger--going to the West," he said, with emphasis.

"Where have /you/ come from?" said I.

"From the East," said he, "and I am hoping that you will give him the message on the Square--for the sake of my Mother as well as your own."

Englishmen are not usually softened by appeals to the memory of their mothers; but for certain reasons, which will be fully apparent, I saw fit to agree.

"It's more than a little matter," said he, "and that's why I asked you to do it--and now I know that I can depend on you doing it. A Second-class carriage at Marwar Junction, and a red-haired man asleep in it. You'll be sure to remember. I get out at the next station, and I must hold on there till he comes or sends me what I want."

"I'll give the message if I catch him," I said, "and for the sake of your Mother as well as mine I'll give you a word of advice. Don't try to run the Central India States just now as the correspondent of the 'Backwoodsman.' There's a real one knocking about here, and it might lead to trouble."

"Thank you," said he, simply; "and when will the swine be gone? I can't starve because he's ruining my work. I wanted to get hold of the Degumber Rajah down here about his father's widow, and give him a jump."

"What did he do to his father's widow, then?"

"Filled her up with red pepper and slipped her to death as she hung from a beam. I found that out myself, and I'm the only man that would dare going into the State to get hush-money for it. They'll try to poison me, same as they did in Chortumna when I went on the loot there. But you'll give the man at Marwar Junction my message?"

He got out at a little roadside station, and I reflected. I had heard, more than once, of men personating correspondents of newspapers and bleeding small Native States with threats of exposure, but I had never met any of the caste before. They lead a hard life, and generally die with great suddenness. The Native States have a wholesome horror of English newspapers, which may throw light on their peculiar methods of government, and do their best to choke correspondents with champagne, or drive them out of their mind with four-in-hand barouches. They do not understand that nobody cares a straw for the internal administration of Native States so long as oppression and crime are kept within decent limits, and the ruler is not drugged, drunk, or diseased from one end of the year to the other. They are the dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty, touching the Railway and the Telegraph on one side, and, on the other, the days of Harun-al-Raschid. When I left the train I did business with divers Kings, and in eight days passed through many changes of life. Sometimes I wore dress-clothes and consorted with Princes and Politicals, drinking from crystal and eating from silver. Sometimes I lay out upon the ground and devoured what I could get, from a plate made of leaves, and drank the running water, and slept under the same

rug as my servant. It was all in the day's work.

Then I headed for the Great Indian Desert upon the proper date, as I had promised, and the night Mail set me down at Marwar Junction, where a funny little, happy-go-lucky, native-managed railway runs to Jodhpore. The Bombay Mail from Delhi makes a short halt at Marwar. She arrived just as I got in, and I had just time to hurry to her platform and go down the carriages. There was only one Second-class on the train. I slipped the window and looked down upon a flaming-red beard, half covered by a railway-rug. That was my man, fast asleep, and I dug him gently in the ribs. He woke with a grunt, and I saw his face in the light of the lamps. It was a great and shining face.

"Tickets again?" said he.

"No," said I. "I am to tell you that he is gone South for the week. He has gone South for the week!"

The train had begun to move out. The red man rubbed his eyes. "He has gone South for the week," he repeated. "Now that's just like his impudence. Did he say that I was to give you anything? 'Cause I won't."

"He didn't," I said, and dropped away, and watched the red lights die out in the dark. It was horribly cold because the wind was blowing off

the sands. I climbed into my own train--not an Intermediate carriage this time--and went to sleep.

If the man with the beard had given me a rupee I should have kept it as a memento of a rather curious affair. But the consciousness of having done my duty was my only reward.

Later on I reflected that two gentlemen like my friends could not do any good if they foregathered and personated correspondents of newspapers, and might, if they blackmailed one of the little rat-trap States of Central India or Southern Rajputana, get themselves into serious difficulties. I therefore took some trouble to describe them as accurately as I could remember to people who would be interested in deporting them; and succeeded, so I was later informed, in having them headed back from the Degumber borders.

Then I became respectable, and returned to an office where there were no Kings and no incidents outside the daily manufacture of a newspaper. A newspaper office seems to attract every conceivable sort of person, to the prejudice of discipline. Zenana-mission ladies arrive, and beg that the Editor will instantly abandon all his duties to describe a Christian prize-giving in a back slum of a perfectly inaccessible village; Colonels who have been overpassed for command sit down and sketch the outline of a series of ten, twelve, or twenty-four leading articles on Seniority /versus/ Selection; missionaries wish to know why they have not been permitted to escape from their

regular vehicles of abuse, and swear at a brother missionary under special patronage of the editorial We; stranded theatrical companies troop up to explain that they cannot pay for their advertisements, but on their return from New Zealand or Tahiti will do so with interest; inventors of patent punka-pulling machines, carriage couplings, and unbreakable swords and axletrees call with specifications in their pockets and hours at their disposal; tea companies enter and elaborate their prospectuses with the office pens; secretaries of ball committees clamour to have the glories of their last dance more fully described; strange ladies rustle in and say, "I want a hundred lady's cards printed /at once/, please," which is manifestly part of an Editor's duty; and every dissolute ruffian that ever tramped the Grand Trunk Road makes it his business to ask for employment as a proof-reader. And, all the time, the telephone-bell is ringing madly, and Kings are being killed on the Continent, and Empires are saying, "You're another," and Mister Gladstone is calling down brimstone upon the British Dominions, and the little black copyboys are whining, "/kaa-pi chay-ha-yeh/" ("Copy wanted"), like tired bees, and most of the paper is as blank as Modred's shield.

But that is the amusing part of the year. There are six other months when none ever come to call, and the thermometer walks inch by inch up to the top of the glass, and the office is darkened to just above reading-light, and the press-machines are red-hot to touch, and nobody writes anything but accounts of amusements in the Hill-stations or obituary notices. Then the telephone becomes a tinkling terror, because it tells you of the sudden deaths of men and women that you

knew intimately, and the prickly heat covers you with a garment, and you sit down and write: "A slight increase of sickness is reported from the Khuda Janta Khan District. The outbreak is purely sporadic in its nature, and, thanks to the energetic efforts of the District authorities, is now almost at an end. It is, however, with deep regret we record the death," etc.

Then the sickness really breaks out, and the less recording and reporting the better for the peace of the subscribers. But the Empires and the Kings continue to divert themselves as selfishly as before, and the Foreman thinks that a daily paper really ought to come out once in twenty-four hours, and all the people at the Hill-stations in the middle of their amusements say, "Good gracious! why can't the paper be sparkling? I'm sure there's plenty going on up here."

That is the dark half of the moon, and, as the advertisements say, "must be experienced to be appreciated."

It was in that season, and a remarkably evil season, that the paper began running the last issue of the week on Saturday night, which is to say Sunday morning, after the custom of a London paper. This was a great convenience, for immediately after the paper was put to bed the dawn would lower the thermometer from 96 degrees to almost 84 degrees for half an hour, and in that chill--you have no idea how cold is 84 degrees on the grass until you begin to pray for it--a very tired man could get off to sleep ere the heat roused him.

One Saturday night it was my pleasant duty to put the paper to bed alone. A King or courtier or a courtesan or a Community was going to die or get a new Constitution, or do something that was important on the other side of the world, and the paper was to be held open till the latest possible minute in order to catch the telegram.

It was a pitchy-black night, as stifling as a June night can be, and the /loo/, the red-hot wind from the westward, was booming among the tinder-dry trees and pretending that the rain was on its heels. Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with the flop of a frog, but all our weary world knew that was only pretence. It was a shade cooler in the press-room than the office, so I sat there, while the type ticked and clicked, and the night-jars hooted at the windows, and the all but naked compositors wiped the sweat from their foreheads and called for water. The thing that was keeping us back, whatever it was, would not come off, though the loo dropped and the last type was set, and the whole round earth stood still in the choking heat, with its finger on its lip, to wait the event. I drowsed, and wondered whether the telegraph was a blessing, and whether this dying man, or struggling people, might be aware of the inconvenience the delay was causing. There was no special reason beyond the heat and worry to make tension, but, as the clock-hands crept up to three o'clock and the machines spun their fly-wheels two and three times to see that all was in order, before I said the word that would set them off, I could have shrieked aloud.

Then the roar and rattle of the wheels shivered the quiet into little bits. I rose to go away, but two men in white clothes stood in front of me. The first one said, "It's him!" The second said, "So it is!" And they both laughed almost as loudly as the machinery roared, and mopped their foreheads. "We seed there was a light burning across the road, and we were sleeping in that ditch there for coolness, and I said to my friend here, 'The office is open. Let's come along and speak to him as turned us back from Degumber State,' " said the smaller of the two. He was the man I had met in the Mhow train, and his fellow was the red-bearded man of Marwar Junction. There was no mistaking the eyebrows of the one or the beard of the other.

I was not pleased, because I wished to go to sleep, not to squabble with loafers. "What do you want?" I asked.

"Half an hour's talk with you, cool and comfortable, in the office," said the red-bearded man. "We'd /like/ some drink,--the Contrack doesn't begin yet, Peachey, so you needn't look,--but what we really want is advice. We don't want money. We ask you as a favour, because we found out you did us a bad turn about Degumber State."

I led from the press-room to the stifling office with the maps on the walls, and the red-haired man rubbed his hands. "That's something like," said he. "This was the proper shop to come to. Now, Sir, let me introduce you to Brother Peachey Carnehan, that's him, and Brother

Daniel Dravot, that is /me/, and the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time--soldier, sailor, compositor, photographer, proof-reader, street-preacher, and correspondents of the 'Backwoodsman' when we thought the paper wanted one. Carnehan is sober, and so am I. Look at us first, and see that's sure. It will save you cutting into my talk. We'll take one of your cigars apiece, and you shall see us light up."

I watched the test. The men were absolutely sober, so I gave them each a tepid whisky-and-soda.

"Well /and/ good," said Carnehan of the eyebrows, wiping the froth from his moustache. "Let me talk now, Dan. We have been all over India, mostly on foot. We have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty contractors, and all that, and we have decided that India isn't big enough for such as us."

They certainly were too big for the office. Dravot's beard seemed to fill half the room and Carnehan's shoulders the other half, as they sat on the big table. Carnehan continued: "The country isn't half worked out because they that governs it won't let you touch it. They spend all their blessed time in governing it, and you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that, without all the Government saying, 'Leave it alone, and let us govern.' Therefore, such /as/ it is, we will let it alone, and go away to some other place where a man isn't crowded and can come to his own.

We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except Drink, and we have signed a Contract on that. /Therefore/ we are going away to be Kings."

"Kings in our own right," muttered Dravot.

"Yes, of course," I said. "You've been tramping in the sun, and it's a very warm night, and hadn't you better sleep over the notion? Come to-morrow."

"Neither drunk nor sunstruck," said Dravot. "We have slept over the notion half a year, and require to see Books and Atlases, and we have decided that there is only one place now in the world that two strong men can Sar-a-/whack/. They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning it's the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two and thirty heathen idols there, and we'll be the thirty-third and fourth. It's a mountaineous country, the women of those parts are very beautiful."

"But that is provided against in the Contract," said Carnehan.

"Neither Women nor Liquor, Daniel."

"And that's all we know, except that no one has gone there, and they fight, and in any place where they fight a man who knows how to drill men can always be a King. We shall go to those parts and say to any

King we find, 'D' you want to vanquish your foes?' and we will show him how to drill men; for that we know better than anything else. Then we will subvert that King and seize his Throne and establish a Dy-nasty."

"You'll be cut to pieces before you're fifty miles across the Border," I said. "You have to travel through Afghanistan to get to that country. It's one mass of mountains and peaks and glaciers, and no Englishman has been through it. The people are utter brutes, and even if you reached them you couldn't do anything."

"That's more like," said Carnehan. "If you could think us a little more mad we would be more pleased. We have come to you to know about this country, to read a book about it, and to be shown maps. We want you to tell us that we are fools and to show us your books." He turned to the bookcases.

"Are you at all in earnest?" I said.

"A little," said Dravot, sweetly. "As big a map as you have got, even if it's all blank where Kafiristan is, and any books you've got. We can read, though we aren't very educated."

I uncased the big thirty-two-miles-to-the-inch map of India and two smaller Frontier maps, hauled down volume INF-KAN of the

"Encyclopaedia Britannica," and the men consulted them.

"See here!" said Dravot, his thumb on the map. "Up to Jagdallak, Peachey and me know the road. We was there with Robert's Army. We'll have to turn off to the right at Jagdallak through Laghmann territory. Then we get among the hills--fourteen thousand feet--fifteen thousand --it will be cold work there, but it don't look very far on the map."

I handed him Wood on the "Sources of the Oxus." Carnehan was deep in the "Encyclopaedia."

"They're a mixed lot," said Dravot, reflectively; "and it won't help us to know the names of their tribes. The more tribes the more they'll fight, and the better for us. From Jagdallak to Ashang. H'mm!"

"But all the information about the country is as sketchy and inaccurate as can be," I protested. "No one knows anything about it really. Here's the file of the 'United Services' Institute.' Read what Bellew says."

"Blow Bellew!" said Carnehan. "Dan, they're a stinkin' lot of heathens, but this book here says they think they're related to us English."

I smoked while the men poured over Raverty, Wood, the maps, and the

"Encyclopaedia."

"There is no use your waiting," said Dravot, politely. "It's about four o'clock now. We'll go before six o'clock if you want to sleep, and we won't steal any of the papers. Don't you sit up. We're two harmless lunatics, and if you come to-morrow evening down to the Serai we'll say good-bye to you."

"You /are/ two fools," I answered. "You'll be turned back at the Frontier or cut up the minute you set foot in Afghanistan. Do you want any money or a recommendation down-country? I can help you to the chance of work next week."

"Next week we shall be hard at work ourselves, thank you," said Dravot. "It isn't so easy being a King as it looks. When we've got our Kingdom in going order we'll let you know, and you can come up and help us govern it."

"Would two lunatics make a Contract like that?" said Carnehan, with subdued pride, showing me a greasy half-sheet of notepaper on which was written the following. I copied it, then and there, as a curiosity.

This Contract between me and you persuing witnesseth in the name of God--Amen and so forth.

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together; i.e., to be Kings of Kafiristan.

(Two) That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman, black, white, or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with Dignity and Discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day.

Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan.

Daniel Dravot.

Both Gentlemen at Large.

"There was no need for the last article," said Carnehan, blushing modestly; "but it looks regular. Now you know the sort of men that loafers are,--we /are/ loafers, Dan, until we get out of India,--and /do/ you think that we would sign a Contract like that unless we was in earnest? We have kept away from the two things that make life worth having."

"You won't enjoy your lives much longer if you are going to try this idiotic adventure. Don't set the office on fire," I said, "and go away before nine o'clock."

I left them still poring over the maps and making notes on the back of the "Contract." "Be sure to come down to the Serai to-morrow," were their parting words.

The Kumharsen Serai is the great foursquare sink of humanity where the strings of camels and horses from the North load and unload. All the nationalities of Central Asia may be found there, and most of the folk of India proper. Balkh and Bokhara there meet Bengal and Bombay, and try to draw eye-teeth. You can buy ponies, turquoises, Persian pussycats, saddle-bags, fat-tailed sheep, and musk in the Kumharsen Serai, and get many strange things for nothing. In the afternoon I went down to see whether my friends intended to keep their word or were lying there drunk.

A priest attired in fragments of ribbons and rags stalked up to me, gravely twisting a child's paper whirligig. Behind him was his servant bending under the load of a crate of mud toys. The two were loading up two camels, and the inhabitants of the Serai watched them with shrieks of laughter.

"The priest is mad," said a horse-dealer to me. "He is going up to Kabul to sell toys to the Amir. He will either be raised to honour or have his head cut off. He came in here this morning and has been behaving madly ever since."

"The witless are under the protection of God," stammered a flat-cheeked Usbeg in broken Hindi. "They foretell future events."

"Would they could have foretold that my caravan would have been cut up by the Shinwaris almost within shadow of the Pass!" grunted the Eusufzai agent of a Rajputana trading-house whose goods had been diverted into the hands of other robbers just across the Border, and whose misfortunes were the laughing-stock of the bazaar. "Ohe, priest, whence come you and whither do you go?"

"From Roum have I come," shouted the priest, waving his whirligig; "from Roum, blown by the breath of a hundred devils across the sea! O thieves, robbers, liars, the blessing of Pir Khan on pigs, dogs, and perjurers! Who will take the Protected of God to the North to sell charms that are never still to the Amir? The camels shall not gall, the sons shall not fall sick, and the wives shall remain faithful while they are away, of the men who give me place in their caravan. Who will assist me to slipper the King of the Roos with a golden slipper with a silver heel? The protection of Pir Khan be upon his labours!" He spread out the skirts of his gabardine and pirouetted between the lines of tethered horses.

"There starts a caravan from Peshawar to Kabul in twenty days, /Huzrut/," said the Eusufzai trader. "My camels go therewith. Do thou also go and bring us good luck."

"I will go even now!" shouted the priest. "I will depart upon my winged camels, and be at Peshawar in a day! Ho! Hazar Mir Khan," he yelled to his servant, "drive out the camels, but let me first mount my own."

He leaped on the back of his beast as it knelt, and, turning round to me, cried, "Come thou also, Sahib, a little along the road, and I will sell thee a charm--an amulet that shall make thee King of Kafiristan."

Then the light broke upon me, and I followed the two camels out of the Serai till we reached open road and the priest halted.

"What d' you think o' that?" said he in English. "Carnehan can't talk their patter, so I've made him my servant. He makes a handsome servant. 'T isn't for nothing that I've been knocking about the country for fourteen years. Didn't I do that talk neat? We'll hitch on to a caravan at Peshawar till we get to Jagdallak, and then we'll see if we can get donkeys for our camels, and strike into Kafiristan. Whirligigs for the Amir, O Lor'! Put your hand under the camelbags and tell me what you feel."

I felt the butt of a Martini, and another and another.

"Twenty of 'em," said Dravot, placidly. "Twenty of 'em and ammunition to correspond, under the whirligigs and the mud dolls."

"Heaven help you if you are caught with those things!" I said. "A Martini is worth her weight in silver among the Pathans."

"Fifteen hundred rupees of capital--every rupee we could beg, borrow, or steal--are invested on these two camels," said Dravot. "We won't get caught. We're going through the Khaiber with a regular caravan. Who'd touch a poor mad priest?"

"Have you got everything you want?" I asked, overcome with astonishment.

"Not yet, but we shall soon. Give us a momento of your kindness, /Brother/. You did me a service yesterday, and that time in Marwar. Half my Kingdom shall you have, as the saying is." I slipped a small charm compass from my watch-chain and handed it up to the priest.

"Good-bye," said Dravot, giving me hand cautiously. "It's the last time we'll shake hands with an Englishman these many days. Shake hands

with him, Carnehan," he cried, as the second camel passed me.

Carnehan leaned down and shook hands. Then the camels passed away along the dusty road, and I was left alone to wonder. My eye could detect no failure in the disguises. The scene in the Serai proved that they were complete to the native mind. There was just the chance, therefore, that Carnehan and Dravot would be able to wander through Afghanistan without detection. But, beyond, they would find death-- certain and awful death.

Ten days later a native correspondent, giving me the news of the day from Peshawar, wound up his letter with: "There has been much laughter here on account of a certain mad priest who is going in his estimation to sell petty gauds and insignificant trinkets which he ascribes as great charms to H. H. the Amir of Bokhara. He passed through Peshawar and associated himself to the Second Summer caravan that goes to Kabul. The merchants are pleased because through superstition they imagine that such mad fellows bring good fortune."

The two, then, were beyond the Border. I would have prayed for them, but that night a real King died in Europe, and demanded an obituary notice.

The wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again. Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again. The daily paper continued and I with it, and upon the third summer there

fell a hot night, a night issue, and a strained waiting for something to be telegraphed from the other side of the world, exactly as had happened before. A few great men had died in the past two years, the machines worked with more clatter, and some of the trees in the office garden were a few feet taller. But that was all the difference.

I passed over to the press-room, and went through just such a scene as I have already described. The nervous tension was stronger than it had been two years before, and I felt the heat more acutely. At three o'clock I cried, "Print off," and turned to go, when there crept to my chair what was left of a man. He was bent into a circle, his head was sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear. I could hardly see whether he walked or crawled--this rag-wrapped, whining cripple who addressed me by name, crying that he was come back. "Can you give me a drink?" he whimpered. "For the Lord's sake, give me a drink!"

I went back to the office, the man following with groans of pain, and I turned up the lamp.

"Don't you know me?" he gasped, dropping into a chair, and he turned his drawn face, surmounted by a shock of gray hair, to the light.

I looked at him intently. Once before had I seen eyebrows that met over the nose in an inch-broad black band, but for the life of me I could not tell where.

"I don't know you," I said, handing him the whisky. "What can I do for you?"

He took a gulp of the spirit raw, and shivered in spite of the suffocating heat.

"I've come back," he repeated; "and I was the King of Kafiristan--me and Dravot--crowned Kings we was! In this office we settled it--you setting there and giving us the books. I am Peachey,--Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan,--and you've been setting here ever since--O Lord!"

I was more than a little astonished, and expressed my feelings accordingly.

"It's true," said Carnehan, with a dry cackle, nursing his feet, which were wrapped in rags--"true as gospel. Kings we were, with crowns upon our heads--me and Dravot--poor Dan--oh, poor, poor Dan, that would never take advice, not though I begged of him!"

"Take the whisky," I said, "and take your own time. Tell me all you can recollect of everything from beginning to end. You got across the Border on your camels, Dravot dressed as a mad priest and you his servant. Do you remember that?"

"I ain't mad--yet, but I shall be that way soon. Of course I remember. Keep looking at me, or maybe my words will go all to pieces. Keep looking at me in my eyes and don't say anything."

I leaned forward and looked into his face as steadily as I could. He dropped one hand upon the table and I grasped it by the wrist. It was twisted like a bird's claw, and upon the back was a ragged, red, diamond-shaped scar.

"No, don't look there. Look at /me/," said Carnehan. "That comes afterward, but for the Lord's sake don't distract me. We left with that caravan, me and Dravot playing all sorts of antics to amuse the people we were with. Dravot used to make us laugh in the evenings when all the people was cooking their dinners--cooking their dinners, and . . . what did they do then? They lit little fires with sparks that went into Dravot's beard, and we all laughed--fit to die. Little red fires they was, going into Dravot's big red beard--so funny." His eyes left mine and he smiled foolishly.

"You went as far as Jagdallak with that caravan," I said, at a venture, "after you had lit those fires. To Jagdallak, where you turned off to try to get into Kafiristan."

"No, we didn't, neither. What are you talking about? We turned off

before Jagdallak, because we heard the roads was good. But they wasn't good enough for our two camels--mine and Dravot's. When we left the caravan, Dravot took off all his clothes and mine too, and said we would be heathen, because the Kafirs didn't allow Mohammedans to talk to them. So we dressed betwixt and between, and such a sight as Daniel Dravot I never saw yet nor expect to see again. He burned half his beard, and slung a sheepskin over his shoulder, and shaved his head into patterns. He shaved mine too, and made me wear outrageous things to look like a heathen. That was in a most mountaineous country, and our camels couldn't go along any more because of the mountains. They were tall and black, and coming home I saw them fight like wild goats --there are lots of goats in Kafiristan. And these mountains, they never keep still, no more than the goats. Always fighting they are, and don't let you sleep at night."

"Take some more whisky," I said, very slowly. "What did you and Daniel Dravot do when the camels could go no farther because of the rough roads that led into Kafiristan?"

"What did which do? There was a party called Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan that was with Dravot. Shall I tell you about him? He died out there in the cold. Slap from the bridge fell old Peachey, turning and twisting in the air like a penny whirligig that you can sell to the Amir. No; they was two for three ha'pence, those whirligigs, or I am much mistaken and woful sore. . . . And then these camels were no use, and Peachey said to Dravot, 'For the Lord's sake let's get out of this before our heads are chopped off,' and with that they killed the

camels all among the mountains, not having anything in particular to eat, but first they took off the boxes with the guns and the ammunition, till two men came along driving four mules. Dravot up and dances in front of them, singing, 'Sell me four mules.' Says the first man, 'If you are rich enough to buy, you are rich enough to rob;' but before ever he could put his hand to his knife, Dravot breaks his neck over his knee, and the other party runs away. So Carnehan loaded the mules with the rifles that was taken off the camels, and together we starts forward into those bitter-cold mountaineous parts, and never a road broader than the back of your hand."

He paused for a moment, while I asked him if he could remember the nature of the country through which he had journeyed.

"I am telling you as straight as I can, but my head isn't as good as it might be. They drove nails through it to make me hear better how Dravot died. The country was mountaineous and the mules were most contrary, and the inhabitants was dispersed and solitary. They went up and up, and down and down, and that other party, Carnehan, was imploring of Dravot not to sing and whistle so loud, for fear of bringing down the tremenjus avalanches. But Dravot says that if a King couldn't sing it wasn't worth being King, and whacked the mules over the rump, and never took no heed for ten cold days. We came to a big level valley all among the mountains, and the mules were near dead, so we killed them, not having anything in special for them or us to eat. We sat upon the boxes, and played odd and even with the cartridges that was jolted out.

"Then ten men with bows and arrows ran down that valley, chasing twenty men with bows and arrows, and the row was tremenjus. They was fair men--fairer than you or me--with yellow hair and remarkable well built. Says Dravot, unpacking the guns, 'This is the beginning of the business. We'll fight for the ten men,' and with that he fires two rifles at the twenty men, and drops one of them at two hundred yards from the rock where he was sitting. The other men began to run, but Carnehan and Dravot sits on the boxes picking them off at all ranges, up and down the valley. Then we goes up to the ten men that had run across the snow too, and they fires a footy little arrow at us. Dravot he shoots above their heads, and they all falls down flat. Then he walks over them and kicks them, and then he lifts them up and shakes hands all round to make them friendly like. He calls them and gives them the boxes to carry, and waves his hand for all the world as though he was King already. They takes the boxes and him across the valley and up the hill into a pine wood on the top, where there was half a dozen big stone idols. Dravot he goes to the biggest--a fellow they call Imbra--and lays a rifle and a cartridge at his feet, rubbing his nose respectfully with his own nose, patting him on the head, and nods his head, and says, 'That's all right. I'm in the know too, and these old jimjams are my friends.' Then he opens his mouth and points down it, and when the first man brings him food, he says, 'No;' and when the second man brings him food, he says 'no;' but when one of the old priests and the boss of the village brings him food, he says, 'Yes;' very haughty, and eats it slow. That was how he came to our first village without any trouble, just as though we had tumbled from

the skies. But we tumbled from one of those damned rope-bridges, you see, and--you couldn't expect a man to laugh much after that?"

"Take some more whisky and go on," I said. "That was the first village you came into. How did you get to be King?"

"I wasn't King," said Carnehan. "Dravot he was the King, and a handsome man he looked with the gold crown on his head and all. Him and the other party stayed in that village, and every morning Dravot sat by the side of old Imbra, and the people came and worshipped. That was Dravot's order. Then a lot of men came into the valley, and Carnehan Dravot picks them off with the rifles before they knew where they was, and runs down into the valley and up again the other side, and finds another village, same as the first one, and the people all falls down flat on their faces, and Dravot says, 'Now what is the trouble between you two villages?' and the people points to a woman, as fair as you or me, that was carried off, and Dravot takes her back to the first village and counts up the dead--eight there was. For each dead man Dravot pours a little milk on the ground and waves his arms like a whirligig, and 'That's all right,' says he. Then he and Carnehan takes the big boss of each village by the arm, and walks them down the valley, and shows them how to scratch a line with a spear right down the valley, and gives each a sod of turf from both sides of the line. Then all the people comes down and shouts like the devil and all, and Dravot says, 'Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply,' which they did, though they didn't understand. Then we asks the names of things in their lingo--bread and water and fire and idols

and such; and Dravot leads the priest of each village up to the idol, and says he must sit there and judge the people, and if anything goes wrong he is to be shot.

"Next week they was all turning up the land in the valley as quiet as bees and much prettier, and the priests heard all the complaints and told Dravot in dumb-show what it was about. 'That's just the beginning,' says Dravot. 'They think we're Gods.' He and Carnehan picks out twenty good men and shows them how to click off a rifle and form fours and advance in line; and they was very pleased to do so, and clever to see the hang of it. Then he takes out his pipe and his baccy-pouch, and leaves one at one village and one at the other, and off we two goes to see what was to be done in the next valley. That was all rock, and there was a little village there, and Carnehan says, 'Send 'em to the old valley to plant,' and takes 'em there and gives 'em some land that wasn't took before. They were a poor lot, and we blooded 'em with a kid before letting 'em into the new Kingdom. That was to impress the people, and then they settled down quiet, and Carnehan went back to Dravot, who had got into another valley, all snow and ice and most mountaineous. There was no people there, and the Army got afraid; so Dravot shoots one of them, and goes on till he finds some people in a village, and the Army explains that unless the people wants to be killed they had better not shoot their little matchlocks, for they had matchlocks. We makes friends with the priest, and I stays there alone with two of the Army, teaching the men how to drill; and a thundering big Chief comes across the snow with kettledrums and horns twanging, because he heard there was a new God

kicking about. Carnehan sights for the brown of the men half a mile across the snow and wings one of them. Then he sends a message to the Chief that, unless he wished to be killed, he must come and shake hands with me and leave his arms behind. The Chief comes alone first, and Carnehan shakes hands with him and whirls his arms about, same as Dravot used, and very much surprised that Chief was, and strokes my eyebrows. Then Carnehan goes alone to the Chief, and asks him in dumb-show if he had an enemy he hated. 'I have,' says the chief. So Carnehan weeds out the pick of his men, and sets the two of the Army to show them drill, and at the end of two weeks the men can manoeuvre about as well as Volunteers. So he marches with the Chief to a great big plain on the top of a mountain, and the Chief's men rushes into a village and takes it; we three Martinis firing into the brown of the enemy. So we took that village too, and I gives the Chief a rag from my coat, and says, 'Occupy till I come;' which was scriptural. By way of a reminder, when me and the Army was eighteen hundred yards away, I drops a bullet near him standing on the snow, and all the people falls flat on their faces. Then I sends a letter to Dravot wherever he be by land or by sea."

At the risk of throwing the creature out of train I interrupted: "How could you write a letter up yonder?"

"The letter?--oh!--the letter! Keep looking at me between the eyes, please. It was a string-talk letter, that we'd learned the way of it from a blind beggar in the Punjab."

I remember that there had once come to the office a blind man with a knotted twig, and a piece of string which he wound round the twig according to some cipher of his own. He could, after the lapse of days or hours, repeat the sentence which he had reeled up. He had reduced the alphabet to eleven primitive sounds, and tried to teach me his method, but I could not understand.

"I sent that letter to Dravot," said Carnehan, "and told him to come back because this Kingdom was growing too big for me to handle; and then I struck for the first valley, to see how the priests were working. They called the village we took along with the Chief, Bashkai, and the first village we took, Er-Heb. The priests at Er-Heb was doing all right, but they had a lot of pending cases about land to show me, and some men from another village had been firing arrows at night. I went out and looked for that village, and fired four rounds at it from a thousand yards. That used all the cartridges I cared to spend, and I waited for Dravot, who had been away two or three months, and I kept my people quiet.

"One morning I heard the devil's own noise of drums and horns, and Dan Dravot marches down the hill with his Army and a tail of hundreds of men, and, which was the most amazing, a great gold crown on his head. 'My Gord, Carnehan,' says Daniel, 'this is a tremenjus business, and we've got the whole country as far as it's worth having. I am the son of Alexander by Queen Semiramis, and you're my younger brother and a God too! It's the biggest thing we've ever seen. I've been marching

and fighting for six weeks with the Army, and every footy little village for fifty miles has come in rejoiceful; and more than that, I've got the key of the whole show, as you'll see, and I've got a crown for you! I told 'em to make two of 'em at a place called Shu, where the gold lies in the rock like suet in mutton. Gold I've seen, and turquoise I've kicked out of the cliffs, and there's garnets in the sands of the river, and here's a chunk of amber that a man brought me. Call up all the priests and, here, take your crown.'

"One of the men opens a black hair bag, and I slips the crown on. It was too small and too heavy, but I wore it for the glory. Hammered gold it was--five pounds weight, like a hoop of a barrel.

" 'Peachey,' says Dravot, 'we don't want to fight no more. The Craft's the trick, so help me!' and he brings forward that same Chief that I left at Bashkai--Billy Fish we called him afterward, because he was so like Billy Fish that drove the big tank-engine at Mach on the Bolan in the old days. 'Shake hands with him,' says Dravot; and I shook hands and nearly dropped, for Billy Fish gave me the Grip. I said nothing, but tried him with the Fellow-craft Grip. He answers all right, and I tried the Master's Grip, but that was a slip. 'A Fellow-craft he is!'

I says to Dan. 'Does he know the word?' 'He does,' says Dan, 'and all the priests know. It's a miracle! The Chiefs and the priests can work a Fellow-craft Lodge in a way that's very like ours, and they've cut the marks on the rocks, but they don't know the Third Degree, and they've come to find out. It's Gord's Truth. I've known these long years that the Afghans knew up to the Fellow-craft Degree, but this is

a miracle. A God and a Grand Master of the Craft am I, and a Lodge in the Third Degree I will open, and we'll raise the head priests and the Chiefs of the villages.'

" 'It's against all the law,' I says, 'holding a Lodge without warrant from any one; and you know we never held office in any Lodge.'

" 'It's a master stroke o' policy,' says Dravot. 'It means running the country as easy as a four-wheeled bogie on a down grade. We can't stop to inquire now, or they'll turn against us. I've forty Chiefs at my heel, and passed and raised according to their merit they shall be. Billet these men on the villages, and see that we run up a Lodge of some kind. The temple of Imbra will do for a Lodge-room. The women must make aprons as you show them. I'll hold a levee of Chiefs to-night and Lodge to-morrow.'

"I was fair run off my legs, but I wasn't such a fool as not to see what a pull this Craft business gave us. I showed the priests' families how to make aprons of the degrees, but for Dravot's apron the blue border and marks was made of turquoise lumps on white hide, not cloth. We took a great square stone in the temple for the Master's chair, and little stones for the officer's chairs, and painted the black pavement with white squares, and did what we could to make things regular.

"At the levee which was held that night on the hillside with big

bonfires, Dravot gives out that him and me were Gods and sons of Alexander, and Passed Grand Masters in the Craft, and was come to make Kafiristan a country where every man should eat in peace and drink in quiet, and specially obey us. Then the Chiefs come round to shake hands, and they were so hairy and white and fair it was just shaking hands with old friends. We gave them names according as they was like men we had known in India--Billy Fish, Holly Dilworth, Pikky Kergan, that was Bazaar-master when I was at Mhow, and so on, and so on.

"The most amazing miracles was at Lodge next night. One of the old priests was watching us continuous, and I felt uneasy, for I knew we'd have to fudge the Ritual, and I didn't know what the men knew. The old priest was a stranger come in from beyond the village of Bashkai. The minute Dravot puts on the Master's apron that the girls had made for him, the priest fetches a whoop and a howl, and tries to overturn the stone that Dravot was sitting on. 'It's all up now,' I says. 'That comes of meddling with the Craft without warrant!' Dravot never winked an eye, not when ten priests took and tilted over the Grand Master's chair--which was to say, the stone of Imbra. The priest begins rubbing the bottom end of it to clear away the black dirt, and presently he shows all the other priests the Master's Mark, same as was on Dravot's apron, cut into the stone. Not even the priests of the temple of Imbra knew it was there. The old chap falls flat on his face at Dravot's feet and kisses 'em. 'Luck again,' says Dravot, across the Lodge, to me; 'they say it's the missing Mark that no one could understand the why of. We're more than safe now.' Then he bangs the butt of his gun for a gavel and says, 'By virtue of the authority vested in me by my

own right hand and the help of Peachey, I declare myself Grand Master of all Freemasonry in Kafiristan in this the Mother Lodge o' the country, and King of Kafiristan equally with Peachey!' At that he puts on his crown and I puts on mine,--I was doing Senior Warden,--and we opens the Lodge in most ample form. It was an amazing miracle! The priests moved in Lodge through the first two degrees almost without telling, as if the memory was coming back to them. After that Peachey and Dravot raised such as was worthy--high priests and Chiefs of far-off villages. Billy Fish was the first, and I can tell you we scared the soul out of him. It was not in any way according to Ritual, but it served our turn. We didn't raise more than ten of the biggest men, because we didn't want to make the Degree common. And they was clamouring to be raised.

" 'In another six months,' says Dravot, 'we'll hold another Communication and see how you are working.' Then he asks them about their villages, and learns that they was fighting one against the other, and were sick and tired of it. And when they wasn't doing that they was fighting with the Mohammedans. 'You can fight those when they come into our country,' says Dravot. 'Tell off every tenth man of your tribes for a Frontier guard, and send two hundred at a time to this valley to be drilled. Nobody is going to be shot or speared any more so long as he does well, and I know that you won't cheat me, because you're white people--sons of Alexander--and not like common black Mohammedans. You are /my/ people, and, by God,' says he, running off into English at the end, 'I'll make a damned fine Nation of you, or I'll die in the making!'

"I can't tell all we did for the next six months, because Dravot did a lot I couldn't see the hang of, and he learned their lingo in a way I never could. My work was to help the people plough, and now and again go out with some of the Army and see what the other villages were doing, and make 'em throw rope bridges across the ravines which cut up the country horrid. Dravot was very kind to me, but when he walked up and down in the pine wood pulling that bloody red beard of his with both fists I knew he was thinking plans I could not advise about, and I just waited for orders.

"But Dravot never showed me disrespect before the people. They were afraid of me and the Army, but they loved Dan. He was the best of friends with the priests and the Chiefs; but any one could come across the hills with a complaint, and Dravot would hear him out fair, and call four priests together and say what was to be done. He used to call in Billy Fish from Bashkai, and Pikky Kergan from Shu, and an old Chief we called Kafuzelum,--it was like enough to his real name,--and hold councils with 'em when there was any fighting to be done in small villages. That was his Council of War, and the four priests of Bashkai, Shu, Khawak, and Madora was his Privy Council. Between the lot of 'em they sent me, with forty men and twenty rifles, and sixty men carrying turquoises, into the Ghorband country to buy those hand-made Martini rifles, that come out of the Amir's workshops at Kabul, from one of the Amir's Herati regiments that would have sold the very teeth out of their mouths for turquoises.

"I stayed in Ghorband a month, and gave the Governor there the pick of my baskets for hush-money, and bribed the Colonel of the regiment some more, and, between the two and the tribes-people, we got more than a hundred hand-made Martinis, a hundred good Kohat Jezails that'll throw to six hundred yards, and forty man-loads of very bad ammunition for the rifles. I came back with what I had, and distributed 'em among the men that the Chiefs sent in to me to drill. Dravot was too busy to attend to those things, but the old Army that we first made helped me, and we turned out five hundred men that could drill, and two hundred that knew how to hold arms pretty straight. Even those cork-screwed, hand-made guns was a miracle to them. Dravot talked big about powder-shops and factories, walking up and down in the pine wood when the winter was coming on.

" 'I won't make a Nation,' says he. 'I'll make an Empire! These men aren't niggers; they're English! Look at their eyes--look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They're the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they've grown to be English. I'll take a census in the spring if the priests don't get frightened. There must be a fair two million of 'em in these hills. The villages are full o' little children. Two million people--two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men--and all English! They only want the rifles and a little drilling. Two hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India! Peachey, man,' he says, chewing his beard in great hunks, 'we shall be Emperors--Emperors of the Earth! Rajah Brooke will be a

suckling to us. I'll treat with the Viceroy on equal terms. I'll ask him to send me twelve picked English--twelve that I know of--to help us govern a bit. There's Mackray, Serjeant Pensioner at Segowli--many's the good dinner he's given me, and his wife a pair of trousers. There's Donkin, the Warder of Tounghoo Jail; there's hundreds that I could lay my hand on if I was in India. The Viceroy shall do it for me; I'll send a man through in the spring for those men, and I'll write for a dispensation from the Grand Lodge for what I've done as Grand Master. That--and all the Sniders that'll be thrown out when the native troops in India take up the Martini. They'll be worn smooth, but they'll do for fighting in these hills. Twelve English, a hundred thousand Sniders run through the Amir's country in driblets,--I'd be content with twenty thousand in one year,--and we'd be an Empire. When everything was shipshape I'd hand over the crown--this crown I'm wearing now--to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say, "Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot." Oh, it's big! It's big, I tell you! But there's so much to be done in every place--Bashkai, Khawak, Shu, and everywhere else.'

" 'What is it?' I says. 'There are no more men coming in to be drilled this autumn. Look at those fat black clouds. They're bringing the snow.'

" 'It isn't that,' says Daniel, putting his hand very hard on my shoulder; 'and I don't wish to say anything that's against you, for no other living man would have followed me and made me what I am as you have done. You're a first-class Commander-in-Chief, and the people

know you; but--it's a big country, and somehow you can't help me, Peachey, in the way I want to be helped.'

" 'Go to your blasted priests, then!' I said, and I was sorry when I made that remark, but it did hurt me sore to find Daniel talking so superior, when I'd drilled all the men and done all he told me.

" 'Don't let's quarrel, Peachey,' says Daniel, without cursing.

'You're a King too, and the half of this Kingdom is yours; but can't you see, Peachey, we want cleverer men than us now--three or four of 'em, that we can scatter about for our Deputies. It's a hugeous great State, and I can't always tell the right thing to do, and I haven't time for all I want to do, and here's the winter coming on and all.'

He put half his beard into his mouth, all red like the gold of his crown.

" 'I'm sorry, Daniel,' says I. 'I've done all I could. I've drilled the men and shown the people how to stack their oats better; and I've brought in those tinware rifles from Ghorband--but I know what you're driving at. I take it Kings always feel oppressed that way.'

" 'There's another thing too,' says Dravot, walking up and down. 'The winter's coming, and these people won't be giving much trouble, and if they do we can't move about. I want a wife.'

" 'For Gord's sake leave the women alone!' I says. 'We've both got all the work we can, though I /am/ a fool. Remember the Contrack, and keep clear o' women.'

" 'The Contrack only lasted till such time as we was Kings; and Kings we have been these months past,' says Dravot, weighing his crown in his hand. 'You go get a wife too, Peachey--a nice, strappin', plump girl that'll keep you warm in the winter. They're prettier than English girls, and we can take the pick of 'em. Boil 'em once or twice in hot water, and they'll come out like chicken and ham.'

" 'Don't tempt me!' I says. 'I will not have any dealings with a woman, not till we are a dam' side more settled than we are now. I've been doing the work o' two men, and you've been doing the work of three. Let's lie off a bit, and see if we can get some better tobacco from Afghan country and run in some good liquor; and no women.'

" 'Who's talking o' /women/?' says Dravot. 'I said /wife/--a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that'll make them your blood-brothers, and that'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs. That's what I want.'

" 'Do you remember that Bengali woman I kept at Mogul Serai when I was a plate-layer?' says I. 'A fat lot o' good she was to me. She taught me the lingo and one or two other things; but what happened? She ran

away with the Station-master's servant and half my month's pay. Then she turned up at Dadur Junction in tow of a half-caste, and had the impudence to say I was her husband--all among the drivers in the running-shed too!

" 'We've done with that,' says Dravot; 'these women are whiter than you or me, and a Queen I will have for the winter months.'

" 'For the last time o' asking, Dan, do /not/, ' I says. 'It'll only bring us harm. The Bible says that Kings ain't to waste their strength on women, 'specially when they've got a new raw Kingdom to work over.'

" 'For the last time of answering, I will,' said Dravot, and he went away through the pine-trees looking like a big red devil, the sun being on his crown and beard and all.

"But getting a wife was not as easy as Dan thought. He put it before the Council, and there was no answer till Billy Fish said that he'd better ask the girls. Dravot damned them all round. 'What's wrong with me?' he shouts, standing by the idol Imbra. 'Am I a dog, or am I not enough of a man for your wenches? Haven't I put the shadow of my hand over this country? Who stopped the last Afghan raid?' It was me really, but Dravot was too angry to remember. 'Who bought your guns? Who repaired the bridges? Who's the Grand Master of the sign cut in the stone?' says he, and he thumped his hand on the block that he used to sit on in Lodge, and at Council, which opened like Lodge always.

Billy Fish said nothing, and no more did the others. 'Keep your hair on, Dan,' said I, 'and ask the girls. That's how it's done at Home, and these people are quite English.'

" 'The marriage of the King is a matter of State,' says Dan, in a white-hot rage, for he could feel, I hope, that he was going against his better mind. He walked out of the Council-room, and the others sat still, looking at the ground.

" 'Billy Fish,' says I to the Chief of Bashkai, 'what's the difficulty here? A straight answer to a true friend.'

" 'You know,' says Billy Fish. 'How should a man tell you who knows everything? How can daughters of men marry Gods or Devils? It's not proper.'

"I remembered something like that in the Bible; but, if after seeing us as long as they had, they still believed we were Gods, it wasn't for me to undeceive them.

" 'A God can do anything,' says I. 'If the King is fond of a girl he'll not let her die.' 'She'll have to,' said Billy Fish. 'There are all sorts of Gods and Devils in these mountains, and now and again a girl marries one of them and isn't seen any more. Besides, you two know the Mark cut in the stone. Only the Gods know that. We thought

you were men till you showed the sign of the Master.'

"I wished then that we had explained about the loss of the genuine secrets of a Master Mason at the first go-off; but I said nothing. All that night there was a blowing of horns in a little dark temple half-way down the hill, and I heard the girl crying fit to die. One of the priests told us that she was being prepared to marry the King.

" 'I'll have no nonsense of that kind,' says Dan. 'I don't want to interfere with your customs, but I'll take my own wife.' 'The girl's a little bit afraid,' says the priest. 'She thinks she's going to die, and they are a-heartening of her up down in the temple.'

" 'Hearten her very tender, then,' says Dravot, 'or I'll hearten you with the butt of a gun so you'll never want to be heartened again.' He licked his lips, did Dan, and stayed up walking about more than half the night, thinking of the wife that he was going to get in the morning. I wasn't any means comfortable, for I knew that dealings with a woman in foreign parts, though you was a crowned King twenty times over, could not but be risky. I got up very early in the morning while Dravot was asleep, and I saw the priests talking together in whispers, and the Chiefs talking together too, and they looked at me out of the corners of their eyes.

" 'What is up, Fish?' I say to the Bashkai man, who was wrapped up in his furs and looking splendid to behold.

" 'I can't rightly say,' says he; 'but if you can make the King drop all this nonsense about marriage, you'll be doing him and me and yourself a great service.'

" 'That I do believe,' says I. 'But sure, you know, Billy, as well as me, having fought against and for us, that the King and me are nothing more than two of the finest men that God Almighty ever made. Nothing more, I do assure you.'

" 'That may be,' says Billy Fish, 'and yet I should be sorry if it was.' He sinks his head upon his great fur cloak for a minute and thinks. 'King,' says he, 'be you man or God or Devil, I'll stick by you to-day. I have twenty of my men with me, and they will follow me. We'll go to Bashkai until the storm blows over.'

" A little snow had fallen in the night, and everything was white except the greasy fat clouds that blew down and down from the north. Dravot came out with his crown on his head, swinging his arms and stamping his feet, and looking more pleased than Punch.

" 'For the last time, drop it, Dan,' says I, in a whisper; 'Billy Fish here says that there will be a row.'

" 'A row among my people!' says Dravot. 'Not much. Peachey, you're a

fool not to get a wife too. Where's the girl?' says he, with a voice as loud as the braying of a jackass. 'Call up all the Chiefs and priests, and let the Emperor see if his wife suits him.'

"There was no need to call any one. They were all there leaning on their guns and spears round the clearing in the centre of the pine wood. A lot of priests went down to the little temple to bring up the girl, and the horns blew fit to wake the dead. Billy Fish saunters round and gets as close to Daniel as he could, and behind him stood his twenty men with matchlocks--not a man of them under six feet. I was next to Dravot, and behind me was twenty men of the regular Army. Up comes the girl, and a strapping wench she was, covered with silver and turquoises, but white as death, and looking back every minute at the priests.

" 'She'll do,' said Dan, looking her over. 'What's to be afraid of, lass? Come and kiss me.' He puts his arm round her. She shuts her eyes, gives a bit of a squeak, and down goes her face in the side of Dan's flaming-red beard.

" 'The slut's bitten me!' says he, clapping his hand to his neck, and, sure enough, his hand was red with blood. Billy Fish and two of his matchlock men catches hold of Dan by the shoulders and drags him into the Bashkai lot, while the priests howls in their lingo, 'Neither God nor Devil, but a man!' I was all taken aback, for a priest cut at me in front, and the Army behind began firing into the Bashkai men.

" 'God A'mighty!' says Dan, 'what is the meaning o' this?'

" 'Come back! Come away!' says Billy Fish. 'Ruin and Mutiny is the matter. We'll break for Bashkai if we can.'

"I tried to give some sort of orders to my men,--the men o' the regular Army,--but it was no use, so I fired into the brown of 'em with an English Martini and drilled three beggars in a line. The valley was full of shouting, howling creatures, and every soul was shrieking, 'Not a God nor a Devil, but only a man!' The Bashkai troops stuck to Billy Fish all they were worth, but their matchlocks wasn't half as good as the Kabul breech-loaders, and four of them dropped. Dan was bellowing like a bull, for he was very wrathful; and Billy Fish had a hard job to prevent him running out at the crowd.

" 'We can't stand,' says Billy Fish. 'Make a run for it down the valley! The whole place is against us.' The matchlock-men ran, and we went down the valley in spite of Dravot. He was swearing horrible and crying out that he was a King. The priests rolled great stones on us, and the regular Army fired hard, and there wasn't more than six men, not counting Dan, Billy Fish, and Me, that came down to the bottom of the valley alive.

"Then they stopped firing, and the horns in the temple blew again.

'Come away--for Gord's sake come away!' says Billy Fish. 'They'll send runners out to all the villages before ever we get to Bashkai. I can protect you there, but I can't do anything now.'

"My own notion is that Dan began to go mad in his head from that hour. He stared up and down like a stuck pig. Then he was all for walking back alone and killing the priests with his bare hands; which he could have done. 'An Emperor am I,' says Daniel, 'and next year I shall be a Knight of the Queen.'

" 'All right, Dan,' says I; 'but come along now while there's time.'

" 'It's your fault,' says he, 'for not looking after your Army better. There was mutiny in the midst, and you didn't know--you damned engine-driving, plate-laying, missionary's-pass-hunting hound!' He sat upon a rock and called me every foul name he could lay tongue to. I was too heart-sick to care, though it was all his foolishness that brought the smash.

" 'I'm sorry, Dan,' says I, 'but there's no accounting for natives. This business is our Fifty-seven. Maybe we'll make something out of it yet, when we've got to Bashkai.'

" 'Let's get to Bashkai, then,' says Dan, 'and, by God, when I come back here again I'll sweep the valley so there isn't a bug in a

blanket left!

"We walked all that day, and all that night Dan was stumping up and down on the snow, chewing his beard and muttering to himself.

" 'There's no hope o' getting clear,' said Billy Fish. 'The priests have sent runners to the villages to say that you are only men. Why didn't you stick on as Gods till things was more settled? I'm a dead man,' says Billy Fish, and he throws himself down on the snow and begins to pray to his Gods.

"Next morning we was in a cruel bad country--all up and down, no level ground at all, and no food, either. The six Bashkai men looked at Billy Fish hungry-way as if they wanted to ask something, but they never said a word. At noon we came to the top of a flat mountain all covered with snow, and when we climbed up into it, behold, there was an Army in position waiting in the middle!

" 'The runners have been very quick,' says Billy Fish, with a little bit of a laugh. 'They are waiting for us.'

"Three or four men began to fire from the enemy's side, and a chance shot took Daniel in the calf of the leg. That brought him to his senses. He looks across the snow at the Army, and sees the rifles that we had brought into the country.

" 'We're done for,' says he. 'They are Englishmen, these people,--and it's my blasted nonsense that has brought you to this. Get back, Billy Fish, and take your men away; you've done what you could, and now cut for it. Carnehan,' says he, 'shake hands with me and go along with Billy, Maybe they won't kill you. I'll go and meet 'em alone. It's me that did it! Me, the King!'

" 'Go!' says I. 'Go to Hell, Dan! I'm with you here. Billy Fish, you clear out, and we two will meet those folk.'

" 'I'm a Chief,' says Billy Fish, quite quiet. 'I stay with you. My men can go.'

"The Bashkai fellows didn't wait for a second word, but ran off, and Dan and Me and Billy Fish walked across to where the drums were drumming and the horns were horning. It was cold--awful cold. I've got that cold in the back of my head now. There's a lump of it there."

The punka-coolies had gone to sleep. Two kerosene lamps were blazing in the office, and the perspiration poured down my face and splashed on the blotter as I leaned forward. Carnehan was shivering, and I feared that his mind might go. I wiped my face, took a fresh grip of the piteously mangled hands, and said, "What happened after that?"

The momentary shift of my eyes had broken the clear current.

"What was you pleased to say?" whined Carnehan. "They took them without any sound. Not a little whisper all along the snow, not though the King knocked down the first man that set hand on him--not though old Peachey fired his last cartridge into the brown of 'em. Not a single solitary sound did those swines make. They just closed up tight, and I tell you their furs stunk. There was a man called Billy Fish, a good friend of us all, and they cut his throat, Sir, then and there, like a pig; and the King kicks up the bloody snow and says, 'We've had a dashed fine run for our money. What's coming next?' But Peachey, Peachey Taliaferro, I tell you, Sir, in confidence as betwixt two friends, he lost his head, Sir. No, he didn't, neither. The King lost his head, so he did, all along o' one of those cunning rope bridges. Kindly let me have the paper-cutter, Sir. It tilted this way. They marched him a mile across that snow to a rope bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. You may have seen such. They prodded him behind like an ox. 'Damn your eyes!' says the King. 'D' you suppose I can't die like a gentleman?' He turns to Peachey--Peachey that was crying like a child. 'I've brought you to this, Peachey,' says he. 'Brought you out of your happy life to be killed in Kafiristan, where you was late Commander-in-Chief of the Emperor's forces. Say you forgive me, Peachey.' 'I do,' says Peachey. 'Fully and freely do I forgive you, Dan.' 'Shake hands, Peachey,' says he. 'I'm going now.' Out he goes, looking neither right nor left, and when he was plumb in the middle of those dizzy dancing ropes, 'Cut you beggars,' he shouts; and they cut, and old Dan fell, turning round and

round and round, twenty thousand miles, for he took half an hour to fall till he struck the water, and I could see his body caught on a rock with the gold crown close beside.

"But do you know what they did to Peachey between two pine-trees? They crucified him, Sir, as Peachey's hand will show. They used wooden pegs for his hands and feet; but he didn't die. He hung there and screamed, and they took him down next day, and said it was a miracle that he wasn't dead. They took him down--poor old Peachey that hadn't done them any harm--that hadn't done them any--"

He rocked to and fro and wept bitterly, wiping his eyes with the back of his scarred hands and moaning like a child for some ten minutes.

"They was cruel enough to feed him up in the temple, because they said he was more of a God than old Daniel that was a man. Then they turned him out on the snow, and told him to go home, and Peachey came home in about a year, begging along the roads quite safe; for Daniel Dravot he walked before and said, 'Come along, Peachey. It's a big thing we're doing.' The mountains they danced at night, and the mountains they tried to fall on Peachey's head, but Dan he held up his hand, and Peachey came along bent double. He never let go of Dan's hand, and he never let go of Dan's head. They gave it to him as a present in the temple, to remind him not to come again; and though the crown was pure gold and Peachey was starving, never would Peachey sell the same. You know Dravot, Sir! You knew Right Worshipful Brother Dravot! Look at

him now!"

He fumbled in the mass of rags round his bent waist; brought out a black horsehair bag embroidered with silver thread; and shook therefrom on to my table--the dried, withered head of Daniel Dravot! The morning sun, that had long been paling the lamps, struck the red beard and blind sunken eyes; struck, too, a heavy circlet of gold studded with raw turquoises, that Carnehan placed tenderly on the battered temples.

"You be'old now," said Carnehan, "the Emperor in his 'abit as he lived --the King of Kafiristan with his crown upon his head. Poor old Daniel that was a monarch once!"

I shuddered, for, in spite of defacements manifold, I recognised the head of the man of Marwar Junction. Carnehan rose to go. I attempted to stop him. He was not fit to walk abroad. "Let me take away the whisky, and give me a little money," he gasped. "I was a King once. I'll go to the Deputy Commissioner and ask to set in the Poorhouse till I get my health. No, thank you, I can't wait till you get a carriage for me. I've urgent private affairs--in the south--at Marwar."

He shambled out of the office and departed in the direction of the Deputy Commissioner's house. That day at noon I had occasion to go down the blinding-hot Mall, and I saw a crooked man crawling along the

white dust of the roadside, his hat in his hand, quavering dolorously after the fashion of street-singers at Home. There was not a soul in sight, and he was out of all possible earshot of the houses. And he sang through his nose, turning his head from right to left:

"The Son of Man goes forth to war,
A golden crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar--
Who follows in His train?"

I waited to hear no more, but put the poor wretch into my carriage and drove him off to the nearest missionary for eventual transfer to the Asylum. He repeated the hymn twice while he was with me, whom he did not in the least recognise, and I left him singing it to the missionary.

Two days later I inquired after his welfare of the Superintendent of the Asylum.

"He was admitted suffering from sunstroke. He died early yesterday morning," said the Superintendent. "Is it true that he was half an hour bareheaded in the sun at midday?"

"Yes," said I; "but do you happen to know if he had anything upon him by any chance when he died?"

"Not to my knowledge," said the Superintendent.

And there the matter rests.

TAJIMA

BY

MISS MITFORD

Once upon a time, a certain ronin, Tajima Shume by name, an able and well-read man, being on his travels to see the world, went up to Kiyoto by the Tokaido. [The road of the Eastern Sea, the famous highroad leading from Kiyoto to Yedo. The name is also used to indicate the provinces through which it runs.] One day, in the neighbourhood of Nagoya, in the province of Owari, he fell in with a wandering priest, with whom he entered into conversation. Finding that they were bound for the same place, they agreed to travel together, beguiling their weary way by pleasant talk on divers matters; and so by degrees, as they became more intimate, they began to speak without restraint about their private affairs; and the priest, trusting thoroughly in the honour of his companion, told him the object of his journey.

"For some time past," said he, "I have nourished a wish that has engrossed all my thoughts; for I am bent on setting up a molten image in honour of Buddha; with this object I have wandered through various provinces collecting alms, and (who knows by what weary toil?) we have succeeded in amassing two hundred ounces of silver--enough, I trust, to erect a handsome bronze figure."

What says the proverb? "He who bears a jewel in his bosom bears poison." Hardly had the ronin heard these words of the priest than an evil heart arose within him, and he thought to himself, "Man's life, from the womb to the grave, is made up of good and of ill luck. Here am I, nearly forty years old, a wanderer, without a calling, or even a hope of advancement in the world. To be sure, it seems a shame; yet if I could steal the money this priest is boasting about, I could live at ease for the rest of my days;" and so he began casting about how best he might compass his purpose. But the priest, far from guessing the drift of his comrade's thoughts, journeyed cheerfully on till they reached the town of Kuana. Here there is an arm of the sea, which is crossed in ferry-boats, that start as soon as some twenty or thirty passengers are gathered together; and in one of these boats the two travellers embarked. About half-way across, the priest was taken with a sudden necessity to go to the side of the boat; and the ronin, following him, tripped him up while no one was looking, and flung him into the sea. When the boatmen and passengers heard the splash, and saw the priest struggling in the water, they were afraid, and made every effort to save him; but the wind was fair, and the boat running

swiftly under the bellying sails; so they were soon a few hundred yards off from the drowning man, who sank before the boat could be turned to rescue him.

When he saw this, the ronin feigned the utmost grief and dismay, and said to his fellow-passengers, "This priest, whom we have just lost, was my cousin; he was going to Kiyoto, to visit the shrine of his patron; and as I happened to have business there as well, we settled to travel together. Now, alas! by this misfortune, my cousin is dead, and I am left alone."

He spoke so feelingly, and wept so freely, that the passengers believed his story, and pitied and tried to comfort him. Then the ronin said to the boatmen:

"We ought, by rights, to report this matter to the authorities; but as I am pressed for time, and the business might bring trouble on yourselves as well, perhaps we had better hush it up for the present; I will at once go on to Kiyoto and tell my cousin's patron, besides writing home about it. What think you, gentlemen?" added he, turning to the other travellers.

They, of course, were only too glad to avoid any hindrance to their onward journey, and all with one voice agreed to what the ronin had proposed; and so the matter was settled. When, at length, they reached the shore, they left the boat, and every man went his way; but the

ronin, overjoyed in his heart, took the wandering priest's luggage, and, putting it with his own, pursued his journey to Kiyoto.

On reaching the capital, the ronin changed his name from Shume to Tokubei, and, giving up his position as a samurai, turned merchant, and traded with the dead man's money. Fortune favouring his speculations, he began to amass great wealth, and lived at his ease, denying himself nothing; and in course of time he married a wife, who bore him a child.

Thus the days and months wore on, till one fine summer's night, some three years after the priest's death, Tokubei stepped out on the veranda of his house to enjoy the cool air and the beauty of the moonlight. Feeling dull and lonely, he began musing over all kinds of things, when on a sudden the deed of murder and theft, done so long ago, vividly recurred to his memory, and he thought to himself, "Here am I, grown rich and fat on the money I wantonly stole. Since then, all has gone well with me; yet, had I not been poor, I had never turned assassin nor thief. Woe betide me! what a pity it was!" and as he was revolving the matter in his mind, a feeling of remorse came over him, in spite of all he could do. While his conscience thus smote him, he suddenly, to his utter amazement, beheld the faint outline of a man standing near a fir-tree in the garden; on looking more attentively, he perceived that the man's whole body was thin and worn, and the eyes sunken and dim; and in that poor ghost that was before him he recognised the very priest whom he had thrown into the sea at Kuana. Chilled with horror, he looked again, and saw that the priest

was smiling in scorn. He would have fled into the house, but the ghost stretched forth its withered arm, and, clutching the back of his neck, scowled at him with a vindictive glare and a hideous ghastliness of mien so unspeakably awful that any ordinary man would have swooned with fear. But Tokubei, tradesman though he was, had once been a soldier, and was not easily matched for daring; so he shook off the ghost, and, leaping into the room for his dirk, laid about him boldly enough; but, strike as he would, the spirit, fading into the air, eluded his blows, and suddenly reappeared only to vanish again; and from that time forth Tokubei knew no rest, and was haunted night and day.

At length, undone by such ceaseless vexation, Tokubei fell ill, and kept muttering, "Oh, misery! misery! the wandering priest is coming to torture me!" Hearing his moans and the disturbance he made, the people in the house fancied he was mad, and called in a physician, who prescribed for him. But neither pill nor potion could cure Tokubei, whose strange frenzy soon became the talk of the whole neighbourhood.

Now it chanced that the story reached the ears of a certain wandering priest who lodged in the next street. When he heard the particulars, this priest gravely shook his head as though he knew all about it, and sent a friend to Tokubei's house to say that a wandering priest, dwelling hard by, had heard of his illness, and, were it never so grievous, would undertake to heal it by means of his prayers; and Tokubei's wife, driven half wild by her husband's sickness, lost not a moment in sending for the priest and taking him into the sick man's

room.

But no sooner did Tokubei see the priest than he yelled out, "Help! help! Here is the wandering priest come to torment me again. Forgive! forgive!" and hiding his head under the coverlet, he lay quivering all over. Then the priest turned all present out of the room, put his mouth to the affrighted man's ear, and whispered:

"Three years ago, at the Kuana ferry, you flung me into the water; and well you remember it."

But Tokubei was speechless, and could only quake with fear.

"Happily," continued the priest, "I had learned to swim and to dive as a boy; so I reached the shore, and, after wandering through many provinces, succeeded in setting up a bronze figure to Buddha, thus fulfilling the wish of my heart. On my journey homeward, I took a lodging in the next street, and there heard of your marvellous ailment. Thinking I could divine its cause, I came to see you, and am glad to find I was not mistaken. You have done a hateful deed; but am I not a priest, and have I not forsaken the things of this world, and would it not ill become me to bear malice? Repent, therefore, and abandon your evil ways. To see you do so I should esteem the height of happiness. Be of good cheer, now, and look me in the face, and you will see that I am really a living man, and no vengeful goblin come to torment you."

Seeing he had no ghost to deal with, and overwhelmed by the priest's kindness, Tokubei burst into tears, and answered, "Indeed, indeed, I don't know what to say. In a fit of madness I was tempted to kill and rob you. Fortune befriended me ever after; but the richer I grew, the more keenly I felt how wicked I had been, and the more I foresaw that my victim's vengeance would some day overtake me. Haunted by this thought, I lost my nerve, till one night I beheld your spirit, and from that time fell ill. But how you managed to escape, and are still alive, is more than I can understand."

"A guilty man," said the priest, with a smile, "shudders at the rustling of the wind or the chattering of a stork's beak; a murderer's conscience preys upon his mind till he sees what is not. Poverty drives a man to crimes which he repents of in his wealth. How true is the doctrine of Moshi [Mencius], that the heart of man, pure by nature, is corrupted by circumstances!"

Thus he held forth; and Tokubei, who had long since repented of his crime, implored forgiveness, and gave him a large sum of money, saying, "Half of this is the amount I stole from you three years since; the other half I entreat you to accept as interest, or as a gift."

The priest at first refused the money; but Tokubei insisted on his accepting it, and did all he could to detain him, but in vain; for the

priest went on his way, and bestowed the money on the poor and needy.

As for Tokubei himself, he soon shook off his disorder, and thenceforward lived at peace with all men, revered both at home and abroad, and ever intent on good and charitable deeds.

A CHINESE GIRL GRADUATE

BY

R. K. DOUGLAS

Who among the three hundred million sons of Han does not know the saying:

There's Paradise above, 't is true;

But here below we've Hang and Soo?

[Hangchow and Soochow]

And though no one will deny the beauty of those far-famed cities, they cannot compare in grandeur of situation and boldness of features with many of the towns of the providence of the "Four Streams." Foremost among the favoured spots of this part of the empire is Mienchu, which, as its name implies, is celebrated for the silky bamboos which grow in its immediate neighbourhood. These form, however, only one of the features of its loveliness. Situated at the foot of a range of

mountains which rise through all the gradations from rich and abundant verdure to the region of eternal snow, it lies embosomed in groves of beech, cypress, and bamboo, through the leafy screens of which rise the upturned yellow roofs of the temples and official residences, which dot the landscape like golden islands in an emerald sea; while beyond the wall hurries, between high and rugged banks, the tributary of the Fu River, which bears to the mighty waters of the Yangtze-Kiang the goods and passengers which seek an outlet to the eastern provinces.

The streets within the walls of the city are scenes of life and bustle, while in the suburbs stand the residences of those who can afford to live in peace and quiet, undisturbed by the clamour of the Les and Changs [i.e., the people. Le and Chang are the two commonest names in China.] of the town. There, in a situation which the Son of Heaven might envy, stands the official residence of Colonel Wen. Outwardly it has all the appearance of a grandee's palace, and within the massive boundary-walls which surround it, the courtyards, halls, grounds, summer-houses, and pavilions are not to be exceeded in grandeur and beauty. The office which had fallen to the lot of Colonel Wen was one of the most sought after in the province, and commonly only fell to officers of distinction. Though not without fame in the field, Colonel Wen's main claim to honour lay in the high degrees he had taken in the examinations. His literary acquirements gained him friends among the civil officers of the district, and the position he occupied was altogether one of exceptional dignity.

Unfortunately, his first wife had died, leaving only a daughter to keep her memory alive; but at the time when our story opens, his second spouse, more kind than his first, had presented him with a much-desired son. The mother of this boy was one of those bright, pretty, gay creatures who commonly gain the affections of men much older than themselves. She sang in the most faultless falsetto, she played the guitar with taste and expression, and she danced with grace and agility. What wonder, then, that when the colonel returned from his tours of inspections and parades, weary with travel and dust, he found relief and relaxation in the joyous company of Hyacinth! And was she not also the mother of his son? Next to herself, there can be no question that this young gentleman held the chief place in the colonel's affections; while poor Jasmine, his daughter by his first venture, was left very much to her own resources. No one troubled themselves about what she did, and she was allowed, as she grew up, to follow her own pursuits and to give rein to her fancies without let or hindrance. From her earliest childhood one of her lonely amusements had been to dress as a boy, and so unchecked had the habit become that she gradually drifted into the character which she had chosen to assume. She even persuaded her father to let her go to the neighbouring boys' school. Her mother had died before the colonel had been posted to Mienchu, and among the people of that place, who had always seen her in boy's attire, she was regarded as an adopted son of her father. Hyacinth was only too glad to get her out of the way as much as possible, and so encouraged the idea of allowing her to learn to read and write in the company of their neighbours' urchins.

Being bright and clever, she soon gained an intellectual lead among the boys, and her uncommon beauty, coupled with the magnetism belonging to her sex, secured for her a popularity which almost amounted to adoration. She was tall for her age, as are most young daughters of Han; and her perfectly oval face, almond-shaped eyes, willow-leaf eyebrows, small, well-shaped mouth, brilliantly white teeth, and raven-black hair, completed a face and figure which would have been noticeable anywhere. By the boys she was worshipped, and no undertaking was too difficult or too troublesome if it was to give pleasure to Tsunk'ing, or the "Young Noble," as she was called; for to have answered to the name of Jasmine would have been to proclaim her sex at once. Even the grim old master smiled at her through his horn spectacles as she entered the school-house of a morning, and any graceful turn in her poetry or scholarly diction in her prose was sure to win for her his unsparing praise. Many an evening he invited the "young noble" to his house to read over chapters from Confucius and the poems of Le Taipoh; and years afterward, when he died, among his most cherished papers were found odes signed by Tsunk'ing, in which there was a good deal about bending willows, light, flickering bamboos, horned moons, wild geese, the sound of a flute on a rainy day, and the pleasures of wine, in strict accord with the models set forth in the "Aids to Poetry-making" which are common in the land.

If it had not been for the indifference with which she was treated in her home, the favour with which she was regarded abroad would have been most prejudicial to Jasmine; but any conceit which might have been engendered in the school-house was speedily counteracted when she

got within the portals of the colonel's domain. Coming into the presence of her father and his wife, with all the incense of kindness, affection, and, it must be confessed, flattery, with which she was surrounded by her school-fellows, fresh about her, was like stepping into a cold bath. Wholesome and invigorating the change may have been, but it was very unpleasant, and Jasmine often longed to be alone to give vent to her feelings in tears.

One deep consolation she had, however: she was a devoted student, and in the society of her books she forgot the callousness of her parents, and, living in imagination in the bygone annals of the empire, she was able to take part, as it were, in the great deeds which mark the past history of the state, and to enjoy the converse and society of the sages and poets of antiquity. When the time came that she had gained all the knowledge which the old schoolmaster could impart to her, she left the school, and formed a reading-party with two youths of her own age. These lads, by name Wei and Tu, had been her school-fellows, and were delighted at obtaining her promise to join them in their studies. So industriously were these pursued that the three friends succeeded in taking their B.A. degree at the next examination, and, encouraged by this success, determined to venture on a struggle for a still higher distinction.

Though at one in their affection for Jasmine, Tu and Wei were unlike in everything else, which probably accounted for the friendship which existed between them. Wei was the more clever of the two. He wrote poetry with ease and fluency, and his essays were marked by

correctness of style and aptness of quotation. But there was a want of strength in his character. He was exceedingly vain, and was always seeking to excite admiration among his companions. This unhappy failing made him very susceptible of adverse criticism, and at the same time extremely jealous of any one who might happen to excel him in any way. Tu, on the other hand, though not so intellectually favoured, had a rough kind of originality, which always secured for his exercises a respectful attention, and made him at all times an agreeable companion. Having no exaggerated ideas of his capabilities, he never strove to appear otherwise than he was, and being quite independent of the opinions of others, he was always natural. Thus he was one who was sought out by his friends, and was best esteemed by those whose esteem was best worth having. In outward appearance the youths were as different as their characters were diverse. Wei was decidedly good-looking, but of a kind of beauty which suggested neither rest nor sincerity; while in Tu's features, though there was less grace, the want was fully compensated for by the strength and honest firmness of his countenance.

For both these young men Jasmine had a liking, but there was no question as to which she preferred. As she herself said, "Wei is pleasant enough as a companion, but if I had to look to one of them for an act of true friendship--or as a lover," she mentally added--"I should turn at once to Tu." It was one of her amusements to compare the young men in her mind, and one day when so occupied Tu suddenly looked up from his book and said to her:

"What a pity it is that the gods have made us both men! If /I/ were a woman, the object of my heart would be to be your wife, and if /you/ were a woman, there is nothing I should like better than to be your husband."

Jasmine blushed up to the roots of her hair at having her own thoughts thus capped, as it were; but before she could answer, Wei broke in with:

"What nonsense you talk! And why, I should like to know, should you be the only one the 'young noble' might choose, supposing he belonged to the other sex?"

"You are both talking nonsense," said Jasmine, who had had time to recover her composure, "and remind me of my two old childless aunts," she added, laughing, "who are always quarrelling about the names they would have given their children if the goddess Kwanyin had granted them any half a century ago. As a matter of fact, we are three friends reading for our M.A. degrees, neither more nor less. And I will trouble you, my elder brother," she added, turning to Tu, "to explain to me what the poet means by the expression 'tuneful Tung' in the line:

'The greedy flames devour the tuneful Tung.' "

A learned disquisition by Tu on the celebrated musician who recognised the sonorous qualities of a piece of Tung timber burning in the kitchen fire effectually diverted the conversation from the inconvenient direction it had taken, and shortly afterward Jasmine took her leave.

Haunted by the thought of what had passed, she wandered on to the veranda of her archery pavilion, and while gazing half unconsciously heavenward her eyes were attracted by a hawk which flew past and alighted on a tree beyond the boundary-wall, and in front of the study she had lately left. In a restless and thoughtless mood, she took up her bow and arrow, and with unerring aim compassed the death of her victim. No sooner, however, had the hawk fallen, carrying the arrow with it, than she remembered that her name was inscribed on the shaft, and fearing lest it should be found by either Wei or Tu, she hurried round in the hope of recovering it. But she was too late. On approaching the study, she found Tu in the garden in front, examining the bird and arrow.

"Look," he said, as he saw her coming, "what a good shot some one has made! and whoever it is, he has a due appreciation of his own skill.

Listen to these lines which are scraped on the arrow:

'Do not lightly draw your bow;

But if you must, bring down your foe.' "

Jasmine was glad enough to find that he had not discovered her name, and eagerly exchanged banter with him on the conceit of the owner of the arrow. But before she could recover it, Wei, who had heard the talking and laughter, joined them, and took the arrow out of Tu's hand to examine it. Just at that moment a messenger came to summon Tu to his father's presence, and he had no sooner gone than Wei exclaimed:

"But see, here is the name of the mysterious owner of the arrow, and, as I live, it is a girl's name--Jasmine! Who, among the goddesses of heaven can Jasmine be?"

"Oh, I will take the arrow then," said Jasmine. "It must belong to my sister. That is her name."

"I did not know that you had a sister," said Wei.

"Oh yes, I have," answered Jasmine, quite forgetful of the celebrated dictum of Confucius: "Be truthful." "She is just one year younger than I am," she added, thinking it well to be circumstantial.

"Why have you never mentioned her?" asked Wei, with animation. "What is she like? Is she anything like you?"

"She is the very image of me."

"What! In height and features and ways?"

"The very image, so that people have often said that if we changed clothes each might pass for the other."

"What a good-looking girl she must be!" said Wei, laughing. "But, seriously, I have not, as you know, yet set up a household; and if your sister has not received bridal presents, I would beg to be allowed to invite her to enter my lowly habitation. What does my elder brother say to my proposal?"

"I don't know what my sister would feel about it," said Jasmine. "I would never answer for a girl, if I lived to be as old as the God of Longevity."

"Will you find out for me?"

"Certainly I will. But remember, not a word must be mentioned on the subject to my father, or, in fact, to anybody, until I give you leave."

"So long as my elder brother will undertake for me, I will promise anything," said the delighted Wei. "I already feel as though I were

nine-tenths of the way to the abode of the phoenix. Take this box of precious ointment to your sister as an earnest of my intentions, and I will keep the arrow as a token from her until she demands its return. I feel inclined to express myself in verse. May I?"

"By all means," said Jasmine, laughing.

Thus encouraged, Wei improvised as follows:

" 'T was sung of old that Lofu had no mate,
Though Che was willing; for no word was said.
At last an arrow like a herald came,
And now an honoured brother lends his aid."

"Excellent," said Jasmine, laughing. "With such a poetic gift as you possess, you certainly deserve a better fate than befell Lofu."

From this day the idea of marrying Jasmine's sister possessed the soul of Wei. But not a word did he say to Tu on the matter, for he was conscious that, as Tu was the first to pick up the arrow through which he had become acquainted with the existence of Jasmine's sister, his friend might possibly lay a claim to her hand. To Jasmine also the subject was a most absorbing one. She felt that she was becoming most unpleasantly involved in a risky matter, and that, if the time should ever come when she should have to make an explanation, she might in

honour be compelled to marry Wei--a prospect which filled her with dismay. The turn events had taken had made her analyse her feelings more than she had ever done before, and the process made her doubly conscious of the depth of her affection for Tu. "A horse," she said to herself, "cannot carry two saddles, and a woman cannot marry more than one man." Wise as this saw was, it did not help her out of her difficulty, and she turned to the chapter of accidents, and determined to trust to time, that old disposer of events, to settle the matter. But Wei was inclined to be impatient, and Jasmine was obliged to resort to more of those departures from truth which circumstances had forced upon this generally very upright young lady.

"I have consulted my father on the subject," she said to the expectant Wei, "and he insists on your waiting until the autumn examination is over. He has every confidence that you will then take your M.A. degree, and your marriage will, he hopes, put the coping-stone on your happiness and honour."

"That is all very well," said Wei; "but autumn is a long time hence, and how do I know that your sister may not change her mind?"

"Has not your younger brother undertaken to look after your interests, and cannot you trust him to do his best on your behalf?"

"I can trust my elder brother with anything in the world. It is your sister that I am afraid of," said Wei. "But since you will undertake

for her--"

"No, no," said Jasmine, laughing, "I did not say that I would undertake for her. A man who answers for a woman deserves to have 'fool' written on his forehead."

"Well, at all events, I will be content to leave the matter in your hands," said Wei.

At last the time of the autumn examination drew near, and Tu and Wei made preparations for their departure to the provincial capital. They were both bitterly disappointed when Jasmine announced that she was not going up that time. This determination was the result of a conference with her father. She had pointed out to the colonel that if she passed and took her M.A. degree she might be called upon to take office at any time, and that then she would be compelled to confess her sex; and as she was by no means disposed to give up the freedom which her doublet and hose conferred upon her, it was agreed between them that she should plead illness and not go up. Her two friends, therefore, went alone, and brilliant success attended their venture. They both passed with honours, and returned to Mienchu to receive the congratulations of their friends. Jasmine's delight was very genuine, more especially as regarded Tu, and the first evening was spent by the three students in joyous converse and in confident anticipation of the future. As Jasmine took leave of the two new M.A.'s, Wei followed her to the outer door and whispered at parting:

"I am coming to-morrow to make my formal proposal to your sister."

Jasmine had no time to answer, but went home full of anxious and disturbed thoughts, which were destined to take a more tragic turn than she had ever anticipated even in her most gloomy moments. The same cruel fate had also decreed that Wei's proposal was to be suspended, like Buddha, between heaven and earth. The blow fell upon him when he was attiring himself in the garments of his new degree, in preparation for his visit. He was in the act of tying his sash and appending it to his purse and trinkets, when Jasmine burst into the young men's study, looking deadly pale and bearing traces of acute mental distress on her usually bright and joyous countenance.

"What is the matter?" cried Tu, with almost as much agitation as was shown by Jasmine. "Tell me what has happened."

"Oh, my father, my poor father!" sobbed Jasmine.

"What is the matter with your father? He is not dead, is he?" cried the young men in one breath.

"No, it is not so bad as that," said Jasmine, "but a great and bitter misfortune has come upon us. As you know, some time ago my father had a quarrel with the military intendant, and that horrid man has, out of spite, brought charges against him for which he was carried off this

morning to prison."

The statement of her misery and the shame involved in it completely unnerved poor Jasmine, who, true to her inner sex, burst into tears and rocked herself to and fro in her grief. Tu and Wei, on their knees before her, tried to pour in words of consolation. With a lack of reason which might be excused under the circumstances, they vowed that her father was innocent before they knew the nature of the charges against him, and they pledged themselves to rest neither day nor night until they had rescued him from his difficulty. When, under the influence of their genuine sympathy, Jasmine recovered some composure, Tu begged her to tell him of what her father was accused.

"The villain," said Jasmine, through her tears, "has dared to say that my father has made use of government taxes, has taken bribes for recommending men for promotion, has appropriated the soldiers' ration-money, and has been in league with highwaymen."

"Is it possible?" said Tu, who was rather staggered by this long catalogue of crimes. "I should not have believed that any one could have ventured to have charged your honoured father with such things, least of all the intendant, who is notoriously possessed of an itching palm. But I tell you what we can do at once. Wei and I, being M.A.'s, have a right to call on the prefect, and it will be a real pleasure to us to exercise our new privilege for the first time in your service. We will urge him to inquire into the matter, and I cannot doubt that

he will at once quash the proceedings."

Unhappily, Tu's hopes were not realised. The prefect was very civil, but pointed out that, since a higher court had ordered the arrest of the colonel, he was powerless to interfere in the matter. Many were the consultations held by the three friends, and much personal relief Jasmine got from the support and sympathy of the young men. One hope yet remained to her: Tu and Wei were about to go to Peking for their doctor's degrees, and if they passed they might be able to bring such influence to bear as would secure the release of her father.

"Let not the 'young noble' distress himself overmuch," said Wei to her, with some importance. "This affair will be engraven on our hearts and minds, and if we take our degrees we will use our utmost exertions to wipe away the injustice which has been done your father."

"Unhappily," said the more practical Tu, "it is too plain that the examining magistrates are all in league to ruin him. But let our elder brother remain quietly at home, doing all he can to collect evidence in the colonel's favour, while we will do our best at the capital. If things turn out well with us there, our elder brother had better follow at once to assist us with his advice."

Before the friends parted, Wei, whose own affairs were always his first consideration, took an opportunity of whispering to Jasmine, "Don't forget your honoured sister's promise, I beseech you. Whether

we succeed or not, I shall ask for her in marriage on my return."

"Under present circumstances, we must no longer consider the engagement," said Jasmine, shocked at his introducing the subject at such a moment," and the best thing that you can do is to forget all about it."

The moment for the departure of the young men had come, and they had no time to say more. With bitter tears, the two youths took leave of the weeping Jasmine, who, as their carts disappeared in the distance, felt for the first time what it was to be alone in misery. She saw little of her stepmother in those days. That poor lady made herself so ill with unrestrained grief that she was quite incapable of rendering either help or advice. Fortunately the officials showed no disposition to proceed with the indictment, and by the judicious use of the money at her command Jasmine induced the prison authorities to make her father's confinement as little irksome as possible. She was allowed to see him at almost any time, and on one occasion, when he was enjoying her presence as in his prosperous days he had never expected to do, he remarked:

"Since the officials are not proceeding with the business, I think my best plan will be to send a petition to Peking asking the Board of War to acquit me. But my difficulty is that I have no one whom I can send to look after the business."

"Let /me/ go," said Jasmine. "When Tu and Wei were leaving, they begged me to follow them to consult as to the best means of helping you, and with them to depend on I have nothing to fear."

"I quite believe that you are as capable of managing the matter as anybody," said her father, admiringly; "but Peking is a long way off, and I cannot bear to think of the things which might happen to you on the road."

"From all time," answered Jasmine, "it has been considered the duty of a daughter to risk anything in the service of her father; and though the way is long, I shall have weapons to defend myself with against injury, and a clear conscience with which to answer any interrogatories which may be put to me. Besides, I will take our messenger, 'The Dragon,' and his wife with me. I will make her dress as a man--what fun it will be to see Mrs. Dragon's portly form in trousers, and gabardine! When that transformation is made, we shall be a party of three men. So, you see, she and I will have a man to protect us, and I shall have a woman to wait upon me; and if such a gallant company cannot travel from this to Peking in safety, I'll forswear boots and trousers and will retire into the harem for ever."

"Well," said her father, laughing, "if you can arrange in that way, go by all means, and the sooner you start the sooner I hope you will be back."

Delighted at having gained the approval of her father to her scheme, Jasmine quickly made the arrangements for her journey. On the morning of the day on which she was to start, the results of the doctors' examination at Peking reached Mienchu, and, to Jasmine's infinite delight, she found the names of Tu and Wei among the successful candidates. Armed with this good news, she hurried to the prison. All difficulties seemed to disappear like mist before the sun as she thought of the powerful advocates she now had at Peking.

"Tu and Wei have passed," she said, as she rushed into her father's presence, "and now the end of our troubles is approaching."

With impatient hope Jasmine took leave of her father, and started on her eventful journey. As evening drew on she entered the suburbs of Ch'engtu, the provincial capital, and sent "The Dragon" on to find a suitable inn for the couple of nights which she knew she would be compelled to spend in the city. "The Dragon" was successful in his search, and conducted Jasmine and his wife to a comfortable hostelry in one of the busiest parts of the town. Having refreshed herself with an excellent dinner, Jasmine was glad to rest from the fatigues and heat of the day in the cool courtyard into which her room opened. Fortune and builders had so arranged that a neighbouring house, towering above the inn, overlooked this restful spot, and one of the higher windows faced exactly the position which Jasmine had taken up. Such a fact would not, in ordinary circumstances, have troubled her in the least; but she had not been sitting long before she began to feel

an extraordinary attraction toward the window. She did her best to look the other way, but she was often unconsciously impelled to glance up at the lattice. Once she fancied she saw the curtain move.

Determined to verify her impression, she suddenly raised her eyes, after a prolonged contemplation of the pavement, and caught a momentary sight of a girl's face, which as instantly disappeared, but not before Jasmine had been able to recognise that it was one of exceptional beauty.

"Now, if I were a young man," said she to herself, "I ought to feel my heart beat at the sight of such loveliness, and it would be my bounden duty to swear that I would win the owner of it in the teeth of dragons. But as my manhood goes no deeper than my outer garments, I can afford to sit here with a quiet pulse and a whole skin."

The next day Jasmine was busily engaged in interviewing some officials in the interest of her father, and only reached the shelter of her inn toward evening. As she passed through the courtyard she instinctively looked up at the window, and again caught a glimpse of the vision of beauty which she had seen the evening before. "If she only knew," thought Jasmine, "that I was such a one as herself, she would be less anxious to see me, and more likely to avoid me."

While amusing herself at the thought of the fair watcher, the inn door opened, and a waiting-woman entered carrying a small box. As she approached Jasmine she bowed low, and with bated breath thus addressed

her:

"May every happiness be yours, sir. My young lady, Miss King, whose humble dwelling is the adjoining house, seeing that you are living in solitude, has sent me with this fruit and tea as a complimentary offering."

So saying, she presented to Jasmine the box, which contained pears and a packet of scented tea.

"To what am I indebted for this honour?" replied Jasmine; "I can claim no relationship with your lady, nor have I the honour of her acquaintance."

"My young lady says," answered the waiting-woman, "that, among the myriads who come to this inn and the thousands who go from it, she has seen no one to equal your Excellency in form and feature. At sight of you she was confident that you came from a lofty and noble family, and having learned from your attendants that you are the son of a colonel, she ventured to send you these trifles to supplement the needy fare of this rude inn."

"Tell me something about your young lady," said Jasmine, in a moment of idle curiosity.

"My young lady," said the woman, "is the daughter of Mr. King, who was a vice-president of a lower court. Her father and mother having both visited the 'Yellow Springs' [Hades], she is now living with an aunt, who has been blessed by the God of Wealth, and whose main object in life is to find a husband whom her niece may be willing to marry. The young gentleman, my young lady's cousin, is one of the richest men in Ch'engtú. All the larger inns belong to him, and his profits are as boundless as the four seas. He is as anxious as his mother to find a suitable match for the young lady, and has promised that so soon as she can make a choice he will arrange the wedding."

"I should have thought," said Jasmine, "that, being the owner of so much wealth and beauty, the young lady would have been besieged by suitors from all parts of the empire."

"So she is," said the woman, "and from her window yonder she espies them, for they all put up at this inn. Hitherto she has made fun of them all, and describes their appearance and habits in the most amusing way. 'See this one,' says she, 'with his bachelor cap on and his new official clothes and awkward gait, looking for all the world like a barn-door fowl dressed up as a stork; or that one, with his round shoulders, monkey-face, and crooked legs;' and so she tells them off."

"What does she say of me, I wonder?" said Jasmine, amused.

"Of your Excellency she says that her comparisons fail her, and that she can only hope that the Fates who guided your jewelled chariot hitherward will not tantalise her by an empty vision, but will bind your ankles to hers with the red matrimonial cords."

"How can I hope for such happiness?" said Jasmine, smiling. "But please to tell your young lady that, being only a guest at this inn, I have nothing worthy of her acceptance to offer in return for her bounteous gifts, and that I can only assure her of my boundless gratitude."

With many bows, and with reiterated wishes for Jasmine's happiness and endless longevity, the woman took her leave.

"Truly this young lady has formed a most perverted attachment," said Jasmine to herself. "She reminds me of the man in the fairy tale who fell in love with a shadow, and, so far as I can see, she is not likely to get any more satisfaction out of it than he did." So saying, she took up a pencil and scribbled the following lines on a scrap of paper:

"With thoughts as ardent as a quenchless thirst,
She sends me fragrant and most luscious fruit;
Without a blush she seeks a phenix guest [a bachelor]
Who dwells alone like case-enveloped lute."

After this mental effort Jasmine went to bed. Nor had her interview with the waiting-woman made a sufficient impression on her mind to interfere in any way with her sleep. She was surprised, however, on coming into her sitting-room in the morning, to meet the same messenger, who, laden with a dish of hot eggs and a brew of tea, begged Jasmine to "deign to look down upon her offerings."

"Many thanks," said Jasmine, "for your kind attention."

"You are putting the saddle on the wrong horse," replied the woman.

"In bringing you these I am but obeying the orders of Miss King, who herself made the tea of leaves from Pu-erh in Yunnan, and who with her own fair hands shelled the eggs."

"Your young lady," answered Jasmine, "is as bountiful as she is kind. What return can I make her for her kindness to a stranger? Stay," she said, as the thought crossed her mind that the verses she had written the night before might prove a wholesome tonic for this effusive young lady, "I have a few verses which I will venture to ask her to accept." So saying, she took a piece of peach-blossom paper, on which she carefully copied the quatrain and handed it to the woman. "May I trouble you," said she, "to take this to your mistress?"

"If," said Jasmine to herself as the woman took her departure, "Miss

King is able to penetrate the meaning of my verses, she won't like them. Without saying so in so many words, I have told her with sufficient plainness that I will have nothing to say to her. But stupidity is a shield sent by Providence to protect the greater part of mankind from many evils; so perhaps she will escape."

It certainly in this case served to shield Miss King from Jasmine's shafts. She was delighted at receiving the verses, and at once sat down to compose a quatrain to match Jasmine's in reply. With infinite labour she elaborated the following:

"Sung Yuh on th' eastern wall sat deep in thought,
And longed with P'e to pluck the fragrant fruit.
If all the well-known tunes be newly set,
What use to take again the half-burnt lute?"

Having copied these on a piece of silk-woven paper, she sent them to Jasmine by her faithful attendant. On looking over the paper, Jasmine said, smiling, "What a clever young lady your mistress must be! These lines, though somewhat inconsequential, are incomparable."

But, though Jasmine was partly inclined to treat the matter as a joke, she saw that there was a serious side to the affair, more especially as the colours under which she was sailing were so undeniably false. She knew well that for Sung Yuh should be read Miss King, and for P'e her own name; and she determined, therefore, to put an end to the

philandering of Miss King, which, in her present state of mind, was doubly annoying to her.

"I am deeply indebted to your young lady," she said, and then, being determined to make a plunge into the morass of untruthfulness, for a good end as she believed, added, "and, if I had love at my disposal, I should possibly venture to make advances toward the feathery peach [a nuptial emblem]; but let me confess to you that I have already taken to myself a wife. Had I the felicity of meeting Miss King before I committed myself in another direction, I might perhaps have been a happier man. But, after all, if this were so, my position is no worse than that of most other married men, for I never met one who was not occasionally inclined to cry, like the boys at 'toss cash,' 'Hark back and try again.' "

"This will be sad news for my lady, for she has set her heart upon you ever since you first came to the inn; and when young misses take that sort of fancy and lose the objects of their love, they are as bad as children when forbidden their sugar-plums. But what's the use of talking to you about a young lady's feelings!" said the woman, with a vexed toss of her head; "I never knew a man who understood a woman yet."

"I am extremely sorry for Miss King," said Jasmine, trying to suppress a smile. "As you wisely remark, a young lady is a sealed book to me, but I have always been told that their fancies are as variable as the

shadow of the bamboo; and probably, therefore, though Miss King's sky may be overcast just now, the gloom will only make her enjoy to-morrow's sunshine all the more."

The woman, who was evidently in a hurry to convey the news to her mistress, returned no answer to this last sally, but, with curtailed obeisance, took her departure.

Her non-appearance the next morning confirmed Jasmine in the belief that her bold departure from truth on the previous evening had had its curative effect. The relief was great, for she had felt that these complications were becoming too frequent to be pleasant, and, reprehensible though it may appear, her relief was mingled with no sort of compassion for Miss King. Hers was not a nature to sympathise with such sudden and fierce attachments. Her affection for Tu had been the growth of many months, and she had no feeling in common with a young lady who could take a violent liking for a young man simply from seeing him taking his post-prandial ease. It was therefore with complete satisfaction that she left the inn in the course of the morning to pay her farewell visits to the governor and the judge of the province, who had taken an unusual interest in Colonel Wen's case since Jasmine had become his personal advocate. Both officials had promised to do all they could for the prisoner, and had loaded Jasmine with tokens of good will in the shape of strange and rare fruits and culinary delicacies. On this particular day the governor had invited her to the midday meal, and it was late in the afternoon before she found her way back to the inn.

The following morning she rose early, intending to start before noon, and was stepping into the courtyard to give directions to "The Dragon," when, to her surprise, she was accosted by Miss King's servant, who, with a waggish smile and a cunning shake of the head, said:

"How can one so young as your Excellency be such a proficient in the art of inventing flowers of the imagination?"

"What do you mean?" said Jasmine.

"Why, last night you told me you were married, and my poor young lady when she heard it was wrung with grief. But, recovering somewhat, she sent me to ask your servants whether what you had said was true or not, for she knows what she's about as well as most people, and they both with one voice assured me that, far from being married you had not even exchanged nuptial presents with anybody. You may imagine Miss King's delight when I took her this news. She at once asked her cousin to call upon you to make a formal offer of marriage, and she has now sent me to tell you that he will be here anon."

Every one knows what it is to pass suddenly from a state of pleasurable high spirits into deep despondency, to exchange in an instant bright mental sunshine for cloud and gloom. All, therefore,

must sympathise with poor Jasmine, who believing the road before her to be smooth and clear, on a sudden became thus aware of a most troublesome and difficult obstruction. She had scarcely finished calling down anathemas on the heads of "The Dragon" and his wife, and cursing her own folly for bringing them with her, than the inn doors were thrown open, and a servant appeared carrying a long red visiting-card inscribed with the name of the wealthy inn-proprietor. On the heels of this forerunner followed young Mr. King, who, with effusive bows, said, "I have ventured to pay my respects to your Excellency."

Poor Jasmine was so upset by the whole affair that she lacked some of the courtesy that was habitual to her, and in her confusion very nearly seated her guest on her right hand. Fortunately this outrageous breach of etiquette was avoided, and the pair eventually arranged themselves in the canonical order.

"This old son of Han," began Mr. King, "would not have dared to intrude himself upon your Excellency if it were not that he has a matter of great delicacy to discuss with you. He has a cousin, the daughter of Vice-President King, for whom for years he has been trying to find a suitable match. The position is peculiar, for the lady declares positively that she will not marry any one she has not seen and approved of. Until now she has not been able to find any one whom she would care to marry. But the presence of your Excellency has thrown a light across her path which has shown her the way to the plum-groves of matrimonial felicity."

Here King paused, expecting some reply; but Jasmine was too absorbed in thought to speak, so Mr. King went on:

"This old son of Han, hearing that your Excellency is still unmarried, has taken it upon himself to make a proposal of marriage to you, and to offer his cousin as your 'basket and broom.' [wife] His interview with you has, he may say, shown him the wisdom of his cousin's choice, and he cannot imagine a pair better suited for one another, or more likely to be happy, than your Excellency and his cousin."

"I dare not be anything but straightforward with your worship," said Jasmine, "and I am grateful for the extraordinary affection your cousin has been pleased to bestow upon me; but I cannot forget that she belongs to a family which is entitled to pass through the gate of the palace [a family of distinction], and I fear that my rank is not sufficient for her. Besides, my father is at present under a cloud, and I am now on my way to Peking to try to release him from his difficulties. It is no time, therefore, for me to be binding myself with promises."

"As to your Excellency's first objection," replied King, "you are already the wearer of a hat with a silken tassel, and a man need not be a prophet to foretell that in time to come any office, either civil or military, will be within your reach. No doubt, also, your business in Peking will be quickly brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and

there can be no objection, therefore, to our settling the preliminaries now, and then, on your return from the capital, we can celebrate the wedding. This will give rest and composure to my cousin's mind, which is now like a disturbed sea, and will not interfere, I venture to think, with the affair which calls you to Peking."

As King proceeded, Jasmine felt that her difficulties were on the increase. It was impossible that she should explain her position in full, and she had no sufficient reason at hand to give for rejecting the proposal made her, though, at the same time, her annoyance was not small at having such a matter forced upon her at a moment when her mind was filled with anxieties. "Then," she thought to herself, "there is ahead of me that explanation which must inevitably come with Wei; so that, altogether, if it were not for the deeply rooted conviction which I have that Tu will be mine at last, when he knows what I really am, life would not be worth having. As for this inn-proprietor, if he has so little delicacy as to push his cousin upon me at this crisis, I need not have any compunction regarding him; so perhaps my easiest way of getting out of the present hobble will be to accept his proposal and to present the box of precious ointment handed me by Wei for my sister to this ogling love-sick girl." So turning to King, she said:

"Since you, sir, and your cousin have honoured me with your regard, I dare not altogether decline your proposal, and I would therefore beg you, sir, to hand this," she added, producing the box of ointment, "to your honourable cousin, as a token of the bond between us, and to

convey to her my promise that, if I don't marry her, I will never marry another lady."

Mr. King, with the greatest delight, received the box, and handing it to the waiting-woman, who stood expectant by, bade her carry it to her mistress, with the news of the engagement. Jasmine now hoped that her immediate troubles were over, but King insisted on celebrating the event by a feast, and it was not until late in the afternoon that she succeeded in making a start. Once on the road, her anxiety to reach Peking was such that she travelled night and day, "feeding on wind and lodging in water." Nor did she rest until she reached a hotel within the Hata Gate of the capital.

Jasmine's solitary journey had given her abundant time for reflection, and for the first time she had set herself seriously to consider her position. She recognised that she had hitherto followed only the impulses of the moment, of which the main one had been the desire to escape complications by the wholesale sacrifice of truth; and she acknowledged to herself that, if justice were evenly dealt out, there must be a Nemesis in store for her which would bring distress and possibly disaster upon her. In her calmer moments she felt an instinctive foreboding that she was approaching a crisis in her fate, and it was with mixed feelings, therefore, that on the morning after her arrival she prepared to visit Tu and Wei, who were as yet ignorant of her presence.

She dressed herself with more than usual care for the occasion, choosing to attire herself in a blue silk robe and a mauve satin jacket which Tu had once admired, topped by a brand-new cap. Altogether her appearance as she passed through the streets justified the remark made by a passerby: "A pretty youngster, and more like a maiden of eighteen than a man."

The hostelry at which Tu and Wei had taken up their abode was an inn befitting the dignity of such distinguished scholars. On inquiring at the door, Jasmine was ushered by a servant through a courtyard to an inner enclosure, where, under the grateful shade of a wide-spreading cotton-tree, Tu was reclining at his ease. Jasmine's delight at meeting her friend was only equalled by the pleasure with which Tu greeted her. In his strong and gracious presence she became conscious that she was released from the absorbing care which had haunted her, and her soul leaped out in new freedom as she asked and answered questions of her friend. Each had much to say, and it was not for some time, when an occasional reference brought his name forward that Jasmine noticed the absence of Wei. When she did, she asked after him.

"He left this some days ago," said Tu, "having some special business which called for his presence at home. He did not tell me what it was, but doubtless it was something of importance." Jasmine said nothing, but felt pretty certain in her mind as to the object of his hasty return.

Tu, attributing her silence to a reflection on Wei for having left the capital before her father's affair was settled, hastened to add:

"He was very helpful in the matter of your honoured father's difficulty, and only left when he thought he could not do any more."

"How do matters stand now?" asked Jasmine, eagerly.

"We have posted a memorial at the palace gate," said Tu, "and have arranged that it shall reach the right quarter. Fortunately, also, I have an acquaintance in the Board of War who has undertaken to do all he can in that direction, and promises an answer in a few days."

"I have brought with me," said Jasmine, "a petition prepared by my father. What do you think about presenting it?"

"At present I believe that it would only do harm. A superabundance of memorials is as bad as none at all. Beyond a certain point, they only irritate officials."

"Very well," said Jasmine; "I am quite content to leave the conduct of affairs in your hands."

"Well then," said Tu, "that being understood, I propose that you

should move your things over to this inn. There is Wei's room at your disposal, and your constant presence here will be balm to my lonely spirit. At the Hata Gate you are almost as remote as if you were in our study at Mienchu."

Jasmine was at first startled by this proposal. Though she had been constantly in the company of Tu, she had never lived under the same roof with him, and she at once recognised that there might be difficulties in the way of her keeping her secret if she were to be constantly under the eyes of her friend. But she had been so long accustomed to yield to the present circumstances, and was so confident that Fortune, which, with some slight irregularities, had always stood her friend, would not desert her on the present occasion, that she gave way.

"By all means," she said. "I will go back to my inn, and bring my things at once. This writing-case I will leave here. I brought it because it contains my father's petition."

So saying, she took her leave, and Tu retired to his easy-chair under the cotton-tree. But the demon of curiosity was abroad, and alighting on the arm of Tu's chair, whispered in his ear that it might be well if he ran his eye over Colonel Wen's petition to see if there was any argument in it which he had omitted in his statement to the Board of War. At first, Tu, whose nature was the reverse of inquisitive, declined to listen to these promptings, but so persistent did they

become that he at last put down his book--"The Spring and Autumn Annals"--and, seating himself, at the sitting-room table, opened the writing-case so innocently left by Jasmine. On the top were a number of red visiting-cards bearing the inscription, in black, of Wen Tsunk'ing, and beneath these was the petition. Carefully Tu read it through, and passed mental eulogies on it as he proceeded. The colonel had put his case skilfully, but Tu had no difficulty in recognising Jasmine's hand, both in the composition of the document and in the penmanship. "If my attempt," he thought, "does not succeed, we will try what this will do." He was on the point of returning it to its resting-place, when he saw another document in Jasmine's handwriting lying by it. This was evidently a formal document, probably connected, as he thought, with the colonel's case, and he therefore unfolded it and read as follows:

"The faithful maiden, Miss Wen of Mienchu Hien, with burning incense reverently prays the God of War to release her father from his present difficulties, and speedily to restore peace to her own soul by nullifying, in accordance with her desire, the engagement of the bamboo arrow and the contract of the box of precious ointment. A respectful petition."

As Tu read on, surprise and astonishment took possession of his countenance. A second time he read it through, and then, throwing himself back in his chair, broke out into a fit of laughter.

"So," he said to himself, "I have allowed myself to be deceived by a young girl all these years. And yet not altogether deceived," he added, trying to find an excuse for himself; "for I have often fancied that there was the savour of a woman about the 'young noble.' I hope she is not one of those heaven-born genii who appear on earth to plague men, and who, just when they have aroused the affections they wished to excite, ascend through the air and leave their lovers mourning."

Just at this moment the door opened, and Jasmine entered, looking more lovely than ever, with the flush begotten by exercise on her beautifully moulded cheeks. At sight of her Tu again burst out laughing, to Jasmine's not unnatural surprise, who, thinking that there must be something wrong with her dress, looked herself up and down, to the increasing amusement of Tu.

"So," said he at last, "you deceitful little hussy, you have been deceiving me all these years by passing yourself off as a man, when in reality you are a girl."

Overcome with confusion, Jasmine hung her head, and murmured:

"Who has betrayed me?"

"You have betrayed yourself," said Tu, holding up the incriminating

document; "and here we have the story of the arrow with which you shot the hawk, but what the box of precious ointment means I don't know."

Confronted with this overwhelming evidence, poor Jasmine remained speechless, and dared not even lift her eyes to glance at Tu. That young man, seeing her distress, and being in no wise possessed by the scorn which he had put into his tone, crossed over to her and gently led her to a seat by him.

"Do you remember," he said, in so altered a voice that Jasmine's heart ceased to throb as if it wished to force an opening through the finely formed bosom which enclosed it, "on one occasion in our study at home I wished that you were a woman that you might become my wife? Little did I think that my wish might be gratified. Now it is, and I beseech you to let us join our lives in one, and seek the happiness of the gods in each other's perpetual presence."

But, as if suddenly recollecting herself, Jasmine withdrew her hand from his, and, standing up before him with quivering lip and eyes full of tears, said:

"No. It can never be."

"Why not?" said Tu, in alarmed surprise.

"Because I am bound to Wei."

"What! Does Wei know your secret?"

"No. But do you remember when I shot that arrow in front of your study?"

"Perfectly," said Tu. "But what has that to do with it?"

"Why, Wei discovered my name on the shaft, and I, to keep my secret, told him that it was my sister's name. He then wanted to marry my sister, and I undertook, fool that I was, to arrange it for him. Now I shall be obliged to confess the truth, and he will have a right to claim me instead of my supposed sister."

"But," said Tu, "I have a prior right to that of Wei, for it was I who found the arrow. And in this matter I shall be ready to outface him at all hazards. But," he added, "Wei, I am sure, is not the man to take an unfair advantage of you."

"Do you really think so?" asked Jasmine.

"Certainly I do," said Tu.

"Then--then--I shall be--very glad," said poor Jasmine, hesitatingly, overcome with bashfulness, but full of joy.

At which gracious consent Tu recovered the hand which had been withdrawn from his, and Jasmine sank again into the chair at his side.

"But, Tu, dear," she said, after a pause, "there is something else that I must tell you before I can feel that my confessions are over."

"What! You have not engaged yourself to any one else, have you?" said Tu, laughing.

"Yes, I have," she replied, with a smile; and she then gave her lover a full and particular account of how Mr. King had proposed to her on behalf of his cousin, and how she had accepted her.

"How could you frame your lips to utter such untruths?" said Tu, half laughing and half in earnest.

"O Tu, falsehood is so easy and truth so difficult sometimes. But I feel that I have been very, very wicked," said poor Jasmine, covering her face with her hands.

"Well, you certainly have got yourself into a pretty hobble. So far as I can make out, you are at the present moment engaged to one young lady and two young men."

The situation, thus expressed, was so comical that Jasmine could not refrain from laughing through her tears; but, after a somewhat lengthened consultation with her lover, her face recovered its wonted serenity, and round it hovered a halo of happiness which added light and beauty to every feature. There is something particularly entrancing in receiving the first confidences of a pure and loving soul. So Tu thought on this occasion, and while Jasmine was pouring the most secret workings of her inmost being into his ear, those lines of the poet of the Sung dynasty came irresistibly into his mind:

'T is sweet to see the flowers woo the sun,
To watch the quaint wiles of the cooing dove,
But sweeter far to hear the dulcet tones
Of her one loves confessing her great love.

But there is an end to everything, even to the "Confucian Analects," and so there was also to this lovers' colloquy. For just as Jasmine was explaining, for the twentieth time, the origin and basis of her love for Tu, a waiter entered to announce the arrival of her luggage.

"I don't know quite," said Tu, "where we are to put your two men. But, by-the-bye," he added, as the thought struck him, "did you really

travel all the way in the company of these two men only?"

"O Tu," said Jasmine, laughing, "I have something else to confess to you."

"What! another lover?" said Tu, affecting horror and surprise.

"No; not another lover, but another woman. The short, stout one is a woman, and came as my maid. She is the wife of 'The Dragon.' "

"Well, now have you told me all? For I am getting so confused about the people you have transformed from women to men, that I shall have doubts about my own sex next."

"Yes, Tu, dear; now you know all," said Jasmine, laughing. But not all the good news which was in store for him, for scarcely had Jasmine done speaking when a letter arrived from his friend in the Board of War, who wrote to say that he had succeeded in getting the military intendant of Mienchu transferred to a post in the province of Kwangsi, and that the departure of this noxious official would mean the release of the colonel, as he alone was the colonel's accuser. This news added one more chord of joy which had been making harmony in Jasmine's heart for some hours, and readily she agreed with Tu that they should set off homeward on the following morning.

With no such adventure as that which had attended Jasmine's journey to the capital, they reached Mienchu, and, to their delight, were received by the colonel in his own yamun. After congratulating him on his release, which Jasmine took care he should understand was due entirely to Tu's exertions, she gave him a full account of her various experiences on the road and at the capital.

"It is like a story out of a book of marvels," said her father, "and even now you have not exhausted all the necessary explanations. For, since my release, your friend Wei has been here to ask for my daughter in marriage. From some questions I put to him, he is evidently unaware that you are my only daughter, and I therefore put him off and told him to wait until you returned. He is in a very impatient state, and, no doubt, will be over shortly."

Nor was the colonel wrong, for almost immediately Wei was announced, who, after expressing the genuine pleasure he felt at seeing Jasmine again, began at once on the subject which filled his mind.

"I am so glad," he said, "to have this opportunity of asking you to explain matters. At present I am completely nonplussed. On my return from Peking I inquired of one of your father's servants about his daughter. 'He has not got one,' quoth the man. I went to another, and he said, 'You mean the "young noble," I suppose.' 'No, I don't,' I said; 'I mean his sister.' 'Well, that is the only daughter I know of,' said he. Then I went to your father, and all I could get out of

him was, 'Wait until the "young noble" comes home.' Please tell me what all this means."

"Your great desire is to marry a beautiful and accomplished girl, is it not?" said Jasmine.

"That certainly is my wish," said Wei.

"Well then," said Jasmine, "I can assure you that your betrothal present is in the hand of such a one, and a girl whom to look at is to love."

"That may be," said Wei, "But my wish is to marry your sister."

"Will you go and talk to Tu about it?" said Jasmine, who felt that the subject was becoming too difficult for her, and whose confidence in Tu's wisdom was unbounded, "and he will explain it all to you."

Even Tu, however, found it somewhat difficult to explain Jasmine's sphinx-like mysteries, and on certain points Wei showed a disposition to be anything but satisfied. Jasmine's engagement to Tu implied his rejection, and he was disposed to be splenetic and disagreeable about it. His pride was touched, and in his irritation he was inclined to impute treachery to his friend and deceit to Jasmine. To the first charge Tu had a ready answer, but the second was all the more annoying

because there was some truth in it. However, Tu was not in the humour to quarrel, and being determined to seek peace and ensue it, he overlooked Wei's innuendos and made out the best case he could for his bride. On Miss King's beauty, virtues, and ability he enlarged with a wealth of diction and power of imagination which astonished himself, and Jasmine also, to whom he afterward repeated the conversation. "Why, Tu, dear," said that artless maiden, "how can you know all this about Miss King? You have never seen her, and I am sure I never told you half of all this."

"Don't ask questions," said the enraptured Tu. "Let it be enough for you to know that Wei is as eager for the possession of Miss King as he was for your sister, and that he has promised to be my best man at our wedding to-morrow."

And Wei was as good as his word. With every regard to ceremony and ancient usage, the marriage of Tu and Jasmine was celebrated in the presence of relatives and friends, who, attracted by the novelty of the antecedent circumstances, came from all parts of the country to witness the nuptials. By Tu's especial instructions also a prominence was allowed to Wei, which gratified his vanity and smoothed down the ruffled feathers of his conceit.

Jasmine thought that no time should be lost in reducing Miss King to the same spirit of acquiescence to which Wei had been brought, and on the evening of her wedding-day she broached the subject to Tu.

"I shall not feel, Tu, dear," she said, "that I have gained absolution for my many deceptions until that very forward Miss King has been talked over into marrying Wei; and I insist, therefore," she added, with an amount of hesitancy which reduced the demand to the level of a plaintive appeal, "that we start to-morrow for Ch'engt'u to see the young woman."

"Ho! ho!" replied Tu, intensely amused at her attempted bravado.

"These are brave words, and I suppose that I must humbly register your decrees."

"O Tu, you know what I mean. You know that, like a child who takes a delight in conquering toy armies, I love to fancy that I can command so strong a man as you are. But, Tu, if you knew how absolutely I rely on your judgment, you would humour my folly and say yes."

There was a subtle incense of love and flattery about this appeal which, backed as it was by a look of tenderness and beauty, made it irresistible; and the arrangements for the journey were made in strict accordance with Jasmine's wishes.

On arriving at the inn which was so full of chastening memories to Jasmine, Tu sent his card to Mr. King, who, flattered by the attention paid him by so eminent a scholar, cordially invited Tu to his house.

"To what," he said, as Tu, responding to his invitation, entered his reception-hall, "am I to attribute the honour of receiving your illustrious steps in my mean apartments?"

"I have heard," said Tu, "that the beautiful Miss King is your Excellency's cousin, and having a friend who is desirous of gaining her hand, I have come to plead on his behalf."

"I regret to say," replied King, "that your Excellency has come too late, as she has already received an engagement token from a Mr. Wen, who passed here lately on his way to Peking."

"Mr. Wen is a friend of mine also," said Tu, "and it was because I knew that his troth was already plighted that I ventured to come on behalf of him of whom I have spoken."

"Mr. Wen," said King, "is a gentleman and a scholar, and having given a betrothal present, he is certain to communicate with us direct in case of any difficulty."

"Will you, old gentleman," [a term of respect] said Tu, producing the lines which Miss King had sent Jasmine, "just cast your eyes over these verses, written to Wen by your cousin? Feeling most regretfully that he was unable to fulfil his engagement, Wen gave these to me as a

testimony of the truth of what I now tell you."

King took the paper handed him by Tu, and recognised at a glance his cousin's handwriting.

"Alas!" he said, "Mr Wen told us he was engaged, but, not believing him, I urged him to consent to marry my cousin. If you will excuse me, sir," he added, "I will consult with the lady as to what should be done."

After a short absence he returned.

"My cousin is of the opinion," he said, "that she cannot enter into any new engagement until Mr. Wen has come here himself and received back the betrothal present which he gave her on parting."

"I dare not deceive you, old gentleman, and will tell you at once that that betrothal present was not Wen's but was my unworthy friend Wei's, and came into Wen's possession in a way that I need not now explain."

"Still," said King, "my cousin thinks Mr. Wen should present himself here in person and tell his own story; and I must say that I am of her opinion."

"It is quite impossible that Mr. Wen should return here," replied Tu; "but my 'stupid thorn' [wife] is in the adjoining hostelry, and would be most happy to explain fully to Miss King Wen's entire inability to play the part of a husband to her."

"If your honourable consort would meet my cousin, she, I am sure, will be glad to talk the matter over with her."

With Tu's permission, Miss King's maid was sent to the inn to invite Jasmine to call on her mistress. The maid, who was the same who had acted as Miss King's messenger on the former occasion, glanced long and earnestly at Jasmine. Her features were familiar to her, but she could not associate them with any lady of her acquaintance. As she conducted her to Miss King's apartments, she watched her stealthily, and became more and more puzzled by her appearance. Miss King received her with civility, and after exchanging wishes that each might be granted ten thousand blessings, Jasmine said, smiling:

"Do you recognise Mr. Wen?"

Miss King looked at her, and seeing in her a likeness to her beloved, said:

"What relation are you to him, lady?"

"I am his very self!" said Jasmine.

Miss King opened her eyes wide at this startling announcement, and gazed earnestly at her.

"/Haiyah!/" cried her maid, clapping her hands, "I thought there was a wonderful likeness between the lady and Mr. Wen. But who would have thought that she was he?"

"But what made you disguise yourself in that fashion?" asked Miss King, in an abashed and somewhat vexed tone.

"My father was in difficulties," said Jasmine, "and as it was necessary that I should go to Peking to plead for him, I dressed as a man for the convenience of travel. You will remember that in the first instance I declined your flattering overtures, but when I found that you persisted in your proposal, not being able to explain the truth, I thought the best thing to do was to hand you my friend's betrothal present which I had with me, intending to return and explain matters. And you will admit that in one thing I was truthful."

"What was that?" asked the maid.

"Why," answered Jasmine, "I said that if I did not marry your lady I

would never marry any woman."

"Well, yes," said the maid, laughing, "you have kept your faith royally there."

"The friend I speak of," continued Jasmine, "has now taken his doctor's degree, and this stupid husband and wife have come from Mienchu to make you a proposal on his behalf."

Miss King was not one who could readily take in an entirely new and startling idea, and she sat with a half-dazed look, staring at Jasmine without uttering a word. If it had not been for the maid, the conversation would have ceased; but that young woman was determined to probe the matter to the bottom.

"You have not told us," she said, "the gentleman's name. And will you explain why you call him your friend? How could you be on terms of friendship with him?"

"From my childhood," said Jasmine, "I have always dressed as a boy. I went to a boy's school--"

"/Haiyah!/" interjected the maid.

"And afterward I joined my husband and this gentleman, Mr. Wei, in a reading-party."

"Didn't they discover your secret?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Never."

"That's odd," said the maid. "But will you tell us something about this Mr. Wei?"

Upon this, Jasmine launched out in a glowing eulogy upon her friend. She expatiated with fervour on his youth, good looks, learning, and prospects, and with such effect did she speak that Miss King, who began to take in the situation, ended by accepting cordially Jasmine's proposal.

"And now, lady, you must stay and dine with me," said Miss King, when the bargain was struck, "while my cousin entertains your husband in the hall."

At this meal the beginning of a friendship was formed between the two ladies which lasted ever afterward, though it was somewhat unevenly balanced. Jasmine's stronger nature felt compassion mingled with liking for the pretty doll-like Miss King, while the young lady entertained the profoundest admiration for her guest.

There was nothing to delay the fulfilment of the engagement thus happily arranged, and at the next full moon Miss King had an opportunity of comparing her bridegroom with the picture which Jasmine had drawn of him.

Scholars are plentiful in China, but it was plainly impossible that men of such distinguished learning as Tu and Wei should be left among the unemployed, and almost immediately after their marriage they were appointed to important posts in the empire. Tu rose rapidly to the highest rank, and died, at a good old age, viceroy of the metropolitan province and senior guardian to the heir apparent. Wei was not so supremely fortunate, but then, as Tu used to say, "he had not a Jasmine to help him."

THE REVENGE OF HER RACE

BY

MARY BEAUMONT

The low hedge, where the creepers climbed, divided the lawn and its magnificent Wellingtonias from the meadow. There was little grass to be seen, for it was at this time one vast profusion of delicate ixias of every bright and tender shade.

The evening was still, and the air heavy with scent. In a room opening upon the veranda wreathed with white-and-scarlet passion-flowers, where she could see the garden and the meadow, and, beyond all, the Mountain Beautiful, lay a sick woman. Her dark face was lovely as an autumn leaf is lovely--hectic with the passing life. Her eyes wandered to the upper snows of the mountain, from time to time resting upon the brown-haired English girl who sat on a low stool by her side, holding the frail hand in her cool, firm clasp.

The invalid was speaking; her voice was curiously sweet, and there was a peculiarity about the "s," and an occasional turn of the sentence, which told the listener that her English was an acquired language.

"I am glad he is not here," she said slowly. "I do not want him to have pain."

"But perhaps, Mrs. Denison, you will be much better in a day or two, and able to welcome him when he comes back."

"No, I shall not be here when he comes back, and it is just as it should be. I asked him to turn round as he left the garden, and I could see him, oh, so well! He looked kind and so beautiful, and he waved to me his hand. Now he will come back, and he will be sad. He did not want to leave me, but the governor sent for him. He will be sad, and he will remember that I loved him, and some day he will be glad again." She smiled into the troubled face near her.

The girl stroked the thick dark hair lovingly.

"Don't," she implored; "it hurts me. You are better to-night, and the children are coming in." Mrs. Denison closed her eyes, and with her left hand she covered her face.

"No, not the children," she whispered, "not my darlings. I cannot bear it. I must see them no more." She pressed her companion's hand with a sudden close pressure. "But you will help them, Alice; you will make them English like you--like him. We will not pretend to-night; it is not long that I shall speak to you. I ask you to promise me to help them to be English."

"Dear," the girl urged, "they are such a delicious mixture of England and New Zealand--prettier, sweeter than any mere English child could ever be. They are enchanting."

But into the dying woman's eyes leaped an eager flame.

"They must all be English, no Maori!" she cried. A violent fit of coughing interrupted her, and when the paroxysm was over she was too exhausted to speak. The English nurse, Mrs. Bentley, an elderly Yorkshire woman, who had been with Mrs. Denison since her first baby came six years ago, and who had, in fact, been Horace Denison's own nurse-maid, came in and sent the agitated girl into the garden. "For you haven't had a breath of fresh air to-day," she said.

At the door Alice turned. The large eyes were resting upon her with an intent and solemn regard, in which lay a message. "What was it?" she thought, as she passed through the wide hall sweet with flowers. "She wanted to say something; I am sure she did. To-morrow I will ask her." But before the morrow came she knew. Mrs. Dennison had said /good-bye/.

The funeral was over. Mr. Denison, who had looked unaccountably ill and weary for months, had been sent home by Mr. Danby for at least a year's change and rest, and the doctor's young sister had yielded to various pressure, and promised to stay with the children until he returned. There was every reason for it. She had loved and been loved by the gentle Maori mother; she delighted in the dark beauty and sweetness of the children. And they, on their side, clung to her as to an adorable fairy relative, dowered with love and the fruits of love--tales and new games and tender ways. Best reason of all, in a sense,

Mrs. Bentley, that kind autocrat, entreated her to stay, "as the happiest thing for the children, and to please that poor lamb we laid yonder, who fair longed that you should! She was mightily taken up with you, Miss Danby, and you've your brother and his wife near, so that you won't be lonesome, and if there's aught I can do to make you comfortable, you've only to speak, miss." As for Mr. Denison, he was pathetically grateful and relieved when Alice promised to remain.

After the evening romp and the last good-night, when the two elder children, Ben and Marie, called after her mother, Maritana, had given her their last injunctions to be sure and come for them "her very own self" on her way down to breakfast in the morning, she usually rode down between the cabbage-trees, down by the old rata, fired last autumn, away through the grasslands to the doctor's house, a few miles nearer Rochester; or he and his wife would ride out to chat with her. But there were many evenings when she preferred the quiet of the airy house and the garden. The colonial life was new to her, everything had its charm, and in the colonies there is always a letter to write to those at home--the mail-bag is never satisfied. On such evenings it was her custom to cross the meadow to the copse of feathery trees beyond, where, sung to by the brook and the Tui, the children's mother slept. And from the high presence of the Mountain Beautiful there fell a dew of peace.

She would often ask Mrs. Bentley to sit with her until bedtime, and revel in the shrewd north-country woman's experiences, and her impressions of the new land to which love had brought her. Both women

grew to have a sincere and trustful affection for each other, and one night, seven or eight months after Mrs. Denison's death, Mrs. Bentley told a story which explained what had frequently puzzled Alice--the patient sorrow in Mrs. Denison's eyes, and Mr. Denison's harassed and dejected manner. "But for your goodness to the children," said the old woman, "and the way that precious baby takes to you, I don't think I should be willing to say what I am going to do, miss. Though my dear mistress wished it, and said, the very last night, 'You must tell her all about it, some day, Nana,'--and I promised, to quiet her,--I don't think I could bring myself to it if I hadn't lived with you and known you." And then the good nurse told her strange and moving tale.

She described how her master had come out young and careless-hearted to New Zealand in the service of the government, and how scandalised and angry his father and mother, the old Tory squire and his wife, had been to receive from him, after a year or two, letters brimming with a boyish love for his "beautiful Maori princess," whom he described as having "the sweetest heart and the loveliest eyes in the world." It gave them little comfort to hear that her father was one of the wealthiest Maoris in the island, and that, though but half civilised himself, he had had his daughter well educated in the "bishop's" and other English schools. To them she was a savage. There was no threat of disinheritance, for there was nothing for him to inherit. There was little money, and the estate was entailed on the elder brother. But all that could be done to intimidate him was done, and in vain. Then silence fell between the parents and the son.

But one spring day came the news of a grandson, called Benjamin after his grandfather, and an urgent letter from their boy himself, enclosing a prettily and humbly worded note from the new strange daughter, begging for an English nurse. She told them that she had now no father and no mother, for they had died before the baby came, and if she might love her husband's parents a little she would be glad.

"My lady read the letters to me herself," Mrs. Bentley said; "I'd taken the housekeeper's place a bit before, and she asked me to find her a sensible young woman. Well, I tried, but there wasn't a girl in the place that was fit to nurse Master Horace's child. And the end of it was, I came myself, for Master Horace had been like my own when he was a little lad. My lady pretended to be vexed with me, but the day I sailed she thanked me in words I never thought to hear from her, for she was a bit proud always." The faithful servant's voice trembled. She leaned back in her chair, and forgot for the moment the new house and the new duties. She was back again in the old nursery with the fair-haired child playing about her knees. But Alice's face recalled her, and she continued the story. She had, she said, dreaded the meeting with her new mistress, and was prepared to find her "a sort of a heathen woman, who'd pull down Master Horace till he couldn't call himself a gentleman."

But when she saw the graceful creature who received her with gentle words and gestures of kindness, and when she found her young master not only content, but happy, and when she took in her arms the

laughing healthy baby, she felt--though she regretted its dark eyes and hair--more at home than she could have believed possible. The nurseries were so large and comfortable, and so much consideration was shown to her, that she confessed, "I should have been more ungrateful than a cat if I hadn't settled comfortable."

Then came nearly five happy years, during which time her young mistress had found a warm and secure place in the good Yorkshire heart. "She was that loving and that kind that Dick Burdas, the groom, used to say that he believed she was an angel as had took up with them dark folks, to show 'em what an angel was like." Mrs. Bentley went on:

"She wasn't always quite happy, and I wondered what brought the shadow into her face, and why she would at times sigh that deep that I could have cried. After a bit I knew what it was. It was the Maori in her. She told me one night that she was a wicked woman, and ought never to have married Master Horace, for she got tired sometimes of the English house and its ways, and longed for her father's /whare/; (that's a native hut, miss). She grieved something awful one day when she had been to see old Tim, the Maori who lives behind the stables. She called herself a bad and ungrateful woman, and thought there must be some evil spirit in her tempting her into the old ways, because, when she saw Tim eating, and you know what bad stuff they eat, she had fair longed to join him. She gave me a fright I didn't get over for nigh a week. She leaned her bonny head against my knee, and I stroked her cheek and hummed some silly nursery tune,--for she was all of a tremble and like a child,--and she fell asleep just where she was."

"Poor thing!" said Alice, softly.

"Eh, but it's what's coming that upsets me, ma'am. Eh, what suffering for my pretty lamb, and her that wouldn't have hurt a worm! Baby would be about six months old when she came in one day with him in her arms, and they /were/ a picture. His little hand was fast in her hair. She always walked as if she'd wheels on her feet, that gliding and graceful. She had on a sort of sheeny yellow silk, and her cheeks were like them damask roses at home, and her eyes fair shone like stars. 'Isn't he a beauty, Nana?' she asked me. 'If only he had blue eyes, and that hair of gold like my husband's, and not these ugly eyes of mine!' And as she spoke she sighed as I dreaded to hear. Then she told me to help her to unpack her new dress from Paris, which she was to wear at the Rochester races the next day. Master Horace always chose her dresses, and he was right proud of her in them. And next morning he came into the nursery with her, and she was all in pale red, and that beautiful! 'Isn't she scrumptious, Nana?' he said, in his boyish way. 'Don't spoil her dress, children. How like her Marie grows!' Those two little ones they had got her on her knees on the ground, and were hugging her as if they couldn't let her go. But when he said that, she got up very still and white.

" 'I am sorry,' she said; 'they must never be like me.'

" 'They can't be any one better, can they, baby?' he answered her, and

he tossed the child nearly up to the ceiling. But he looked worried as he went out. I saw them drive away, and they looked happy enough. And oh, miss, I saw them come back. We were in the porch, me and the children. Master Horace lifted her down, and I heard him say, 'Never mind, Marie.' But she never looked his way nor ours; she walked straight in and upstairs to her room, past my bonny darling with his arm stretched out to her, and past Miss Marie, who was jumping up and down, and shouting 'Muvver'; and I heard her door shut. Then Master Horace took baby from me.

" 'Go up to her,' he said, and I could scarce hear him. His face was all drawn like, but I felt that silly and stupid that I could say nothing, and just went upstairs." Mrs. Bentley put her knitting down, and throwing her apron over her head sobbed aloud.

"O nurse, what was it?" cried Alice, and the colour left her cheeks.

"Do tell me. I am so sorry for them. What was it?" It was several minutes before the good woman could recover herself; then she began:

"She told me, and Dick Burdas he told me, and it was like this. When they got to the race-course,--it was the first races they'd had in Rochester,--all the gentry was there, and those that knew her always made a deal of her, she had such half-shy, winning ways. And she seemed very bright, Dick said, talking with the governor's lady, who is full of fun and sparkle. The carriages were all together, and Major Beaumont, a kind old gentleman who's always been a good friend to

Master Horace, would have them in his carriage for luncheon, or whatever it was. Dick says he was thinking that she was the prettiest lady there, when his eye was caught by two or three parties of Maoris setting themselves right in front of the carriages. There were four or five in each lot, and they were mostly old. They got out their sharks' flesh and that bad corn they eat, and began to make their meal of them. Near Mrs. Denison there was one old man with a better sort of face, and Dick heard her say to master, 'Isn't he like my father?' What Master Horace answered he didn't hear; he says he never saw anything like her face, so sad and wild, and working for all the world as if something were fighting her within. Then all in a minute she ran out and slipped down in her beautiful dress close by the old Maori in his dirty rags, and was rubbing her face against his, as them folks do when they meet. She had just taken a mouthful of the raw fish when Master Horace missed her. He hadn't noticed her slip away. But in a moment he seemed to understand what it meant. He saw the Maori come out strong in her face, and he knew the Maori had got the better of everything, husband and friends and all. He gave a little cry, and in a minute he had her on her feet and was bringing her back to the carriage. Some folks thought Dick Burdas a rough hard man, and I know he was a shocker of a lad (he was fra Whitby), but that night he cried like a baby when he tell 't me," and Mrs. Bentley fell for a moment into the dialect of her youth.

"He said," she continued, "that she looked like a poor stricken thing condemned, and let herself be led back as submissive as a child, and Master Horace's face was like the dead. He didn't think any one but

the major and Dr. Danby saw her go, all was done in a minute. But it was done, and some few had seen, and it got out, and things were said that wasn't true. Not the doctor! No, miss, you needn't tell me that; he's told none, that I'll warrant. He's faithful and he's close."

"O Mrs. Bentley, how dreadful for her, how dreadful!" and the girl went down on her knees by the old woman, her tears flowing fast.

"That's it, miss, you understand. I feel like that. It was bad enough for Master Horace with the future before him, and his children to think of, but for her it was desperate cruel. Eh, ma'am, what she went through! She loved more than you'd have thought us poor human beings could. And, after all, the nature was in her; she didn't put it there. I've had a deal to do to keep down sinful thoughts since then; there's a lot of things that's wrong in this world, ma'am."

"What did she do?" Alice whispered.

"She! She was for going away and leaving everything; she felt herself the worst woman in the world. It was only by begging and praying of her on my knees that I got her to stay in the house that night, for she was so far English, and had such a fancy, that she saw everything blacker than any Englishwoman would, even the partick'lerest. Afterward Master Horace was that good and gentle, and she loved him so much, that he persuaded her to say nothing more about it, and to try to live as if it hadn't been. And so she seemed to do, outward like,

to other people. But it wasn't ever the same again. Something had broken in them both; with him it was his trust and his pride, but in her it was her heart."

"But the children--surely they comforted her."

"Eh, miss, that was the worst. Poor lamb, poor lamb! Never after that day, though they were more to her nor children ever were to a mother before, would she have them with her. Just a morning and a good-night kiss, and a quarter of an hour at most, and I must take them away. She watched them play in the garden from her window or the little hill there, and when they were asleep she would sit by them for hours, saying how bonny they were and how good they were growing. And she looked after their clothes and their food and every little toy and pleasure, but never came in for a romp and a chat any more."

"Dear, brave heart!" murmured the girl.

"Yes, ma'am, you feel for her, I know. She was fair terrified of them turning Maori and shaming their father. That was it. You didn't notice? No; after you came she was too ill to bear them about, and it seemed natural, I dare say. The Maoris are a fearful delicate set of folks. A bad cold takes them off into consumption directly. And with her there was the sorrow as well as the cold. It was wonderful that she lived so long."

Alice threw her arms round Mrs. Bentley's neck.

"O nurse, it is all so dreadful and sad. Couldn't we have somehow kept her with us and made her happy?"

The old woman held her close. "Nay, my dear bairn, never after that happened. It, or worse, might have come again. It's something stronger in them than we know; it's the very blood, I'm thinking. But she's gone to be the angel that Dick always said she was."

Alice looked away over the starlit garden to where the plummy trees stirred in the night wind. "No," she said, fervently, "not 'gone to be,' nurse dear; she was an angel always. Dick was right."

KING BILLY OF BALLARAT

BY

MORLEY ROBERTS

King Billy was given to strolling up and down the streets of Ballarat when that eviscerated city was merely in process of disembowelment, before alluvial mining gave way to quartz-crushing, when the

individual had a chance, if a very vague one, of sudden and delightful fortune. The Ballarat blacks were a scaly lot, to talk of them like ill-fed hogs, as men were wont to do. They dwined and dwindled, as natives will before the resources of civilisation: the bloodthirsty ones got killed out; the rumthirsty ones died out; the wild corroboree was reduced to a poverty-stricken imitation of its former glory. King Billy's authority grew less with the increase of his clothes. The brass plate with his name on it was about the last relic of his precarious power, and was chiefly valued as a means of notifying the public generally that they might stand drinks to a monarch if they saw fit and were not too humble. He was not haughty, and never presumed on his plate, as parvenus will. He came of an ancient stock, and could afford to condescend, even if he could not afford to pay for drinks. He was very kind to children,--white children, of course,--and was hale-fellow-well-met with many of them.

He was particularly fond of Annie Colborn, whose father was a magistrate and a gold commissioner, and a person of very great importance. Whether or not King Billy was wise in his generation, and out of the unwritten Scriptures of the somber bush had culled a maxim inculcating the wisdom of making friends of the sons of Mammon, I cannot say, but he was always good to Annie. For my own part, I do not believe the simple-hearted old king had any such notion inside his thick antipodean skull. He was good because he was not bad, which is the very best morality after all, and a great advance on much we hear of. And, besides, he was sometimes hungry, and Mr. Colborn's Chinese cook was very haughty, and not to be approached except through an

intermediary. And who so capable of conciliating Wong as Annie? Wong would make her cakes even when his pigtail hung despondently from his aching head after an opium debauch, and his cheeks were shining with anything but gladness; for if you get drunk very often on opium you shine.

Old Billy was mostly to be found where there was a chance of a drink; but if the fountains were dried up, or he had been insulted by some democratic, revolutionary, king-hating miner knocking his high hat down over his eyes, he usually went up to Mr. Colborn's place, and sat on the fence, or on a log outside the gate. So he was often very melancholy when Annie came out. One day his hat was very, very badly bulged indeed.

"Your hat is very bad to-day, King Billy," said six-year-old Annie, as she stood in front of him critically, with her head on one side.

Without knowing it, the child had come to look upon the state of the poor king's hat as emblematical of his state of mind. When it shut up like a closed concertina his barometer was low.

"Yes, missy," said the king; "white man knock 'um over eyes, and"--with a rub down his face--"skin 'um nose."

She inspected his nose carefully--though from a certain distance, because her own nose was very good, both inside and out, and she knew the king never got washed unless it rained when he was very drunk. And

this was the end of summer. It had not rained since November.

"There is not very much skin off," said Annie. "You had better wash it."

The king made a wry face and changed the conversation.

"You got 'um hat, Missy Annie? One hat baal brokum, allasame white fellow hat. Bad hat, King Billy bad; black fellow, white fellow laugh."

He peered into his hat, and, trying to straighten it out, put his fist through the side. Poor Billy looked as if he could cry.

"You stop a minute," said Annie, and, flying indoors, she brought out a very good high hat indeed. "Budgereee!" thought the king, that was a good hat. He could go down the streets like a king indeed, able to hold up his head with any rich man in Ballarat. He tried it on, and though it was much too big, he knew it shone. And the glory of a hat is in its shining as much as its shape; even a black fellow knows that.

But that hat very nearly led to serious trouble. For one thing, Mr. Colborn missed it; and never thinking Annie had given it away, when he saw the king sitting on the fence decorated with it, he stopped and

interviewed him.

"Where did you get that hat, you old thief?" asked the magistrate, without any politeness to him who ruled the land before white men broke into the country. Some in authority are polite to those they dispossess; the Prussians, for instance, to the miserable King Billys who strut about the empire. But the Anglo-Saxon only respects himself, and even that to a limited extent, in new conquests.

The question troubled King Billy greatly. He did not know that Mr. Colborn would as soon have thought of murdering Annie as of bullying her; so he lied promptly: "Me buy 'um, Mistah Cobon!"

Mr. Colborn took it off of his head, and saw that it was his, as he had thought. What he would have said I do not know, for just then he heard a voice behind him:

"Papa, it is my fault; I gave it to King Billy."

Colborn turned round and took her up, letting fall the hat as he did so. Billy made a jump, picked it up, and, in his agitation, brushed it carefully the wrong way.

"My dear, if you gave it to him it's all right. But why didn't the old fool tell me?"

"He's not an old fool, papa, and you must not say so. He's a good man, and I think he thought you would be angry with me. Didn't you, King Billy?" And the king, with a smile of conscious rectitude, admitted it was so.

Mr. Colborn gave him sixpence; and he gave Annie a great many kisses, declaring, with uncommon thoughtlessness, that whatever she did was right, and that she could give the king all his house, and Australia to boot. Whereon King Billy smiled a smile that was portentous, and showed his teeth to the uttermost recesses of his ample mouth. Looking down, he surveyed the rest of his clothes, which in parts resembled the child's definition of a net as a lot of holes tied together with string, and, looking up, he inspected Mr. Colborn as if estimating the resources of his wardrobe. But being urgently smitten with the necessity of getting rid of his sixpence, he shambled off into the town. Other matters might wait; that admitted of no delay.

The mind of King Billy was not a big mind; it would no more have taken in an abstract idea than his /gunyah/ would have accommodated a grand piano. He was as simple as sunlight, and to resolve his intellect into seven colours would want the most ingenious spectroscope. But he could make an inference from a positive fact, and, having made it, he did not allow more remote deductions to trouble his legitimate conclusion. He ceased to fear Mr. Colborn, and began to look upon the magistrate's property as if it were at least half his own. So he got very drunk on

the hospitality of a new chum miner who had been successful, and presently, presuming on his new possessions, got into a fight with his entertainer and a disrespectful subking of his own blacks, and was reduced to worse rags than ever.

Next morning he sat outside the magistrate's house, on the lowest log he could find, and when Mr. Colborn came out he tackled him with the air of a subject king demanding redress of his suzerain.

"Well, Billy, what is it?" asked the suzerain.

"You belong gublement?" said Billy the king, with a question, an implied doubt, and a great complaint in his voice. Colborn laughed.

"Why, yes, Billy; I belong to the government, I suppose."

"Then," said Billy, "what you say to white fellow make 'um black fellow drunk, knock 'um all about? Call you that gublement?" And he showed his kingly robe, which had once been a frock-coat, with great disgust.

However, he met with no favour, and was told that he should not get drunk--that it served him right; with which magisterial decision Colborn got on his horse and rode off to the flat.

The king sat down sadly and considered thickly in his slow brain. Annie did not come out, and he knew better than to ask for her, for Mr. Colborn's niece, who kept house for him, was but newly come from home, and thought all black fellows congenital murderers, which indeed they are in some parts of the north. So Billy sat and waited, for he wanted a new coat. How could he be respected in one whose natural divisions were unnaturally extended to the very neck? It was obviously necessary to get a new garment at once, and the best chance of a good one lay in little Annie's kindness. But in order to obviate the slightest chance of his girl patron's refusing, he must bring her some offering. He went off into the bush at the back of the town, and, coming to where three or four black fellows were camped, he sat down and talked with them. In spite of the heat, a wretched old gin, muffled up in her one garment, a ragged blanket, held her hands over the few burning sticks which represent an Australian native's idea of a fire. Presently King Billy rose, and, taking a tomahawk, went farther into the bush. He looked about, and at last came to a tree, which he climbed native fashion, first discarding his clothes. When near the first big branches he came to a hole, and, putting in his hand, he extracted a lively young possum by the tail.

Next morning he was sitting on the Colborns' fence as usual. At his feet was a little box with two or three slats nailed roughly across it. Inside was the possum. King Billy wondered what kind of a coat he could get. He liked a frock-coat; there was something majestic about it, something fine and ample. Common morning coats would not do; no

one would insult a king by offering him tweed; even little Annie knew better than that, especially if he gave her a live possum he had caught himself. And when Annie did come out, she was in the seventh heaven of delight with the possum, and ready to bestow anything in the world on King Billy.

"You give poor Billy one fellow coat, missy, and he go down along street like a king."

Annie flew into the house and seized the first garment she laid her little hands on. It was her father's dress-coat. She rolled it up, and, running out, thrust it excitedly into the king's black paw. As he went off, she carried the possum indoors, and was deliriously happy for hours.

King Billy hurried into the bush till he came to a water-hole, and, stripping off his rags, he held up the coat. His jaw fell; there was a remarkable exiguity about the coat which was inexplicable. He had never observed such in his life. He put it on, and, bending over the surface of the still pool, took a good look at the general effect. It was not bad from some points of view, but Billy had his doubts as to whether he would be received with the respect due to his title if he went into Ballarat clothed thus. He tried to button it, but discovered that, if it had ever been intended for buttoning, he could not get it to meet across his chest. He picked up his discarded frock-coat, which was held together by the collar; then he felt the stuff of which the

dress-coat was made, and the material pleased him. "Oh, why," asked Billy, "had it not been made with front tails?" He saw at last that this coat and his high hat alone were insufficient for civilisation. For full dress in a corroboree it might do. Unconsciously, he was so wrought upon by the purpose for which the coat had been built that he determined to reserve it for parties in the seclusion of the bush, where any merriment could be rightly checked by a crack from his waddy. He planted it carefully in a hollow log, and, having inserted himself with as much care into his discarded rags, he wandered off into the town. He got very intoxicated that night, and determined to have a party all by himself.

Now it may seem very annoying, and I confess I find it so myself; but, having got so far, I don't see my way to tell the rest, even if Annie Colborn told me the story herself. For after her father's death she married a man who had a small sheep-station and a hotel not forty miles from Carabobla, in New South Wales. I stayed there a couple of days when I was going north to the Murrumbidgee. But though she told me, I cannot tell it again, at least not in bold, bad print. Still, it will occur to most that a man of King Billy's sweet and innocent disposition might very likely create a sensation, when his natural discretion was drowned in bad whisky, if he ended his solitary corroboree in the moonlight by going up to Colborn's house in order to deliver a speech of gratitude through the French windows.

So Colborn and the king had a corroboree all to themselves in the open space before the house, while the gold commissioner's guests roared

with laughter to find out where the missing dress-coat was. Next day King Billy resumed the split frock-coat.

THY HEART'S DESIRE

BY

NETTA SYRETT

The tents were pitched in the little plain surrounded by hills. Right and left there were stretches of tender, vivid green where the young corn was springing; farther still, on either hand, the plain was yellow with mustard-flower; but in the immediate foreground it was bare and stony. A few thorny bushes pushed their straggling way through the dry soil, ineffectively as far as the grace of the landscape was concerned, for they merely served to emphasise the barren aridness of the land that stretched before the tents, sloping gradually to the distant hills.

The hills were uninteresting enough in themselves; they had no grandeur of outline, no picturesqueness even, though at morning and evening the sun, like a great magician, clothed them with beauty at a touch.

They had begun to change, to soften, to blush rose red in the evening

light, when a woman came to the entrance of the largest of the tents and looked toward them. She leaned against the support on one side of the canvas flap, and, putting back her head, rested that, too, against it, while her eyes wandered over the plain and over the distant hills.

She was bareheaded, for the covering of the tent projected a few feet to form an awning overhead. The gentle breeze which had risen with sundown stirred the soft brown tendrils of hair on her temples, and fluttered her pink cotton gown a little. She stood very still, with her arms hanging and her hands clasped loosely in front of her. There was about her whole attitude an air of studied quiet which in some vague fashion the slight clasp of her hands accentuated. Her face, with its tightly, almost rigidly closed lips, would have been quite in keeping with the impression of conscious calm which her entire presence suggested, had it not been that when she raised her eyes a strange contradiction to this idea was afforded. They were large gray eyes, unusually bright and rather startling in effect, for they seemed the only live thing about her. Gleaming from her still, set face, there was something almost alarming in their brilliancy. They softened with a sudden glow of pleasure as they rested on the translucent green of the wheat-fields under the broad generous sunlight, and then wandered to where the pure vivid yellow of the mustard-flower spread in waves to the base of the hills, now mystically veiled in radiance. She stood motionless, watching their melting, elusive changes from palpitating rose to the transparent purple of amethyst. The stillness of evening was broken by the monotonous, not unmusical creaking of a Persian wheel at some little distance to the left of the tent. The

well stood in a little grove of trees; between their branches she could see, when she turned her head, the coloured saris of the village women, where they stood in groups chattering as they drew the water, and the little naked brown babies that toddled beside them or sprawled on the hard ground beneath the trees. From the village of flat-roofed mud houses under the low hill at the back of the tents, other women were crossing the plain toward the well, their terra-cotta water-jars poised easily on their heads, casting long shadows on the sun-baked ground as they came.

Presently, in the distance, from the direction of the sunlit hills opposite a little group of men came into sight. Far off, the mustard-coloured jackets and the red turbans of the orderlies made vivid splashes of colour on the dull plain. As they came nearer, the guns slung across their shoulders, the cases of mathematical instruments, the hammers, and other heavy baggage they carried for the sahib, became visible. A little in front, at walking pace rode the sahib himself, making notes as he came in a book he held before him. The girl at the tent entrance watched the advance of the little company indifferently, it seemed; except for a slight tightening of the muscles about her mouth, her face remained unchanged. While he was still some little distance away, the man with the notebook raised his head and smiled awkwardly as he saw her standing there. Awkwardness, perhaps, best describes the whole man. He was badly put together, loose-jointed, ungainly. The fact that he was tall profited him nothing, for it merely emphasised the extreme ungracefulness of his figure. His long pale face was made paler by the shock of coarse, tow-

coloured hair; his eyes, even, looked colourless, though they were certainly the least uninteresting feature of his face, for they were not devoid of expression. He had a way of slouching when he moved that singularly intensified the general uncouthness of his appearance. "Are you very tired?" asked his wife, gently, when he had dismounted close to the tent. The question would have been an unnecessary one had it been put to her instead of to her husband, for her voice had that peculiar flat toneless sound for which extreme weariness is answerable.

"Well, no, my dear, not very," he replied, drawling out the words with an exasperating air of delivering a final verdict, after deep reflection on the subject.

The girl glanced once more at the fading colours on the hills. "Come in and rest," she said, moving aside a little to let him pass.

She stood lingering a moment after he had entered the tent, as though unwilling to leave the outer air; and before she turned to follow him she drew a deep breath, and her hand went for one swift second to her throat as though she felt stifled.

Later on that evening she sat in her tent, sewing by the light of the lamp that stood on her little table.

Opposite to her, her husband stretched his ungainly length in a deck-chair, and turned over a pile of official notes. Every now and then her eyes wandered from the gay silks of the table-cover she was embroidering to the canvas walls which bounded the narrow space into which their few household goods were crowded. Outside there was a deep hush. The silence of the vast empty plain seemed to work its way slowly, steadily in toward the little patch of light set in its midst.

The girl felt it in every nerve; it was as though some soft-footed, noiseless, shapeless creature, whose presence she only dimly divined, was approaching nearer--/nearer/. The heavy outer stillness was in some way made more terrifying by the rustle of the papers her husband was reading, by the creaking of his chair as he moved, and by the little fidgeting grunts and half-exclamations which from time to time broke from him. His wife's hand shook at every unintelligible mutter from him, and the slight habitual contraction between her eyes deepened.

All at once she threw her work down on to the table. "For heaven's sake--/please/, John, /talk/!" she cried. Her eyes, for the moment's space in which they met the startled ones of her husband, had a wild, hunted look, but it was gone almost before his slow brain had time to note that it had been there--and was vaguely disturbing. She laughed a little unsteadily.

"Did I startle you? I'm sorry. I"--she laughed again--"I believe I'm a little nervous. When one is all day alone--" She paused without finishing the sentence. The man's face changed suddenly. A wave of

tenderness swept over it, and at the same time an expression of half-incredulous delight shone in his pale eyes.

"Poor little girl, are you really lonely?" he said. Even the real feeling in his tone failed to rob his voice of its peculiarly irritating grating quality. He rose awkwardly, and moved to his wife's side.

Involuntarily she shrank a little, and the hand which he had stretched out to touch her hair sank to his side. She recovered herself immediately, and turned her face up to his, though she did not raise her eyes; but he did not kiss her. Instead, he stood in an embarrassed fashion a moment by her side, and then went back to his seat.

There was silence again for some time. The man lay back in his chair, gazing at his big, clumsy shoes as though he hoped for some inspiration from that quarter, while his wife worked with nervous haste.

"Don't let me keep you from reading, John," she said, and her voice had regained its usual gentle tone.

"No, my dear; I'm just thinking of something to say to you, but I don't seem--"

She smiled a little. In spite of herself, her lip curled faintly.

"Don't worry about it; it was stupid of me to expect it. I mean--" she added, hastily, immediately repenting the sarcasm. She glanced furtively at him, but his face was quite unmoved; evidently he had not noticed it, and she smiled faintly again.

"O Kathie, I knew there was /something/ I'd forgotten to tell you, my dear; there's a man coming down here. I don't know whether--"

She looked up sharply. "A man coming /here/? What for?" she interrupted, breathlessly.

"Sent to help me about this oil-boring business, my dear."

He had lighted his pipe, and was smoking placidly, taking long whiffs between his words.

"Well?" impatiently questioned his wife, fixing her bright eyes on his face.

"Well--that's all, my dear."

She checked an exclamation. "But don't you know anything about him-- his name? where he comes from? what he is like?" She was leaning

forward against the table, her needle, with a long end of yellow silk drawn half-way through her work, held in her upraised hand, her whole attitude one of quivering excitement and expectancy.

The man took his pipe from his mouth deliberately, with a look of slow wonder.

"Why, Kathie, you seem quite anxious. I didn't know you'd be so interested, my dear. Well,"--another long pull at his pipe,--"his name's Brook--/Brookfield/, I think." He paused again. "This pipe doesn't draw well a bit; there's something wrong with it, I shouldn't wonder," he added, taking it out and examining the bowl as though struck with the brilliance of the idea.

The woman opposite put down her work and clinched her hands under the table.

"Go on, John," she said, presently, in a tense, vibrating voice; "his name is Brookfield. Well, where does he come from?"

"Straight from home, my dear, I believe." He fumbled in his pocket, and after some time extricated a pencil, with which he began to poke the tobacco in the bowl in an ineffectual aimless fashion, becoming completely engrossed in the occupation apparently. There was another long pause. The woman went on working, or feigning to work, for her

hands were trembling a good deal.

After some moments she raised her head again. "John, will you mind attending to me one moment, and answering these questions as quickly as you can?" The emphasis on the last word was so faint as to be almost as imperceptible as the touch of exasperated contempt which she could not absolutely banish from her tone.

Her husband, looking up, met her clear bright gaze, and reddened like a school-boy.

"Whereabouts '/from home/' does he come?" she asked, in a studiedly gentle fashion.

"Well, from London, I think," he replied, almost briskly for him, though he stammered and tripped over the words. "He's a university chap; I used to hear he was clever; I don't know about that, I'm sure; he used to chaff me, I remember, but--"

"Chaff /you/? You have met him then?"

"Yes, my dear,"--he was fast relapsing into his slow drawl again,--

"that is, I went to school with him; but it's a long time ago.

Brookfield--yes, that must be his name."

She waited a moment; then, "When is he coming?" she inquired, abruptly.

"Let me see--to-day's--"

"/Monday/;" the word came swiftly between her set teeth.

"Ah, yes--Monday; well," reflectively, "/next/ Monday, my dear."

Mrs. Drayton rose, and began to pace softly the narrow passage between the table and the tent wall, her hands clasped loosely behind her.

"How long have you known this?" she said, stopping abruptly. "O John, you /needn't/ consider; it's quite a simple question. To-day? Yesterday?"

Her foot moved restlessly on the ground as she waited.

"I think it was the day before yesterday," he replied.

"Then why, in heaven's name, didn't you tell me before?" she broke out, fiercely.

"My dear, it slipped my memory. If I'd thought you would be interested--"

"Interested!" She laughed shortly. "It /is/ rather interesting to hear that after six months of this"--she made a quick comprehensive gesture with her hand--"one will have some one to speak to--some one. It is the hand of Providence; it comes just in time to save me from--" She checked herself abruptly.

He sat staring up at her stupidly, without a word.

"It's all right, John," she said, with a quick change of tone, gathering up her work quietly as she spoke. "I'm not mad--yet. You--you must get used to these little outbreaks," she added, after a moment, smiling faintly; "and, to do me justice, I don't /often/ trouble you with them, do I? I'm just a little tired, or it's the heat or--something. No--don't touch me!" she cried, shrinking back; for he had risen slowly and was coming toward her.

She had lost command over her voice, and the shrill note of horror in it was unmistakable. The man heard it, and shrank in his turn.

"I'm so sorry, John," she murmured, raising her great bright eyes to his face. They had not lost their goaded expression, though they were

full of tears. "I'm awfully sorry; but I'm just nervous and stupid,
and I can't bear /any one/ to touch me when I'm nervous."

"Here's Broomhurst, my dear! I made a mistake in his name after all, I
find. I told you /Brookfield/, I believe, didn't I? Well, it isn't
Brookfield, he says; it's Broomhurst."

Mrs. Drayton had walked some little distance across the plain to meet
and welcome the expected guest. She stood quietly waiting while her
husband stammered over his incoherent sentences, and then put out her
hand.

"We are very glad to see you," she said, with a quick glance at the
new-comer's face as she spoke.

As they walked together toward the tent, after the first greetings,
she felt his keen eyes upon her before he turned to her husband.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Drayton finds the climate trying?" he asked. "Perhaps
she ought not to have come so far in this heat?"

"Kathie is often pale. You /do/ look white to-day, my dear," he
observed, turning anxiously toward his wife.

"Do I?" she replied. The unsteadiness of her tone was hardly appreciable, but it was not lost on Broomhurst's quick ears. "Oh, I don't think so. I /feel/ very well."

"I'll come and see if they've fixed you up all right," said Drayton, following his companion toward the new tent that had been pitched at some little distance from the large one.

"We shall see you at dinner then?" Mrs. Drayton observed in reply to Broomhurst's smile as they parted.

She entered the tent slowly, and, moving up to the table already laid for dinner, began to rearrange the things upon it in a purposeless, mechanical fashion.

After a moment she sank down upon a seat opposite the open entrance, and put her hand to her head.

"What is the matter with me?" she thought, wearily. "All the week I've been looking forward to seeing this man--/any/ man, /any one/ to take off the edge of this." She shuddered. Even in thought she hesitated to analyse the feeling that possessed her. "Well, he's here, and I think I feel /worse/." Her eyes travelled toward the hills she had been used to watch at this hour, and rested on them with a vague, unseeing gaze.

"Tired Kathie? A penny for your thoughts, my dear," said her husband, coming in presently to find her still sitting there.

"I'm thinking what a curious world this is, and what an ironical vein of humour the gods who look after it must possess," she replied, with a mirthless laugh, rising as she spoke.

John looked puzzled.

"Funny my having known Broomhurst before, you mean?" he said doubtfully.

"I was fishing down at Lynmouth this time last year," Broomhurst said at dinner. "You know Lynmouth, Mrs. Drayton? Do you never imagine you hear the gurgling of the stream? I am tantalised already by the sound of it rushing through the beautiful green gloom of those woods-- /aren't/ they lovely? And // haven't been in this burnt-up spot as many hours as you've had months of it."

She smiled a little.

"You must learn to possess your soul in patience," she said, and glanced inconsequently from Broomhurst to her husband, and then dropped her eyes and was silent a moment.

John was obviously, and a little audibly, enjoying his dinner. He sat with his chair pushed close to the table, and his elbows awkwardly raised, swallowing his soup in gulps. He grasped his spoon tightly in his bony hand, so that its swollen joints stood out larger and uglier than ever, his wife thought.

Her eyes wandered to Broomhurst's hands. They were well shaped, and, though not small, there was a look of refinement about them; he had a way of touching things delicately, a little lingeringly, she noticed. There was an air of distinction about his clear-cut, clean-shaven face, possibly intensified by contrast with Drayton's blurred features; and it was, perhaps, also by contrast with the gray cuffs that showed beneath John's ill-cut drab suit that the linen Broomhurst wore seemed to her particularly spotless.

Broomhurst's thoughts, for his part, were a good deal occupied with his hostess.

She was pretty, he thought, or perhaps it was that, with the wide, dry lonely plain as a setting, her fragile delicacy of appearance was invested with a certain flower-like charm.

"The silence here seems rather strange, rather appalling at first, when one is fresh from a town," he pursued, after a moment's pause;

"but I suppose you're used to it, eh, Drayton? How do /you/ find life here, Mrs. Drayton?" he asked, a little curiously, turning to her as he spoke.

She hesitated a second. "Oh, much the same as I should find it anywhere else, I expect," she replied; "after all, one carries the possibilities of a happy life about with one; don't you think so? The Garden of Eden wouldn't necessarily make my life any happier, or less happy, than a howling wilderness like this. It depends on one's self entirely."

"Given the right Adam and Eve, the desert blossoms like the rose, in fact," Broomhurst answered, lightly, with a smiling glance inclusive of husband and wife; "you two don't feel as though you'd been driven out of Paradise, evidently."

Drayton raised his eyes from his plate with a smile of total incomprehension.

"Great heavens! what an Adam to select!" thought Broomhurst, involuntarily, as Mrs. Drayton rose rather suddenly from the table.

"I'll come and help with that packing-case," John said, rising, in his turn, lumberingly from his place; "then we can have a smoke--eh! Kathie don't mind, if we sit near the entrance."

The two men went out together, Broomhurst holding the lantern, for the moon had not yet risen. Mrs. Drayton followed them to the doorway, and, pushing the looped-up hanging farther aside, stepped out into the cool darkness.

Her heart was beating quickly, and there was a great lump in her throat that frightened her as though she were choking.

"And I am his /wife/--I /belong/ to him!" she cried, almost aloud.

She pressed both her hands tightly against her breast, and set her teeth, fighting to keep down the rising flood that threatened to sweep away her composure. "Oh, what a fool I am! What an hysterical fool of a woman I am!" she whispered below her breath. She began to walk slowly up and down outside the tent, in the space illumined by the lamplight, as though striving to make her outwardly quiet movements react upon the inward tumult. In a little while she had conquered; she quietly entered the tent, drew a low chair to the entrance, and took up a book, just as footsteps became audible. A moment afterward Broomhurst emerged from the darkness into the circle of light outside, and Mrs. Drayton raised her eyes from the pages she was turning to greet him with a smile.

"Are your things all right?"

"Oh, yes, more or less, thank you. I was a little concerned about a case of books, but it isn't much damaged fortunately. Perhaps I've some you would care to look at?"

"The books will be a godsend," she returned, with a sudden brightening of the eyes; "I was getting /desperate/--for books."

"What are you reading now?" he asked, glancing at the volume that lay in her lap.

"It's a Browning. I carry it about a good deal. I think I like to have it with me, but I don't seem to read it much."

"Are you waiting for a suitable optimistic moment?" Broomhurst inquired, smiling.

"Yes, now that you mention it, I think that must be why I am waiting," she replied, slowly.

"And it doesn't come--even in the Garden of Eden? Surely the serpent, pessimism, hasn't been insolent enough to draw you into conversation with him?" he said, lightly.

"There has been no one to converse with at all--when John is away, I mean. I think I should have liked a little chat with the serpent immensely by way of a change," she replied, in the same tone.

"Ah, yes," Broomhurst said, with sudden seriousness; "it must be unbearably dull for you alone here, with Drayton away all day."

Mrs. Drayton's hand shook a little as she fluttered a page of her open book.

"I should think it quite natural you would be irritated beyond endurance to hear that all's right with the world, for instance, when you were sighing for the long day to pass," he continued.

"I don't mind the day so much; it's the evenings." She abruptly checked the swift words, and flushed painfully. "I mean--I've grown stupidly nervous, I think--even when John is here. Oh, you have no idea of the awful /silence/ of this place at night," she added, rising hurriedly from her low seat, and moving closer to the doorway. "It is so close, isn't it?" she said, almost apologetically. There was silence for quite a minute.

Broomhurst's quick eyes noted the silent momentary clinching of the hands that hung at her side, as she stood leaning against the support at the entrance.

"But how stupid of me to give you such a bad impression of the camp-- the first evening, too!" Mrs. Drayton exclaimed, presently; and her companion mentally commended the admirable composure of her voice.

"Probably you will never notice that it /is/ lonely at all," she continued; "John likes it here. He is immensely interested in his work, you know. I hope /you/ are too. If you are interested it is all quite right. I think the climate tries me a little. I never used to be stupid--and nervous. Ah, here's John; he's been round to the kitchen tent, I suppose."

"Been looking after that fellow cleanin' my gun, my dear," John explained, shambling toward the deck-chair.

Later Broomhurst stood at his own tent door. He looked up at the star-sown sky, and the heavy silence seemed to press upon him like an actual, physical burden.

He took his cigar from between his lips presently, and looked at the glowing end reflectively before throwing it away.

"Considering that she has been alone with him here for six months, she has herself very well in hand--/very/ well in hand," he repeated.

It was Sunday morning. John Drayton sat just inside the tent, presumably enjoying his pipe before the heat of the day. His eyes furtively followed his wife as she moved about near him, sometimes passing close to his chair in search of something she had mislaid. There was colour in her cheeks; her eyes, though preoccupied, were bright; there was a lightness and buoyancy in her step which she set to a little dancing air she was humming under her breath.

After a moment or two the song ceased; she began to move slowly, sedately; and, as if chilled by a raw breath of air, the light faded from her eyes, which she presently turned toward her husband.

"Why do you look at me?" she asked, suddenly.

"I don't know, my dear," he began slowly and laboriously, as was his wont. "I was thinkin' how nice you looked--jest now--much better, you know; but somehow,"--he was taking long whiffs at his pipe, as usual, between each word, while she stood patiently waiting for him to finish,--"somehow, you alter so, my dear--you're quite pale again, all of a minute."

She stood listening to him, noticing against her will the more than suspicion of cockney accent and the thick drawl with which the words were uttered.

His eyes sought her face piteously. She noticed that too, and stood before him torn by conflicting emotions, pity and disgust struggling in a hand-to-hand fight within her.

"Mr. Broomhurst and I are going down by the well to sit; it's cooler there. Won't you come?" she said at last, gently.

He did not reply for a moment; then he turned his head aside, sharply for him.

"No, my dear, thank you; I'm comfortable enough here," he returned, huskily.

She stood over him, hesitating a second; then moved abruptly to the table, from which she took a book.

He had risen from his seat by the time she turned to go out, and he intercepted her timorously.

"Kathie, give me a kiss before you go," he whispered, hoarsely. "I--I don't often bother you."

She drew her breath in deeply as he put his arms clumsily about her;

but she stood still, and he kissed her on the forehead, and touched the little wavy curls that strayed across it gently with his big, trembling fingers.

When he released her, she moved at once impetuously to the open doorway. On the threshold she hesitated, paused a moment irresolutely, and then turned back.

"Shall I--does your pipe want filling, John?" she asked, softly.

"No, thank you, my dear."

"Would you like me to stay, read to you, or anything?"

He looked up at her wistfully. "N-no, thank you; I'm not much of a reader, you know, my dear--somehow."

She hated herself for knowing that there would be a "my dear," probably a "somehow," in his reply, and despised herself for the sense of irritated impatience she felt by anticipation, even before the words were uttered.

There was a moment's hesitating silence, broken by the sound of quick, firm footsteps without. Broomhurst paused at the entrance, and looked

into the tent.

"Aren't you coming, Drayton?" he asked, looking first at Drayton's wife and then swiftly putting in his name with a scarcely perceptible pause. "Too lazy? But you, Mrs. Drayton?"

"Yes, I'm coming," she said.

They left the tent together, and walked some few steps in silence.

Broomhurst shot a quick glance at his companion's face.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, presently.

Though the words were ordinary enough, the voice in which they were spoken was in some subtle fashion a different voice from that in which he had talked to her nearly two months ago, though it would have required a keen sense of nice shades in sound to have detected the change.

Mrs. Drayton's sense of niceties in sound was particularly keen, but she answered quietly, "Nothing, thank you."

They did not speak again till the trees round the stone well were

reached.

Broomhurst arranged their seats comfortably beside it.

"Are we going to read or talk?" he asked, looking up at her from his lower place.

"Well, we generally talk most when we arrange to read; so shall we agree to talk to-day for a change, by way of getting some reading done?" she rejoined, smiling. "/You/ begin."

Broomhurst seemed in no hurry to avail himself of the permission; he was apparently engrossed in watching the flecks of sunshine on Mrs. Drayton's white dress. The whirring of insects, and the creaking of a Persian wheel somewhere in the neighbourhood, filtered through the hot silence.

Mrs. Drayton laughed after a few minutes; there was a touch of embarrassment in the sound.

"The new plan doesn't answer. Suppose you read, as usual, and let me interrupt, also as usual, after the first two lines."

He opened the book obediently, but turned the pages at random.

She watched him for a moment, and then bent a little forward toward him.

"It is my turn now," she said, suddenly; "is anything wrong?"

He raised his head, and their eyes met. There was a pause. "I will be more honest than you," he returned; "yes, there is."

"What?"

"I've had orders to move on."

She drew back, and her lips whitened, though she kept them steady.

"When do you go?"

"On Wednesday."

There was silence again; the man still kept his eyes on her face.

The whirring of the insects and the creaking of the wheel had suddenly grown so strangely loud and insistent that it was in a half-dazed

fashion she at length heard her name--"/Kathleen!/"

"Kathleen!" he whispered again, hoarsely.

She looked him full in the face, and once more their eyes met in a long, grave gaze.

The man's face flushed, and he half rose from his seat with an impetuous movement; but Kathleen stopped him with a glance.

"Will you go and fetch my work? I left it in the tent," she said, speaking very clearly and distinctly; "and then will you go on reading? I will find the place while you are gone."

She took the book from his hand, and he rose and stood before her.

There was a mute appeal in his silence, and she raised her head slowly.

Her face was white to the lips, but she looked at him unflinchingly; and without a word he turned and left her.

Mrs. Drayton was resting in the tent on Tuesday afternoon. With the help of cushions and some low chairs, she had improvised a couch, on

which she lay quietly with her eyes closed. There was a tenseness, however, in her attitude which indicated that sleep was far from her.

Her features seemed to have sharpened during the last few days, and there were hollows in her cheeks. She had been very ill for a long time, but all at once, with a sudden movement, she turned her head and buried her face in the cushions with a groan. Slipping from her place, she fell on her knees beside the couch, and put both hands before her mouth to force back the cry that she felt struggling to her lips.

For some moments the wild effort she was making for outward calm, which even when she was alone was her first instinct, strained every nerve and blotted out sight and hearing, and it was not till the sound was very near that she was conscious of the ring of horse's hoofs on the plain.

She raised her head sharply, with a thrill of fear, still kneeling, and listened.

There was no mistake. The horseman was riding in hot haste, for the thud of the hoofs followed one another swiftly.

As Mrs. Drayton listened her white face grew whiter, and she began to tremble. Putting out shaking hands, she raised herself by the arms of the folding-chair and stood upright.

Nearer and nearer came the thunder of the approaching sound, mingled with startled exclamations and the noise of trampling feet from the direction of the kitchen tent.

Slowly, mechanically almost, she dragged herself to the entrance, and stood clinging to the canvas there. By the time she had reached it Broomhurst had flung himself from the saddle, and had thrown the reins to one of the men.

Mrs. Drayton stared at him with wide, bright eyes as he hastened toward her.

"I thought you--you are not--" she began, and then her teeth began to chatter. "I am so cold!" she said, in a little, weak voice.

Broomhurst took her hand and led her over the threshold back into the tent.

"Don't be so frightened," he implored; "I came to tell you first. I thought it wouldn't frighten you so much as--Your--Drayton is--very ill. They are bringing him. I--"

He paused. She gazed at him a moment with parted lips; then she broke

into a horrible, discordant laugh, and stood clinging to the back of a chair.

Broomhurst started back.

"Do you understand what I mean?" he whispered. "Kathleen, for God's sake--/don't/--he is /dead/."

He looked over his shoulder as he spoke, her shrill laughter ringing in his ears. The white glare and dazzle of the plain stretched before him, framed by the entrance to the tent; far off, against the horizon, there were moving black specks, which he knew to be the returning servants with their still burden.

They were bringing John Drayton home.

One afternoon, some months later, Broomhurst climbed the steep lane leading to the cliffs of a little English village by the sea. He had already been to the inn, and had been shown by the proprietress the house where Mrs. Drayton lodged.

"The lady was out, but the gentleman would likely find her if he went to the cliffs--down by the bay, or thereabouts," her landlady explained; and, obeying her directions, Broomhurst presently emerged from the shady woodland path on to the hillside overhanging the sea.

He glanced eagerly round him, and then, with a sudden quickening of the heart, walked on over the springy heather to where she sat. She turned when the rustling his footsteps made through the bracken was near enough to arrest her attention, and looked up at him as he came. Then she rose slowly and stood waiting for him. He came up to her without a word, and seized both her hands, devouring her face with his eyes. Something he saw there repelled him. Slowly he let her hands fall, still looking at her silently. "You are not glad to see me, and I have counted the hours," he said, at last, in a dull, toneless voice.

Her lips quivered. "Don't be angry with me--I can't help it--I'm not glad or sorry for anything now," she answered; and her voice matched his for grayness.

They sat down together on a long flat stone half embedded in a wiry clump of whortleberries. Behind them the lonely hillsides rose, brilliant with yellow bracken and the purple of heather. Before them stretched the wide sea. It was a soft, gray day. Streaks of pale sunlight trembled at moments far out on the water. The tide was rising in the little bay above which they sat, and Broomhurst watched the lazy foam-edged waves slipping over the uncovered rocks toward the shore, then sliding back as though for very weariness they despaired of reaching it. The muffled, pulsing sound of the sea filled the silence. Broomhurst thought suddenly of hot Eastern sunshine, of the

whir of insect wings on the still air, and the creaking of a wheel in the distance. He turned and looked at his companion.

"I have come thousands of miles to see you," he said; "aren't you going to speak to me now I am here?"

"Why did you come? I told you not to come," she answered, falteringly.

"I--" she paused.

"And I replied that I should follow you--if you remember," he answered, still quietly. "I came because I would not listen to what you said then, at that awful time. You didn't know /yourself/ what you said. No wonder! I have given you some months, and now I have come."

There was silence between them. Broomhurst saw that she was crying; her tears fell fast on to her hands, that were clasped in her lap. Her face, he noticed, was thin and drawn.

Very gently he put his arm round her shoulder and drew her nearer to him. She made no resistance; it seemed that she did not notice the movement; and his arm dropped at his side.

"You asked me why I had come. You think it possible that three months can change one very thoroughly, then?" he said, in a cold voice.

"I not only think it possible; I have proved it," she replied,
wearily.

He turned round and faced her.

"You /did/ love me, Kathleen!" he asserted. "You never said so in
words, but I know it," he added, fiercely.

"Yes, I did."

"And--you mean that you don't now?"

Her voice was very tired. "Yes; I can't help it," she answered; "it
has gone--utterly."

The gray sea slowly lapped the rocks. Overhead the sharp scream of a
gull cut through the stillness. It was broken again, a moment
afterward, by a short hard laugh from the man.

"Don't!" she whispered, and laid a hand swiftly on his arm. "Do you
think it isn't worse for me? I wish to God I /did/ love you!" she
cried, passionately. "Perhaps it would make me forget that, to all
intents and purposes, I am a murderess.

Broomhurst met her wide, despairing eyes with an amazement which yielded to sudden pitying comprehension.

"So that is it, my darling? You are worrying about /that/? You who were as loyal as--"

She stopped him with a frantic gesture.

"Don't! /don't!/" she wailed. "If you only knew! Let me try to tell you--will you?" she urged, pitifully. "It may be better if I tell some one--if I don't keep it all to myself, and think, and /think/."

She clasped her hands tight, with the old gesture he remembered when she was struggling for self-control, and waited a moment.

Presently she began to speak in a low, hurried tone: "It began before you came. I know now what the feeling was that I was afraid to acknowledge to myself. I used to try and smother it; I used to repeat things to myself all day--poems, stupid rhymes--/anything/ to keep my thoughts quite underneath--but I--/hated/ John before you came! We had been married nearly a year then. I never loved him. Of course you are going to say, 'Why did you marry him?' " She looked drearily over the placid sea. "Why /did/ I marry him? I don't know; for the reason that hundreds of ignorant, inexperienced girls marry, I suppose. My home

wasn't a happy one. I was miserable, and oh--/restless/. I wonder if men know what it feels like to be restless? Sometimes I think they can't even guess. John wanted me very badly; nobody wanted me at home particularly. There didn't seem to be any point in my life. Do you understand? . . . Of course, being alone with him in that little camp in that silent plain"--she shuddered--"made things worse. My nerves went all to pieces. Everything he said, his voice, his accent, his walk, the way he ate, irritated me so that I longed to rush out sometimes and shriek--and go /mad/. Does it sound ridiculous to you to be driven mad by such trifles? I only know I used to get up from the table sometimes and walk up and down outside, with both hands over my mouth to keep myself quiet. And all the time I /hated/ myself--how I hated myself! I never had a word from him that wasn't gentle and tender. I believe he loved the ground I walked on. Oh, it is /awful/ to be loved like that when you--" She drew in her breath with a sob. "I--I--it made me sick for him to come near me--to touch me." She stopped a moment.

Broomhurst gently laid his hand on her quivering one. "Poor little girl!" he murmured.

"Then /you/ came," she said, "and before long I had another feeling to fight against. At first I thought it couldn't be true that I loved you --it would die down. I think I was /frightened/ at the feeling; I didn't know it hurt so to love any one."

Broomhurst stirred a little. "Go on," he said, tersely.

"But it didn't die," she continued, in a trembling whisper, "and the other /awful/ feeling grew stronger and stronger--hatred; no, that is not the word--/loathing/ for--for--John. I fought against it. Yes," she cried, feverishly, clasping and unclasping her hands; "Heaven knows I fought it with all my strength, and reasoned with myself, and --oh, I did /everything/, but--" Her quick-falling tears made speech difficult.

"Kathleen!" Broomhurst urged, desperately, "you couldn't help it, you poor child. You say yourself you struggled against your feelings. You were always gentle; perhaps he didn't know."

"But he did--he /did/," she wailed; "it is just that. I hurt him a hundred times a day; he never said so, but I knew it; and yet I /couldn't/ be kind to him,--except in words,--and he understood. And after you came it was worse in one way, for he knew--I /felt/ he knew --that I loved you. His eyes used to follow me like a dog's, and I was stabbed with remorse, and I tried to be good to him, but I couldn't."

"But--he didn't suspect--he trusted you," began Broomhurst. "He had every reason. No woman was ever so loyal, so--"

"Hush!" she almost screamed. "Loyal! it was the least I could do--to

stop you, I mean--when you--After all, I knew it without your telling me. I had deliberately married him without loving him. It was my own fault. I felt it. Even if I couldn't prevent his knowing that I hated him, I could prevent /that/. It was my punishment. I deserved it for /daring/ to marry without love. But I didn't spare John one pang after all," she added, bitterly. "He knew what I felt toward him; I don't think he cared about anything else. You say I mustn't reproach myself? When I went back to the tent that morning--when you--when I stopped you from saying you loved me, he was sitting at the table with his head buried in his hands; he was crying--bitterly. I saw him,--it is terrible to see a man cry,--and I stole away gently, but he saw me. I was torn to pieces, but I /couldn't/ go to him. I knew he would kiss me, and I shuddered to think of it. It seemed more than ever not to be borne that he should do that--when I knew /you/ loved me."

"Kathleen," cried her lover, again, "don't dwell on it all so terribly --don't--"

"How can I forget?" she answered, despairingly. "And then,"--she lowered her voice,--"oh, I can't tell you--all the time, at the back of my mind somewhere, there was a burning wish that he might /die/. I used to lie awake at night, and, do what I would to stifle it, that thought used to /scorch/ me, I wished it so intensely. Do you believe that by willing one can bring such things to pass?" she asked, looking at Broomhurst with feverishly bright eyes. "No? Well, I don't know. I tried to smother it,--I /really/ tried,--but it was there, whatever other thoughts I heaped on the top. Then, when I heard the horse

galloping across the plain that morning, I had a sick fear that it was /you/. I knew something had happened, and my first thought when I saw you alive and well, and knew it was /John/, was /that it was too good to be true/. I believe I laughed like a maniac, didn't I? . . . Not to blame? Why, if it hadn't been for me he wouldn't have died. The men say they saw him sitting with his head uncovered in the burning sun, his face buried in his hands--just as I had seen him the day before. He didn't trouble to be careful; he was too wretched."

She paused, and Broomhurst rose and began to pace the little hillside path at the edge of which they were seated.

Presently he came back to her.

"Kathleen, let me take care of you," he implored, stooping toward her.

"We have only ourselves to consider in this matter. Will you come to me at once?"

She shook her head sadly.

Broomhurst set his teeth, and the lines round his mouth deepened. He threw himself down beside her on the heather.

"Dear," he urged, still gently, though his voice showed he was controlling himself with an effort, "you are morbid about this. You

have been alone too much; you are ill. Let me take care of you; I /can/, Kathleen,--and I love you. Nothing but morbid fancy makes you imagine you are in any way responsible for--Drayton's death. You can't bring him back to life, and--"

"No," she sighed, drearily, "and if I could, nothing would be altered. Though I am mad with self-reproach, I feel /that/--it was all so inevitable. If he were alive and well before me this instant, my feeling toward him wouldn't have changed. If he spoke to me he would say 'my dear'--and I should /loathe/ him. Oh, I know! It is /that/ that makes it so awful."

"But if you acknowledge it," Broomhurst struck in, eagerly, "will you wreck both of our lives for the sake of vain regrets? Kathleen, you never will."

He waited breathlessly for her answer.

"I won't wreck both our lives by marrying again without love on my side," she replied, firmly.

"I will take the risk," he said. "You /have/ loved me; you will love me again. You are crushed and dazed now with brooding over this--this trouble, but--"

"But I will not allow you to take the risk," Kathleen answered. "What sort of woman should I be to be willing again to live with a man I don't love? I have come to know that there are things one owes to /one's self/. Self-respect is one of them. I don't know how it has come to be so, but all my old feeling for you has /gone/. It is as though it had burned itself out. I will not offer gray ashes to any man."

Broomhurst, looking up at her pale, set face, knew that her words were final, and turned his own aside with a groan.

"Ah," cried Kathleen, with a little break in her voice, "/don't!/ Go away, and be happy and strong, and all that I loved in you. I am so sorry--so sorry to hurt you. I--" her voice faltered miserably; "I--I only bring trouble to people."

There was a long pause.

"Did you never think that there is a terrible vein of irony running through the ordering of this world?" she said, presently. "It is a mistake to think our prayers are not answered--they are. In due time we get our heart's desire--when we have ceased to care for it."

"I haven't yet got mine," Broomhurst answered, doggedly, "and I shall never cease to care for it."

She smiled a little, with infinite sadness.

"Listen, Kathleen," he said. They had both risen, and he stood before her, looking down at her. "I will go now, but in a year's time I shall come back. I will not give you up. You shall love me yet."

"Perhaps--I don't think so," she answered, wearily.

Broomhurst looked at her trembling lips a moment in silence; then he stooped and kissed both her hands instead.

"I will wait till you tell me you love me," he said.

She stood watching him out of sight. He did not look back, and she turned with swimming eyes to the gray sea and the transient gleams of sunlight that swept like tender smiles across its face.