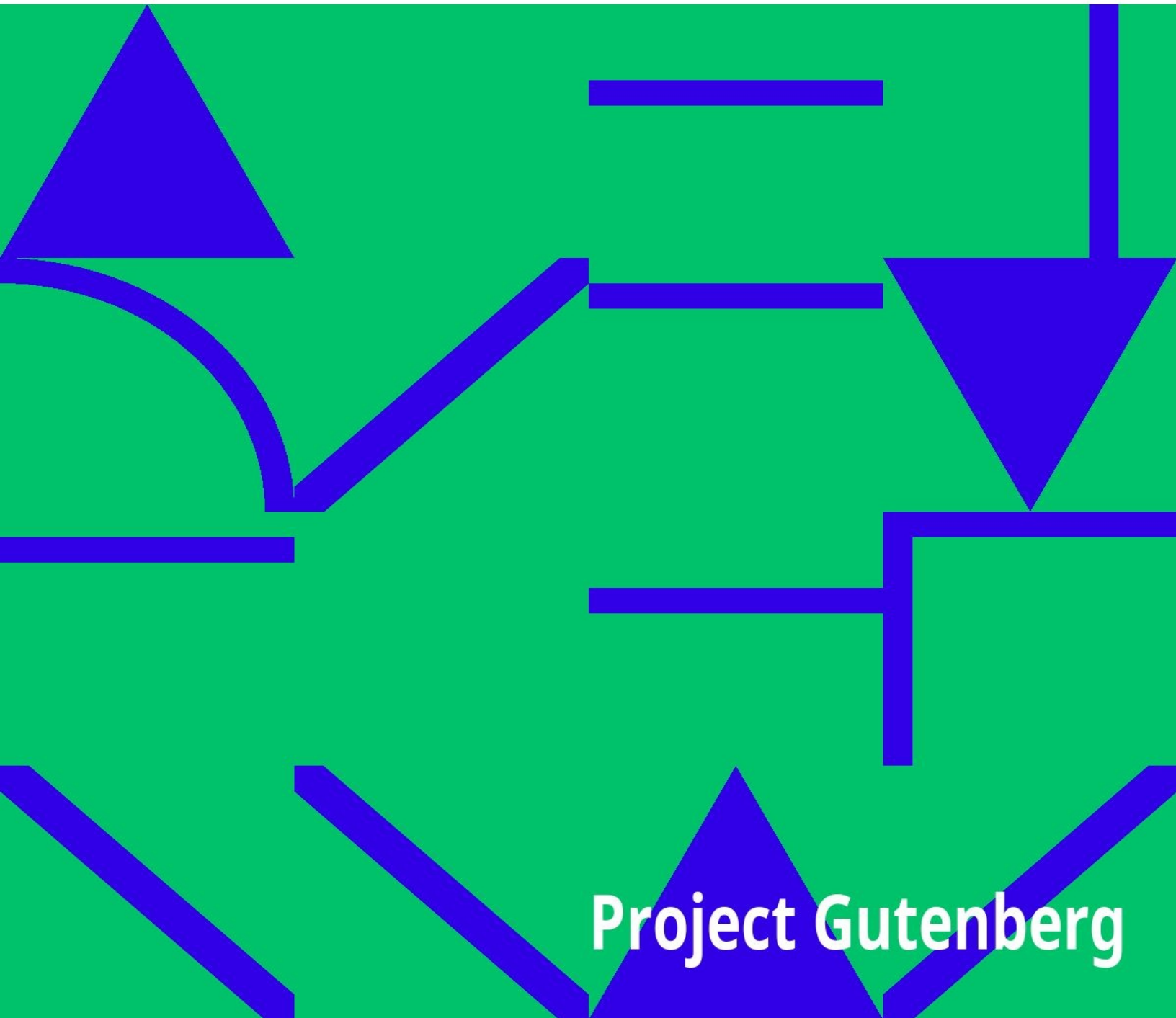
A Chinese Command

A Story of Adventure in Eastern Seas

Harry Collingwood



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       A Story of Adventure in Eastern Seas

Author: Harry Collingwood

Illustrator: Arch. Webb

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Chapter One.

The Outcast.

A furious gust of wind tore down the chimney, blowing the smoke out into the small but cosily-furnished sitting-room of the little cottage at Kingston-on-Thames, and sending a shower of sparks hissing and spluttering on to the hearth-rug, where they were promptly trodden out by a tall, fair-haired young giant, who lazily removed his feet from a chair on which they reposed, for the purpose.

This operation concluded, he replaced his feet on the chair with deliberation, re-arranged a cushion behind his head, leaned back luxuriously, and started hunting in his pocket for matches wherewith to light his pipe, which had gone out.

“Beastly night for a dog to be out, much more a human being,” he soliloquised. “Poor old Murray’s sure to be drenched when he gets back, as well as frozen to the bone. Let’s see—is everything ready for him? Yes, there are his slippers warming before the fire—hope none of those sparks burnt a hole in ’em—likewise dry coat, shirt, and trousers; that ought to do him all right. I hope to goodness the poor old chap’s got some encouragement to-day, if nothing else, for he’s fearfully down on his luck, and no mistake. And, between me and those fire-irons there, I’m getting almost afraid to let him out of my sight, for fear he’ll go and do something foolish—though, to be sure, he’s hardly that kind of fellow, when one comes to think of it. However, he should be in very soon now, and then I, shall learn the news.”

Having delivered himself of this monologue, Dick Penryn lit his pipe, took up the book he had been reading, and was soon deep in the pages of Théophile Gautier’s *Voyage en I’Orient*.

Dick Penryn and Murray Frobisher, the friend to whom he had been

alluding, were chums of many years' standing. They had been born within a few months of one another—Frobisher being slightly the elder—in the same Devon village; had attended the same school in Plymouth—Mannamead House, to be exact; had gone to the same college together, and had passed into the British Navy within a year of one another—Frobisher being again first in the race.

Then, for some years, fortune smiled upon both. Each won golden opinions from his superiors; and by the time that the lads were twenty-three years of age they had attained the rank of lieutenant, and showed signs of rising rapidly in the service.

Everything was going splendidly, and both Dick and Murray were enjoying temporary rank as commanders of torpedo-boats during the winter manoeuvres of 1891-92, when suddenly, without any warning, Fate turned her face away from one of the chums and plunged him from the pinnacle of light-hearted happiness to the depths of misery and despair.

One evening, while a portion of the defending fleet was lying in Portland Roads waiting to be joined by the other division, news was brought in by one of the scouting destroyers that the attacking fleet had been seen at the entrance to the Channel, steering a course which undoubtedly had Portland as its objective. If that naval base was to be "saved", it was urgently necessary to send eastward in haste to Portsmouth, to bring up the other half of the defending squadron; otherwise the attackers would have things all their own way, and the south-west coast of England would lie at the mercy of the "enemy."

The destroyer *Spitfire*, which had just brought the news, would naturally have been selected to carry the message under ordinary circumstances—one of the rules of the game being that the telegraph might not be used by either side; but unfortunately, while still a considerable distance from Portland, she had commenced to run short of coal, being obliged to steam at half-speed for a number of hours, and finally arrived in the harbour on the sweepings of her bunkers. Hence there was greater need for haste than ever; and, as it would have taken longer to re-bunker the *Spitfire* than for T.B. 42, Murray's ship, to raise steam, the young commander was sent for in hot haste by his admiral, hurriedly given his

instructions, and told to raise steam and make for Portsmouth with the news in “something less than a pig’s whisper.”

Delighted at receiving this important commission, Murray Frobisher had hurried back to his little ship, helped the astonished stokers with his own hands to raise steam, and at midnight on a dark, blustering night, with half a gale blowing from the south-east, the sea running steeply, and a heavy driving rain lashing right in their faces, he and his little crew cleared from Portland Roads, dashed across Weymouth Bay at a reckless speed—considering the height of the sea—and doubled Saint Alban’s Head.

Murray found that the storm in the bay was a mere trifle compared with that which he was now facing; so, for safety’s sake, and to avoid being blown ashore, he was compelled to stand off the coast a good deal farther than he had originally intended. He knew that he was in a position of some danger, and, besides being himself additionally on the alert, he posted an extra look-out, with orders to keep his eyes wide open for the first signs of light or loom of moving ship upon that black, rushing waste of water.

T.B. 42 was behaving splendidly, and Murray was just congratulating himself that, in spite of the violence of the wind, his little craft was fighting her way to her destination at a good honest twelve knots an hour, when, with a shriek like that of a thousand warlocks, the wind and sleet whirled down in a burst of vicious fury that struck the boat like a solid wall, rendering it a matter of physical impossibility for any human being to face it until after its first violence was exhausted.

It was during those few fateful moments that the catastrophe occurred. As the gust veered away astern, and the breathless, half-frozen seamen on deck were again able to direct their eyes ahead, there came a wild cry from the look-out forward of: “Port your helm, sir; port your helm!” followed, before Murray could spring to the assistance of the quartermaster at the wheel, by a splintering crash, the rending sound of steel rasping through steel. Then the little craft heeled over to starboard, until Murray felt himself sliding bodily down the steeply inclined deck towards the sea; while above, right over his head, as it seemed, he could dimly perceive the outline of a great, towering metal stem that still surged

and sawed onward and over Number 42, relentless as fate itself.

A second later, and the catastrophe was complete. The colliding steamer lifted with the ’scend of the waves and crashed down yet again upon the hapless torpedo-boat, and young Frobisher found himself in the raging sea, clinging instinctively to something—he knew not what—that had come away in his hands as he flung them out wildly to prevent himself from sliding off the deck. As his head appeared above the brine after the plunge, he heard certain dreadful cries which he never forgot as long as he lived. They were the death shrieks of his unhappy crew, imprisoned below among the bursting steam-pipes and boilers, the cascade of white-hot coals from the furnaces, and the crumpling wreckage of machinery and torn plates; and he knew that his trim little ship and his gallant comrades were gone from him for ever.

As it happened, those on the look-out on board the liner, with the storm behind them and their eyes consequently clear, had seen the boat at the instant when the collision had become inevitable; and the captain had promptly rung his engines astern, brought his ship to a standstill, and lowered his boats in an endeavour to rescue the survivors. But the only person rescued was the unfortunate Murray himself, and even he was hauled on board more dead than alive, grieving that it had not been his lot to share the fate of his crew.

Upon his recovery he was called upon to face a court martial for the loss of his ship; and—strange were the ways of the Judge-Advocate—was dismissed that Service which, confronted by a less-harsh officer, he might have remained to honour. And since that miserable moment the unhappy man had been living upon his slender savings, endeavouring meanwhile to obtain employment of any sort that would keep the wolf from the door.

At the moment when this story opens, Murray Frobisher was down to his last few sovereigns, and had therefore been unfeignedly glad to accept the invitation of kind-hearted Dick Penryn, his former comrade-in-arms, to share the cottage at Kingston where, having no ties of any kind, that young gentleman was staying during his spell of shore leave. And it was Murray whom Penryn was momentarily expecting on this stormy, cold, and dismal evening in March, 1893, just a year after the catastrophe in the Channel which had ruined his career in the British Navy, and all but

broken his heart.

Dick Penryn had scarcely finished another page of his very fascinating book when he heard the front door of the cottage open. A furious gust of wind tore through the little house for a moment, causing even the occupant of the easy chair to shiver in sympathy with his friend; and then the door was shut with a slam, and he heard Murray Frobisher's well-known footsteps ascending the stairs. But there was not the former light-hearted spring in them. Murray was coming upstairs slowly and heavily, like a man carrying a ponderous burden, and Dick heaved a sharp sigh as he murmured to himself, "No luck again to-day, evidently; else *we* should have had Murray coming up here full steam ahead. Poor old boy! I wonder what on earth will happen to him if he doesn't get a berth soon? A man can't go on like this for ever without losing heart; and there are already signs that the boy is beginning to lose hope. I wish to Heaven there was something I could do for him; but unfortunately I have not a particle of influence; I am absolutely powerless."

At this moment the door of the little room opened, and Murray stood framed in the opening, looking at his friend with an expression in which weariness, disappointment, and a certain suggestion of relief were curiously blended. If Dick Penryn was what some people were in the habit of calling a giant, then Murray Frobisher could only be considered gigantic. Standing fully six feet four inches in his boots, broad in proportion, weighing fully sixteen stone, with dark, olive complexion bronzed almost to the shade of an Arab's by exposure to the weather, and with clean-shaven cheeks and lips, and close-cropped, wavy black hair, the man was a truly magnificent specimen of humanity, compelling the attention of all with whom he came in contact.

"So you're back at last, Murray," shouted Penryn, leaping out of his chair, and speaking more cheerfully than he felt that the occasion warranted. "Come inside, man; come inside! Don't stand there in the doorway letting in all the draught; goodness knows it's cold enough without that!" And as Murray closed the door behind him, and slowly pulled forward a chair to the fire, he proceeded: "And what's the news to-day, old man? Any luck of any sort; or has it been the usual style of things—offer your services and have them declined with, or without, thanks?"

“Well,” answered Murray in his deep bass tones, stretching out his half-frozen hands to the blaze, “I hardly know what to think about to-day. It certainly has been a little different from the usual run of things, but not very much. During the whole of the morning, and for the better part of the afternoon, luck was dead against me, as usual. Then, about four o’clock, there came just one little ray of light to brighten the darkness.”

“Capital!” broke in Dick, cheerfully. “Every little helps, you know. Straws show which way the wind blows, and all the rest of it. Tell us about this ray of light of yours.”

“Well,” answered Frobisher, with a wry smile, “I don’t know that it was very much of a ray, after all; but I’ll tell you what happened. I had been running up and down office stairs from before nine o’clock until about three in the afternoon, without result, and I became heartily sick of it; and just by way of a change, I made up my mind to take a run down to the docks and see whether there was anything doing there.

“I got down at about three-thirty, and, feeling pretty hungry—for I had had nothing to eat since breakfast—I went into a small place within hail of the dock gates, and asked for some bread and cheese and beer. The landlady, a kindly old soul, seeing, I suppose, that I looked cold, and as though I could do with a rest, showed me into a little sanctum labelled *Captains’ Room*, where, I was glad to see, there blazed a fine big fire, before which stood two or three very cosy-looking arm-chairs.

“Throwing myself into one, I began to discuss my frugal luncheon with considerable appetite, and had nearly finished when the door opened, and in came the most curious-looking little man I have ever set eyes on. That he was a seaman was perfectly apparent to the meanest intelligence, and I at once set him down as the first officer—as they call themselves nowadays—or perhaps even the skipper, of a tramp steamer. He was certainly not more than five feet in height, but his breadth of shoulder and depth of chest were so enormous as to amount, literally, to a deformity; and I should judge that his strength must be herculean, as the novelists say. He was bronzed to the colour of deep mahogany, and had a heavy black moustache and a beard which grew right up to his eyes—deep-set, black, and as brilliant as diamonds. Added to this he wore gold ear-rings, and, altogether, was as like my conception of one of

the pirates of old, about whom we used to read in our young days, as any man possibly could be.

“From the moment the man entered the room I began to feel deeply interested in him, and could scarcely refrain from staring at him openly. ‘Here,’ I said to myself, ‘is a personality; a man who has knocked about the world during most of his life; a man who has seen things and done things, some of which, probably, would not bear too close scrutiny.’ For he gave me the impression of being a person who would make a good, stanch friend, but who would prove to be a thoroughly bad and dangerous enemy.

“Apparently he was a bit surprised to find anybody else in the captains’ sanctum at that time of day; and, after the first hasty glance, it seemed as though he, too, was taking more than usual interest in your humble servant; for every time I raised my eyes to take a quiet look at him, I found his black, glittering orbs fixed on me, with that curious, unblinking stare that you may have noticed among certain species of birds. Seriously, Dick, I can tell you that he kept this staring business up so long that I was beginning to feel quite uncomfortable, and had made up my mind to finish my meal as soon as possible and continue my journey down to the docks, when I heard him give vent to a kind of grunt, which might have expressed satisfaction, dissatisfaction, disgust, or any other feeling for aught I could judge.

“Then, taking his eyes off me, this curious customer tugged the bell and ordered the servant to bring him a glass of ‘rum hot’, and a bit of cold meat and bread; from which, when it arrived, he began to make a meal, eating as though it were the first time he had touched food for several days. Indeed, he ate so fast and so wolfishly, that by the time I had finished my own meal, and had rung the bell for the bill, my piratical friend was also pushing away his plate with a sigh of satisfaction, and asking for his bill. Both reckonings having been paid, I was on the point of leaving the room when the stranger, whose name I afterwards learned was Drake—a quite appropriate name, I thought, for such a freebooter-looking character—put out a great, hairy paw as though to prevent me, and remarked, in a deep, rumbling voice:—

“‘One moment, young gentleman. Unless you are in a great hurry I’d like

to have a word or two with you.'

"Naturally, Dick, I was a little astonished," proceeded Murray, "but I must confess that I had become vastly interested in the little man, and, as offers of employment sometimes come from the most unlikely sources, like a drowning man clutching at a straw I determined to hear what he had to say. Possibly it might lead to something; and in any case I felt that I should do no harm by listening to him.

"'I think I can spare you a few minutes,' I remarked. 'What is it you wish to see me about?'

"'You're a seaman, aren't you?' he said, answering my question with another.

"'Yes,' I replied, 'I am.'

"'Navy man, too, unless I'm much mistaken,' was his next remark.

"'Well,' I said, rather hesitatingly, 'I was a Navy man—a lieutenant—not so very long ago, but I had the misfortune to lose my ship under circumstances for which, I must say, in justice to myself, I think I was hardly to blame. However, the members of the court martial took a different view of the case, and I was, to put it bluntly, dismissed the Service. Since then I have been looking out for other employment—something in my own line, if possible; but if not, then anything that I can lay my hands on. But so far, I am sorry to say, I have met with nothing but rebuffs. Nobody on the face of this earth appears to need a man with my qualifications just now.'

"'Ha, ha!' chuckled the little man, rubbing his hands gleefully. 'Just as I thought when I first set eyes on you. Here, says I to myself, is a seaman, sure enough—I could tell that at the first glance—a Navy man, too, by the way he carries himself, and no longer in the Service by the general—er—um—not on active duty at the moment, I mean to say,' he ended, rather lamely, with an apologetic cough.

"I felt myself going red round the ears, Dick, and might have been inclined to be angry had anyone else spoken thus. But there was something about my little pirate that assured me he did not in the least

intend to be offensive, so I only laughed, rather ruefully. If my ‘out-of-work’ condition was so apparent as to be noted by even a common seaman, it was no wonder, I told myself, that I so often came out of private offices with the words, ‘Nothing to suit you, I’m afraid, Mr Frobisher’, ringing in my ears.

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘granted that I am an ex-naval officer looking for a job, what bearing has that upon your business with me? For I suppose you must have some idea that you and I can do business together, since you started the conversation.’

“‘What bearing?’ he repeated. ‘Well, I’ll just tell you. As it happens, I’m looking at this moment for exactly such a man as you appear to be. My name’s Drake—Captain John Drake, of the tramp steamer *Quernmore*, two thousand five hundred and sixty tons register, to be exact—and, from what you’ve just said, I think I could make a pretty good shot at your tally. Should I be very far wrong if I said that you were ex-lieutenant Murray Frobisher?’

“‘On the contrary,’ I answered, ‘you would have hit the bull’s-eye dead in the centre.’

“‘I was certain of it,’ he smiled; ‘and again I say, more emphatically than ever, that you’re the very man I’m looking for. If you’ll take that chair and pull up to the fire, I’ll take the other and we’ll have a bit of a palaver.’

“Having seated ourselves comfortably, Drake at once proceeded:—

“‘I may tell you, Mr Frobisher, that for the past twenty years I have been captain of this same steamer, trading between eastern ports all the while; and as this is the first time I have been back to old England during the whole of that period, I don’t think I’m very far wrong in saying that I know as much about the East as any man living—perhaps a good deal more. And there’s not very much going on out there that I don’t know about. Sometimes, even, I get to know about things before they begin to happen, and am able to make my plans and put a little money in my pocket thereby.

“‘This is one of the occasions upon which I have managed to get wind of something in advance, and in this case also I can see my way to making

quite a nice little pile of money. First of all, however, I must ask you to pledge your word that, if after I have told you my plans you don't feel inclined to come in with me, you'll do nothing to upset those plans in any way whatever.'

"I gave him the required promise, perhaps just a little too readily, and Drake resumed his story.

"'It so happens that my last port of call was—well—a small seaport in Korea; and, while there, I heard some news that made me sit up and take notice, as the Yankees say. It seems that, for some time past, the Government of Korea has been playing some very hanky-panky games: taxing the people until the burden has become unbearable; punishing the smallest offences with death by torture; confiscating the goods and money of every man who dared to allow himself a few more luxuries than his neighbours; and, in short, playing the very mischief all round. Naturally, even the mildest-mannered worm will turn under too much of that kind of thing, and the average Korean is anything but mild-mannered; so that, a little while ago, a party of officials decided that they had had quite enough of it, and proceeded quietly and methodically to foment a rebellion against the Government.

"'When I left Korea, things were very nearly ripe for the outbreak; but it would have been suicidal folly for the rebels to have attempted anything of the kind without proper arms to back it up, for the Korean soldiery are naturally on the side from which they draw their pay—that is to say, the side of the Government—and they also happen to be particularly well armed just now. It was therefore necessary for the would-be rebels to procure weapons before any successful revolt could be undertaken, and one day I was interviewed by one of the officials on the subject of supplying the rebel army with modern rifles.

"'To make a rather long story short, the upshot of the interview was that I was commissioned to supply the rebels with one hundred thousand rifles, with the necessary ammunition, at a price which, if the venture is successful, will make it possible for me to give up the sea altogether and live ashore at my ease.'

"'Yes, yes,' I interrupted, rather impatiently; 'this is interesting enough in

its way, Captain, but I fail to see where it concerns me.'

"'I was just coming to that,' returned Drake, 'when you interrupted me. I was unfortunate enough to lose my chief officer overboard in a hurricane in the Indian Ocean on the way home—a circumstance which upset me and my plans very considerably, for he was a fine seaman, had been with me many years, and knew all my little ways. In order to bring off this venture successfully, I must replace him, for there will be difficult and dangerous work ahead; and I need a man as much like my old chief as possible, a man who is willing to go anywhere and do anything; a man who has the brains to organise, and the muscle and courage to keep his own end up in a fight.

"'I have often heard of you, Mr Frobisher, as being just that kind of man; and I followed the whole account of your misfortune and the proceedings of the court martial in the newspapers. When I learned that they had dismissed you from the Service, I considered it a most shocking error of judgment, and told myself that, had you been in my employ, you would not have been so harshly treated. I would have liked at the time to make a try to secure your services, but I had my own chief officer with me then, and consequently had nothing to offer you. But now things are different. You need employment; I need your services, and am prepared to pay you well for them and give you a share of the profits. One of the conditions attaching to my contract is that I deliver the rifles and ammunition into the hands of the rebel officers at—at a small town a considerable distance inland from the coast; and as I cannot leave my ship, the duty of conveying the cargo inland would devolve upon you. This is where the dangerous part of the business comes in, and I shall make allowance therefore in the rate of pay I propose to offer you.

"'If you will join me—to get down to hard facts—I will give you forty pounds a month, from the day you sign on with me until you leave the ship on her return to England, or until you leave her out in the East, if you care to do that. There are plenty of chances for such a man as yourself out there. And, in addition, I agree to give you a share of one-twentieth of my profits, which I estimate should amount to about twenty thousand pounds sterling. Therefore, one thousand pounds, over and above your pay, will be your share of the enterprise. Now, I've said all I have to say; I've put the proposition before you; I've told you that it's likely to be both

profitable and dangerous: what do you say to joining me as my chief officer?'

"I tell you, Dick, I was too amazed to reply for a few moments, and my brain was in such a whirl that all I could presently say was that I would think the thing over, and meet him again at the same place to-morrow to give him a reply. The money part of the business naturally appeals very strongly to one, but the amount seems almost too good to be true. There would be at least six months' pay at forty pounds a month, and a thousand on top of that, if the expedition should prove successful; so that, all being well, I should have a little capital in my hands to work with at the end of that time, and might be able so to invest it as to make myself independent, for the remainder of my life, of anything like the experiences of this past year.

"On the other hand, I am inclined to look a little doubtfully upon this gun-running, or smuggling, business. It is all utterly at variance with Navy traditions; and I would rather starve than set my hand to anything that has even the appearance of being in the least degree dishonest. Still, I am bound to say that, from all I can learn, it looks as though the Korean rebels have a genuine grievance, and that the country might be all the better for a drastic change of government; so that I am really very undecided what to do, Dick. One thing is certain—I must get employment of some kind; and if you are seriously of opinion that I can accept Drake's offer without soiling my hands I shall most certainly do so. I have considered the matter pretty thoroughly myself on the way home, and, to tell the truth, I have almost persuaded myself that I may accept."

Dick Penryn, who during this narrative had been leaning back in his chair smoking, and listening attentively, took his pipe from his mouth, tapped the ashes out slowly and thoughtfully against the bars of the grate, and sat up straight. Then, after a lengthy pause, he delivered judgment.

"Well, Murray," he said, "I've listened most attentively to your yarn, and I've been trying to look at the matter from an unprejudiced and independent standpoint. Of course, as you very truthfully say, anything in the nature of gun-running or smuggling is totally opposed to all our Navy traditions. At the same time, you are, unfortunately, no longer in the Navy; to all intents and purposes you are now a private individual, at

liberty to take up any calling, profession, trade, or whatever you care to term it, that offers you a chance to make a living. Employment of some sort you certainly must have; and so long as that employment is honest—I might almost say in your particular case, so long as it is not *dis*honest—I think you will be wise to take the first thing that offers.

“You have been out of harness for over a year now, and your ready cash must be running pretty low, I should think; besides, this is the first offer that has come your way since you left the Navy, and if you do not accept it while you have the opportunity, it may perhaps be another year or more before you are given another chance. Personally, I do not see anything wrong with Drake’s proposal. It is a purely business enterprise. Certain folk require certain goods, and Drake contracts to supply them. In order to carry out his agreement he needs your help, and is willing to pay very handsomely for it; so my advice to you, my son, is that you take what is offered, and be thankful. Of course I need not say that if the arms had been intended for any country at war, or likely at any time to be at war, with England, such a thing would be absolutely impossible for you to contemplate for a moment; but as things are—well, I have no hesitation in saying that under similar circumstances my conscience would not worry me very much.”

At this very clear and definite expression of opinion, Frobisher’s anxious expression vanished. He had evidently been a little afraid that his friend might not look altogether favourably on the scheme; and he was not so deeply in love with it himself that he would have felt inclined to follow it up had Dick voted against it or pronounced it of too “shady” a character for a gentleman to meddle with. But since Dick’s views coincided so completely with his own, he felt that there could be no longer any room for hesitation.

“I’m glad indeed to hear you say that, Dick,” he exclaimed, jumping up. “It decides me absolutely. Tomorrow I’ll run down to the docks, see Drake on board the *Quernmore* instead of waiting to meet him at the hotel as I had arranged, and tell him I have decided to accept his offer. I would go down to-night if it were not so late; for now that I’ve made up my mind I should feel pretty bad if meanwhile he happened to meet someone else who had not so many scruples as myself, and who needed a job badly enough to accept the opening on the spot, without taking time to think it

over.

“However, I don’t think Drake will interview anybody else until he has had my answer, for he certainly seemed anxious enough to secure my particular services; so I’ll hope for the best and leave things in the hands of fate. And now, Dick,” he went on, passing his hand across his forehead, “I’ve had a long tiring day, and have a rather bad headache into the bargain; so, if you don’t mind, I think I’ll toddle up to bed and get to sleep; for I want to be up early in the morning. Good night, old man!”

“Good night, Murray, my hearty!” replied his friend. “I hope you’ll sleep well, and have pleasant dreams. You ought to, after this piece of good luck. By the way, when does Drake want you to go aboard?”

“Oh, to be sure; I quite forgot to mention that. He told me that if I decided to join him he would require me to be on board as soon as I possibly could. Indeed, he hinted that if I could make it convenient to turn up tomorrow evening and sleep aboard the ship, he would be more than pleased. You see, he has his cargo pretty nearly loaded, and hopes to be able to get away at midday the day after to-morrow; so the sooner I am on board the sooner I shall be able to take some of the worry and trouble and work off his shoulders.”

“Great Scot!” exclaimed Dick, jumping up, “he wants you to join as soon as that! Why, I fully expected that you wouldn’t be leaving under a week at the least. So to-night will be your last sleep in the old bed, for some months to come, at any rate—for I want you to make this place your home again as soon as ever you return. Make the most of it, therefore. You don’t know where you may have to lie, in what queer places you may have to sleep, before you get back. Well, I suppose I’ll see you in the morning at breakfast; and at any rate you’ll be back here after you’ve interviewed Drake, in order to pack your traps, say good-bye, and so on?”

“Yes, you’ll see me at breakfast, Dick; and I shall be back as soon as possible after I have seen the skipper, to pack and to say good-bye. By gad, Dick!” he went on, with a little burst of emotion, “but I’m more than sorry to have to leave you. You’ve been a mighty good chum to me, and as long as I live I’ll never forget your kindness. I wish to goodness you

were coming along too."

"So do I, old chap," answered Penryn, gripping his friend's hand; "but as to 'goodness' and 'kindness' to you, and all the rest of it—why, that's all rot, you know. Any man would do the same for his pal."

"Not every man, Dick," returned Murray, soberly. "If you only knew it, there are not a great many of your sort knocking about nowadays. Good night, again, old chap."

Frobisher slept well, and was not visited by any dreams, sweet or otherwise. We are sometimes told that dreams are sent to us as warnings, as forerunners of events that are to happen to us in the future; but if this is really true it seems strange that Murray's sleep should have been so deep and dreamless. For had that young man been able to foresee but one half of the strange and terrible adventures that were in store for him, it is scarcely to be doubted that he would, in spite of his long period of unemployment, have gladly allowed Captain Drake to take somebody else in his place, notwithstanding the offer of the forty pounds a month salary, and the thousand-pound bonus at the successful termination of the venture.

Chapter Two.

Eastward Ho!

So soundly and dreamlessly did Frobisher sleep that he did not wake until the clear notes of the dressing bugle—a solemn farce which Dick insisted upon his servant performing when ashore—had almost finished ringing through the little cottage.

Punctually at 8 a.m. the old marine who acted as Dick's servant when he was ashore, and as general housekeeper and caretaker when he was afloat, sounded the bugle as a signal to his master that it was time to turn out; and the neighbours in the houses round about—who, by the way, referred to Penryn as "that very eccentric young man"—had come to look upon the instrument somewhat in the light of a town clock; so much so that several of them set their watches by it, and one old gentleman was in

the habit of leaving his front door and sprinting for the eight-fifteen train to town punctually upon the first note.

Frobisher sat up in bed with a yawn, and was half-way to the bath-room before he was sufficiently wideawake to recollect that this morning was different from the three hundred and sixty-five odd preceding mornings. But as he remembered that at last he had secured the offer of regular and profitable employment—although not quite along the lines he had hoped for—he let out a whoop of rejoicing that made the cottage ring.

Having completed his toilet, Frobisher came downstairs whistling, to find Penryn standing in front of the fire, warming his coat tails and sniffing hungrily, while from the direction of the kitchen came certain savoury smells.

"'Morning, Murray!"

"'Morning, Dick!" was the response. "What's for breakfast this morning?"

"Don't know," answered his friend, "but it smells like eggs and bacon, and steak and mushrooms, and chops and kidneys on toast. I hope so, at any rate, for I'm hungry this morning, and feel quite ready for a snack."

"Snack!" laughed Frobisher. "Is what you have just mentioned your idea of a snack? It sounds to me more like the menu of an aldermanic banquet. By the way, I didn't know the parcel-postman had arrived yet; he's early, isn't he?"

"Oh," replied Dick, turning rather red, "I thought I'd put that away. No, the postman hasn't been. That's just something I went out for, early this morning, for—oh—for a friend of mine."

"Sorry, old man," said Murray, "I didn't mean to be inquisitive. By the way, is there a train to town somewhere about nine or half-past? I should like to catch it if there is."

"One at nine twenty-three," answered Dick. "You'll catch it easily. And now, here's Tom with the breakfast; bring yourself to an anchor, and let's begin. I'm as hungry as a hunter. How about yourself?"

“Rather better than usual this morning,” laughed Frobisher. “A little hope is a splendid thing for giving one an appetite.” And with this remark both the young men fell to with a will.

The meal finished, Frobisher hurried off to catch his train; travelled up to London; crossed the city; and took another train down to the docks. Arrived there, he enquired the whereabouts of the steamer *Quernmore*.

“Over there, sir,” a policeman told him, pointing to a spot about two hundred yards distant; and thither the young man made his way, halting presently at the shore end of a gangway leading on to the steamer, to take a good look at the craft that was to be his floating home for so long a period.

Certainly, he told himself, if one might judge by appearances, Captain Drake had ample justification for being proud of his steamer; for she was as pretty a model of a craft as Frobisher, for all his long experience, had ever set eyes on. Indeed, one would almost have been excused for assuming that, but for her size, she might have been a private yacht at some period of her existence. Flush-decked, with a graceful curving run, a clipper bow with gilt figure-head, and a long, overhanging counter, the hull painted a particularly pleasing shade of dark green down to within a couple of feet of the water-line, and polished black below that, she made a picture completely satisfying to the eye of the most exacting critic. She was rigged as a topsail schooner, and her funnel was tall, oval-shaped, and cream-coloured. Indeed, anything less like the traditional tramp steamer, and more resembling a gentleman’s yacht, it would have been difficult to find.

By the look of her, too, thought Frobisher, she should be able to show a pretty fair turn of speed, if she were put to it—sixteen knots at the least, the young lieutenant judged—and the idea occurred to him that possibly, some time in the future, the lives of her crew might depend upon those few extra knots of which she appeared capable.

However, it would not do to stand there admiring the ship. “Business before pleasure,” the young man reminded himself; and, involuntarily straightening himself up as though about to board a man-of-war, Frobisher marched across the gangway, and asked the first seaman he

met whether Captain Drake was aboard.

“He’s in the chart-house at this moment, sir,” answered the man; “I’ll take you to him.” And a minute later Frobisher found himself ducking his head in order to get in through the low chart-house door-way.

“Hillo! it’s you already, is it?” exclaimed Drake, looking up from a chart over which he was poring. “I didn’t expect to see you until this afternoon. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. I hope you’ve come to tell me that we are to be shipmates for this cruise,” he added, eagerly. “If I can’t persuade you to come in with me, I shall be obliged to sail shorthanded, for I’ve no time to do any more looking round now.”

“Then you can make your mind easy,” laughed Frobisher. “To tell you the simple truth, I believe I had practically made up my mind to sail with you before I said good-bye to you yesterday. Yes, I’m coming, skipper; and I hope, for both our sakes, that the voyage will turn out as successfully as you desire.”

“Good man!” heartily ejaculated the skipper, thrusting out his hand. “That’s the best news I’ve heard for a long while. Now, where’s your dunnage? I’ll show you your room, and you can settle down right away.”

“My dunnage isn’t down yet, skipper,” replied Frobisher, smiling. “I came down just to tell you what I had decided, intending to go back and fetch my traps this afternoon.”

Drake looked rather blank at hearing this. “That’s a pity,” he remarked, thoughtfully, half to himself. Then, addressing Frobisher: “Well, trot away back, and get them down here as quickly as you can, will ye? Certain events have happened since I saw you yesterday that make me anxious to leave at the very earliest moment possible, and I’ve already made arrangements to clear directly after I had seen you this afternoon.”

“I’ll be off at once, skipper,” returned Frobisher, “and be back again not later than one o’clock.” And the young man darted out of the chart-house, across the gangway, and out of the dock premises like a sprinter, leaving Drake staring open-mouthed after him.

“He certainly can take a hint quicker than any man I’ve ever met,” said

that worthy, as he resumed the study of his chart.

Two hours later Frobisher was back in Kingston, had packed his belongings, and was saying good-bye to his old friend, Dick Penryn.

Neither of the men felt very happy at parting, and both, after the manner of their kind, tried to conceal their real feelings by an exaggerated show of indifference. Thus it was that their farewells were brief, almost to curtness, and to the point; and it was only as Frobisher was actually on the door-step that Dick pushed into his friend's hands a parcel—the same parcel that had caught Frobisher's eye that morning. It was heavy, and the recipient could not guess, even remotely, as to its contents; but he thanked Dick heartily, tucked the package under his arm, and got into the cab which had been sent for.

One last firm hand-grip, two rather husky good-byes, now that the actual moment for parting had come, and the pair were separated—one bound for the far, mysterious East, the other to return in a few days to the ship he had come to look upon as his real home.

It was with a few minutes in hand that Frobisher leapt out of his cab at the dock gates, and collected his few belongings. He paid the cabby, and, with his customary swiftness of movement, turned and started to trot quickly through the gates towards the *Quernmore*; but as he did so, he collided violently with another man, causing him to sit down suddenly on the hard cobbles, while Frobisher himself dropped one of his portmanteaux.

The fat policeman on duty at the entrance chuckled loudly; Frobisher laughed and picked up his bag, as he murmured an apology; but the victim on the cobbles appeared to be saying unpleasant things venomously in some language quite unfamiliar to the young lieutenant—who knew a good many—and this caused him to pause an instant and look at the man.

He was a brown, or rather, yellow man; and for a moment Frobisher took him for a Chinaman. But a second glance convinced the latter that he did not belong to that nation, nor to the Japanese, although he was undoubtedly of Eastern extraction.

Murray had no time to waste in conjectures, however, and with a hearty English “Sorry, old man!” he proceeded to the *Quernmore*, where Drake himself conducted him to his state-room.

Frobisher would have left his unpacking until the evening, and gone on duty at once; but Drake informed him that there was no need. All the cargo was aboard; the crew—specially selected men—were all in the forecastle; and there was nothing to be done until three o’clock, when Drake would get his papers, and the tug would arrive to help him out of the dock. Frobisher therefore unpacked and stowed his things away; afterwards getting into his first-officer’s uniform, which had been hastily adapted from his own old Navy outfit by the removal of the shoulder-straps and the “executive curl” from the gold stripes on the sleeves. He then proceeded to examine the parcel placed in his hands by Dick Penryn.

Removing the brown paper, he found a square, polished mahogany box, fastened by two hooks as well as by a lock and key; and, upon opening the lid, he gave a cry of pleasure and surprise.

Inside were a pair of most business-like large-calibre, blued revolvers, carrying the heavy .450 cartridge—serviceable weapons indeed, capable of dropping a man in his tracks at a distance of a hundred yards. In addition to the weapons themselves, there was a cavity beneath the tray in which they rested, fitted up to contain exactly one hundred rounds of ammunition, and it was this—deadly-looking, blunt-nosed bullets in brass cartridge-cases—that had made the parcel so heavy. With his eyes snapping with gratification, Frobisher locked away the case in a drawer, and went out on deck to find Drake.

As he emerged from the companion-way, he saw that the tug was already alongside; and he immediately ran up on to the bridge, so as to be ready to carry out any orders that Drake might have for him. But it appeared that the skipper intended to work his ship out of dock entirely with his own hands, so Frobisher had a few minutes in which to look round him and take in, for the last time for several months at any rate, the intimate sights around him.

The *Quernmore* was now slowly passing out between the pierheads, and

Frobisher was keeping a sharp look-out to see that none of the crew attempted a “pierhead jump”, when he happened to catch sight of his late acquaintance of the collision. The man was standing at the extreme end of the pier, leaning against a bollard, and observing the *Quernmore* and her crew with a scrutiny so close as to be a little suspicious; and Murray half-turned to point him out to Drake.

He need not have troubled to do so, however, for he at once perceived that the skipper was already aware of the man’s presence. If looks went for anything, too, Drake was intensely annoyed; and the thought at once occurred to Frobisher that the presence of this yellow man might possibly have had something to do with Drake’s sudden resolution to leave during the early afternoon. He said nothing, however, at the moment, but continued to stare at the Easterner as long as he could see him clearly, in order to impress the man’s appearance and features indelibly on his memory. For a presentiment had just seized him that this man was in some strange way bound up with his own fate, and that they were destined to meet again under far different circumstances from those under which they had come together, shortly before, at the dock gates.

He had not much time or opportunity, however, to dwell at length upon such matters; for a quarter of an hour later the tug had cast off, the pilot had taken charge, and the *Quernmore*, under her own steam, was proceeding rapidly down the winding, traffic-laden river.

They were passing Gravesend when Drake suddenly turned to Frobisher and remarked:

“I say, Mr Frobisher, did you happen to notice a yellow-skinned chap standing on the pierhead as we left the dock?”

“Why, yes,” replied Frobisher. “That was the second time I’d seen him. The first time I cannoned into him at the dock gates as I was coming aboard, and sent him spinning. You should have heard the remarks he made—though I didn’t understand a word he said, but guessed what they meant by his expression. I believe, if it hadn’t been for the bobby at the gate, the fellow would have tried to knife me, although my running him down was quite an accident. I saw his hand fly to his waist-belt, but I didn’t stay to argue with him. I didn’t like the looks of the fellow a little bit,

and I have a sort of presentiment that we have not seen the last of him. He seemed to be taking quite a lot of interest in the *Quernmore*. Of what nationality do you suppose him to be?"

"That man," answered Drake, "has caused me a heap of anxiety. Ever since we started loading our cargo, he has been on the watch every day and all day. I'll wager he counted every chest and case that we took aboard; and I feel convinced in my own mind that he is a Korean spy. If so, we may be in for a lot of trouble when we arrive out there; for he can easily cable, or even get there before us by catching a fast mail-boat. I tell you candidly that I am not very comfortable about the business; and I shall be glad to get out of English waters, too, for I am not quite as clear as I should like to be concerning the law, in its bearing on cases of this sort. I fancy that the British Government has the power to stop or delay us, if our Korean friend chooses to represent in the proper quarters that I am carrying arms to rebels arrayed against their lawful sovereign."

"If the news should by any means leak out," said Frobisher, "I think there's no doubt that you will be delayed, if not stopped altogether; for England does not want a quarrel on her hands with anybody just now, however insignificant they may be. So we had better keep our weather eyes lifting, and be prepared for all eventualities."

By the time they cleared the mouth of the river and dropped the pilot, however, darkness had long since fallen; and Drake hoped that with the dawn of the morrow he would be far enough down the Channel to be clear of any danger of recall or overhauling.

To this end he shaped a course that would carry him well over toward the French coast, determining to run down on that side of the Channel and so avoid, if possible, any prowling English cruisers. And it was well for him that he did so; for on the following morning, happening to take a glance astern through the glass, Frobisher caught sight, about eight miles distant, of a small gunboat coming along in their wake at top-speed, and flying a signal of some sort which the ex-naval officer shrewdly suspected to be a summons to heave-to, though the craft was too far away for the signal to be plainly read.

He at once informed Drake, who promptly went down to the engine-room

and gave the chief engineer a few private instructions, with the result that, presently, dense volumes of smoke began to pour out of the *Quernmore's* funnel, and her speed quickened up until Frobisher judged her to be doing quite sixteen knots. Then he and Drake took turns at watching the war-ship astern, when it soon became evident that, even if she was not increasing the distance, the *Quernmore* was at least holding her own.

That this was apparent to the commander of the gunboat was demonstrated shortly afterwards, when a puff of white smoke broke out from her bows, and the distant boom of a gun floated down to them.

"I feared as much," exclaimed Drake, uneasily; "but I believe we shall get clear unless that fellow's firing brings a cruiser out from Plymouth to stop us. But,"—brightening up a little—"I fancy we are too far over toward the French side for anything of that sort; so, if we can only keep ahead, I think we shall pull out safely."

The gunboat continued firing, and after a time began to send solid shot after the flying *Quernmore*, as a stronger hint to heave-to; but her guns were not powerful enough for the range, and the shot dropped harmlessly into the water far away astern. She was still in sight when darkness fell, but had lost ground badly during the day; and when the following morning dawned she was out of sight below the horizon.

This was the only attempt made to stop Drake in English waters; and he was shortly afterward safely in the Bay of Biscay.

There is no need to describe in detail the voyage to the East, since it was entirely uneventful. They stopped at Port Said to coal; coaled again at Colombo and Hongkong; and then headed straight for the Korean coast, neither Drake nor Frobisher having taken particular notice of the P&O liner that had left England the day after themselves, and steamed out of Colombo harbour just as the *Quernmore* was entering it. Neither did they observe the fashionably-dressed, yellow-skinned gentleman on board the liner who treated them to such a close scrutiny through a pair of field-glasses. They had, for the moment, forgotten all about their Korean friend of the docks; and, in any case, would hardly have expected to find him on the first-class promenade deck of a crack ocean liner.

It was just two months after leaving London when, late one afternoon, Drake pointed ahead, to the north, indicating what at first sight appeared to be a belt of cloud right down upon the horizon.

“Ah!” remarked Frobisher, following the direction of the skipper’s outstretched finger; “we are nearly at our destination. That’s Quelpart Island, I take it. We ought to anchor off Fusan, then, about this time to-morrow, eh, skipper?”

Drake turned and regarded his officer solemnly. Then he slowly lowered his right eyelid.

“We shall pass Fusan about that time, Mr Frobisher,” he said; “but we do not stop there. Fusan is our port, according to the ship’s papers, I happen to remember; but our actual destination is a small harbour about two hundred miles north of that. We should never be able to get our cargo unloaded at Fusan, much less into the rebels’ hands. Sam-riek is our goal—quite a small unimportant place, right on the coast. There’s good, sheltered anchorage there; and, if we have the luck we deserve, we shall be able to unload the stuff without fear of interruption.”

“Ah!” remarked Frobisher, and relapsed into deep thought.

On the evening of the second day following, the *Quernmore* was close in under the land; and, just as the sun was setting behind the Korean hills, the anchor plashed down from the bows, and the voyage was at an end. The *Quernmore* had reached her destination, done her part; and now it was for Murray Frobisher to carry out the other half of Drake’s contract, and place the cargo in the hands of the rebels, at a spot a week’s journey or more up-country. Would he, or would he not, be able to do this; and, more important still, from his own personal point of view, would he be able to get back to the ship with a whole skin? Time alone would show.

Chapter Three.

Up-Country.

No sooner had the anchor splashed into the water than Captain Drake gave the order for the ship's lanterns to be lighted, and some of them slung in the rigging, while others were to be placed at intervals along the bulwarks. Blocks and tackles were then made fast to the end of the fore and main booms, the booms were triced up at an angle to serve as derricks, and the hatch-covers were stripped off.

It was to be a case of all hands working all night to get the cargo ashore; for now that the ship had arrived in Korean waters—and consequently in the zone of danger—Drake was all eagerness to get his contract completed, to collect his payments, and to clear off out of harm's way, with his steamer still in his own hands. For she was his own property, and to lose her would mean ruin for her owner.

Arrangements had long since been made between Drake and Frobisher as to the method of procedure upon arrival at their destination, and the mere fact that at the last moment the point of disembarkation of the cargo had been changed to Sam-riek made no difference in the plans.

It had been agreed between Drake and the official negotiating for the rebels that the latter should not put in an appearance at the point of debarkation, because of the possibility that things might at the critical moment go wrong, but that the Englishman should land the arms in his own boats, and convey them up-country at his own risk, to a place which, it now transpired, was called Yong-wol, in the department of Kang-won, and situated on the river Han. Here they were to be handed over to the rebel representative and his escort; after which they could be conveyed by water to the environs of Seoul itself, where, in all probability, they would in the first instance be used. This arrangement would necessitate a journey across the entire peninsula of Korea; but to land the arms on the west coast, where the Government troops were mostly posted, would have been simply courting disaster. On the east coast there were only a *few* scattered outposts of troops; the inhabitants were hand-in-glove with the rebels—although none of them had as yet actually implicated

themselves; and the inhabitants of Sam-riek, in particular, could be relied upon not to offer any opposition to the landing, or to inform the Government authorities of what was in the wind.

When, therefore, about nine o'clock that night—at which time the decks were packed with cases that had been got up from below in readiness to be sent ashore in the boats—there came from the look-out whom Drake, as a precautionary measure, had posted in the foretop a hail of "Ho! boat ahoy! What do you want?" every man on deck jumped as though he had been shot, so little was any interruption of any sort expected.

Drake and Frobisher darted to the side together, as though moved by the same impulse, and leant over the bulwarks, peering into the darkness and listening intently for any sound of oars that should enable them to discover the whereabouts of the approaching craft.

Whoever the occupant of the boat might be, he was evidently neither an enemy nor a spy; for hardly had the challenge left the seaman's mouth when the reply came out of the darkness, in a thin, high-pitched, timid voice: "All alightee; all alightee; it only me."

"And who the mischief may 'only me' be?" growled Drake, who had been very considerably startled, and therefore felt rather annoyed with himself.

"Sh, sh! mastel," urged the voice; "you makee not so muchee shout; it vely dangelous. Thlow me lope, so I climb up; I got big piecee news for mastel." And the sound of muffled oars was again heard, this time evidently close to the ship.

"H'm!" muttered Drake under his breath to Frobisher; "I don't much like the look of this. It seems as though something had miscarried, for this fellow to come out here at this time of night, with a 'big piecee news'. I suppose there is no doubt the beggar really has a message of some sort for us, so I'll have to let him come aboard. But if he tries any hanky-panky tricks, I'll send him over the side in double-quick time to feed the sharks. I can't afford to have this venture miss fire now. Jones, open the gangway, and throw a rope over the side," he added, turning to one of the seamen; "and stand by to hit, and hit hard, if everything is not exactly as it should be."

A rope was allowed to slide over the side through the open entry port; and a moment later it began to quiver as the occupant of the boat left his craft and proceeded to scramble up, hand over hand. Presently there appeared on deck a little, thin, wizened man, who might have been any age over sixty. He was clothed in nothing but a length of brown cotton material swathed round his body, and round the upper part of each leg, the end being drawn up between the thighs so as to form a kind of rough apology for a pair of knickerbockers. His lower limbs and feet were bare, and on his head he wore one of those high, broad-brimmed, conical hats that are so common among the Koreans.

“Well,” exclaimed Drake sharply, as this peculiar-looking individual reached the deck and stood staring round him, “what the dickens d’ye want? Who are ye? What’s your name?”

“My name Ling-Wong, mastel,” replied the Korean, “and I come flom Excellency Kyong-Bah, at Yong-wol.”

“Phew!” whistled Drake, turning to Frobisher. “Kyong-bah is the man I negotiated with about this cargo. What’s in the wind, I wonder? Yes—go on,” he added to Ling impatiently. “What’s your message?”

“Me wait, mastel, six, seven day,” said Ling, “wait fol the smoke-junk, to tell you that the Govelnol at Seoul, he got know about evelything, and he sendee tloops catchee you, if he can. Excellency Kyong-Bah tell me say you he must havee those lifles, and think you get them safe thlough if you vely quick and caleful; but he tell me say you must hully, ol you be caught.”

“And that’s over a week ago!” groaned Drake. “What chance have we, think you, Mr Frobisher, of getting this cargo safely through now?”

“Oh!” exclaimed Frobisher cheerfully, seeing that Drake was inclined to take a dismal view of things; “if we can get ’em ashore uninterfered with, I’ll engage to deliver them to Kyong-Bah, or whatever the johnny’s name is, safely enough. *Nil desperandum*, you know, skipper—that’s Latin for ‘You never know what you can do till you try’.”

“Those Latin chaps certainly did know how to say a lot in a few words, didn’t they, Mr Frobisher?” remarked Drake, a little more cheerfully. “But

do you really think you can get through if we get the arms safely ashore?”

“Sure of it,” answered Frobisher, with a good deal more confidence than he really felt. “I’ll take this chap as a guide, collect sufficient carts and mules at Sam-riek to take the whole lot at one trip, and then get this man Ling to show me some bypath over the hills which the Government troops are not likely to take. I understood you to say that there is a good road from Yong-wol to Sam-riek; and, if I know anything of Orientals, the troops will take it. If, then, we take another route, you will have the pleasure of seeing those fellows sitting on their haunches in Sam-riek, waiting for you to unload your cargo into their lap, while I shall be travelling another way, under a heavy press of canvas, conveying the consignment on its way to its proper owners. Savvee?”

Drake brought his hand down on Frobisher’s shoulder. “By the Great Horn Spoon, Mr Frobisher,” he exclaimed, “I don’t know what I should have done without you! That’s a Hundred A1 plan; and if you can only get safely away before the troops appear, I’ll engage so to arrange matters that they shall believe the cargo to be still in the ship. That’ll keep ’em busy long enough to allow you to carry out your part without interference. Of course a lot’ll depend upon the extent to which the people of Sam-riek dislike the Government. If they are really on the side of the rebels, they’ll keep mum about the stuff being already ashore; but if there are any traitors among them, the first thing they’ll do will be to curry favour by setting the troops after you, one-time.”

“Yes, that’s so,” agreed Frobisher, stroking his chin. “Still, it’s the only way out that I can see; and the sooner we get the cargo ashore and test the scheme for ourselves, the better, I think.”

“Right!” answered Drake. “Come along, boys,”—to the listening crew —“you have heard what’s been said, so you see we’ve got to hurry. Jones, take this fellow Ling down below, and lock him up somewhere until Mr Frobisher is ready for him—I’m not taking any risks this trip. Then, when you’ve done that, take a few of the hands and swing eery one of our boats over into the water. We have enough cases on deck now to begin taking some of them ashore.”

Encouraged by the captain and Frobisher, both of whom worked as hard

as, or harder than, any of the seamen, the men buckled-to again in earnest; and soon the chests and cases were leaping up out of the holds on to the decks, off the decks into the boats, and so ashore, at a very satisfactory rate of progress.

All night the work went swiftly and steadily on, and well into the following morning, with only a few minutes' break for meals. Frobisher went ashore early in the morning with one of the loads, taking Ling with him as interpreter, in order to make arrangements for the transport of the cargo, and also to try to discover if there were as yet any signs of the arrival of the troops.

The villagers proved only too glad of the chance to hire out their carts and animals; and after a lengthy ride along the Yong-wol road, on a horse which he had borrowed, Frobisher satisfied himself that, thus far at any rate, there was no sign of troops in the neighbourhood.

By the time he got back to the ship the last of the cases was just being placed on deck, and two more trips of the little fleet of the *Quernmore's* boats would see the whole of the cargo safely ashore. Frobisher therefore ran down to his cabin and, throwing off his uniform, dressed himself in a pair of khaki-coloured riding-breeches, which he had brought out with him from England, thick-soled brown boots, and good leather leggings. An old Norfolk jacket completed the outfit, so far as his outer garb was concerned. And when he had donned an old and somewhat battered, but still serviceable, topi helmet—a relic of more prosperous days—and had fastened round him a leather belt and bandolier combined, filled it with cartridges, and attached to it one of Penryn's revolvers in a leather holster, it would have been rather difficult to recognise in him the erstwhile smart and spruce Murray Frobisher. Rather he resembled a South African transport-rider in a state of disrepair, and of so truculent an appearance that he might have been expected to put to flight with ease, and singlehanded, a considerable detachment of Korean soldiery. He slipped the second revolver into one of the side pockets of his jacket, and an extra supply of cartridges into the other pocket, and then ran up on deck, ready to start on his perilous journey into the interior.

By the time he had said good-bye to the skipper, and had received his

instructions with regard to the collection of the purchase-money and sundry other matters, the last of the cargo had been sent ashore; and Drake's own gig was waiting at the foot of the accommodation-ladder to take the young man to the landing-place.

As he was on the point of descending the side-ladder, Drake asked him to wait a moment, and ran down below; reappearing, a few seconds later, with a serviceable ship's cutlass in his hand, which he himself belted round Frobisher's waist.

"Revolvers are all very well in their way," remarked the little skipper; "but sometimes a man is too busy fighting to have time to reload, and then he is very glad to have a yard of good, stout steel in his fist. Take it along with you, Mr Frobisher. If there should happen to be a scrap, I feel sure you will find it mighty handy. Avoid a fight if you can, of course; but, as Charlie Dickens says in that play of his, *Jim the Penman*, 'once in a fight so carry yourself that the enemy shall be sorry for himself.' Good-bye, my boy, and take care of yourself!"

With a laughing reply Frobisher clasped Drake's hand once more, and ran lightly down the ladder into the boat; and fifteen minutes later he found himself safely ashore. The boat pulled back to the ship, where the remainder of the small fleet were already being hoisted up to the davits; and he was alone in a strange land, charged with a dangerous mission, with no white man to share his burden, and with only one man, Ling, who had even a nodding acquaintance with the English language.

Escort there was none, in the usual sense of the word, for the drivers of the carts containing the arms and ammunition-chests, although armed with old-fashioned muzzle-loading muskets, out-of-date halberds, and, in some cases, bows and arrows, could not possibly be relied upon to put up any sort of a fight in the event of an encounter with the regular Korean soldiery. The only person beside himself who was armed with a modern weapon was the interpreter, Ling, who carried a fairly recent and reliable Marlin repeating rifle, holding eight cartridges; but this was all the ammunition he had, so that, if trouble arose, he could not be relied upon very far, either.

Having reached the village, Frobisher took Ling with him and went off to

see that the carts were properly loaded, and the mule-drivers at their stations; and to his astonishment found that, in spite of the proverbial slackness of the Korean, everything was in readiness, and only his word was necessary to enable the caravan to start. During his previous visit to the shore he had done a little exploration, and had quite made up his mind which road to take in order to avoid the troops coming from Yong-wol—provided, of course, that they came by the direct route. So he did not waste any time, but, after a last look round, to see that everything was satisfactory, commanded Ling to set the caravan in motion, himself remaining behind until the last cart had left the village, in order to make sure that, at the last moment, none of the drivers should shirk the risks and try to desert.

There was no attempt of the kind, however. The Korean mule-drivers appeared absolutely apathetic and indifferent to any possible danger. They were being well paid for their trouble, and “sufficient unto the day” was evidently their motto. Satisfied, therefore, that there was nothing to fear in that respect, Frobisher mounted the elderly steed which he had managed to purchase at about ten times its proper value, and rode to the head of the column, where he found Ling, already fast asleep on the back of the mule which he had elected to ride.

So the long column was at last fairly started on its perilous hundred miles’ journey into the interior of Korea—a journey which involved the negotiation of heavy, ill-made roads, the fording of deep, swift rivers and streams, and, most difficult of all, the passage of the range of lofty hills on the other side of which the town of Yong-wol, their destination, was situated.

For a long time, until, in fact, the caravan disappeared from view among the trees, Captain Drake watched it through his telescope; and, when finally the last cart disappeared in the forest, the man whom Frobisher had once called his “little pirate” was not ashamed to follow the example of his illustrious namesake of immortal memory. He went down to his cabin and remained there for some minutes, actually praying for the safe return of the man to whom he had grown to be very sincerely attached—our friend Murray Frobisher.

It was about three o’clock in the afternoon when the caravan got away

from Sam-riek, and urge and command and even implore as he might, Frobisher was quite unable to get the expedition farther than ten miles from the coast before darkness fell and it became necessary to camp for the night. A suitable place for an encampment was eventually found, on an open, level strip of ground by the side of a considerable stream, about half a mile ahead, a distance which Frobisher was compelled to force the drivers to traverse almost at the muzzle of the pistol. He managed, however, to convince the dull-witted Koreans that another half-mile would not kill them; and about seven o'clock the party pulled up at the spot selected. A couple of the carts contained provisions, and on the top of these Frobisher had placed a bundle containing a tent and blankets for his personal use.

He pitched the tent, spread his blankets on the ground, and then, before allowing the men to prepare their supper, ordered that all the vehicles should be formed into a circle, with his own tent in the centre, the shafts of each being run in under the hind wheels of the one in front, so as to form a fairly effective barricade, which would at least prevent the camp being rushed without warning, should an attack be made by the enemy. He also took care that the mules were picketed within the enclosure so formed, so that they might not stray away or be stolen; and finally, he told off half a dozen of the best-armed and most resolute-looking men, under the command of Ling, to act as sentries in different watches during the first half of the night, resolving to keep watch himself during the second half—the period during which there was most likelihood of danger.

These arrangements having been made, Frobisher served out their rations to the men, partook of his own supper, and, leaving strict orders with Ling that he was to be called at midnight, went to his tent, rolled himself up in his blankets, laid his cutlass and revolvers beside him, and was soon asleep.

He did not know how long he had been sleeping when he suddenly awoke, with a sense of danger and oppression strong upon him. Like most men who pass their lives at sea, or in uncivilised parts of the world, he seemed to be possessed of a sixth sense which always gave him warning when there was peril at hand; and it was this sense which now brought him broad awake in an instant, with his ears straining to catch the least sound, and his eyes peering through the darkness to catch the

first glimpse of an intruder.

Like a wise man, he refrained from making the slightest sound that might betray his whereabouts to a prowling assassin; but, slowly and very carefully, he disengaged his arms from the blankets and reached out for one of his revolvers. With this in his hand he felt much more comfortable, and fully prepared for eventualities.

Then, sitting up carefully, Frobisher again listened intently for some sound which might tell him the position of the danger, if any; but, strain his ears as he might, he could catch not the slightest suggestion of a warning. There was, however, a certain faint, peculiar odour in the tent, which he felt sure proceeded neither from the canvas nor from the blankets. Very faint indeed it was, and it would perhaps have been quite imperceptible to anybody with a less keen olfactory sense than Frobisher possessed; but it was there, all the same, and he felt that he would very much like to identify it and determine its origin. It was not unpleasant—indeed the suggestion was of a pleasant perfume, a perfume which he had often smelt before; but what that perfume was he could not for the life of him recall just at the moment.

One thing was certain, however, and that was that there had been no such odour in the tent when he went to sleep; and it must therefore have been brought in by somebody since then. Now, nobody but himself had any business there, unless it were Ling come to wake him. But Ling would, or should, have stood at the entrance and called him; or at the most, if calling had not aroused him, have come boldly in and shaken him.

There was no sound, however, in the tent, and therefore the intruder, if there were one, had no legitimate business there; and the more Frobisher thought about the matter, the more certain he became that all was not as it should be.

He therefore very slowly and very silently divested himself of his blankets, leaving them in a bundle on the ground, and, with the revolver still grasped tightly in his hand, started to crawl noiselessly toward the open flap of the tent, which he located by seeing the glimmer of stars shining through. At the same time he took care to keep close to the side

of the tent walls, so as to avoid, if possible, colliding with his supposed unknown visitor.

The odour was much more pungent now, and Frobisher knew that in a few seconds he would recognise it for what it was. Surely, he thought, there was a suggestion of oiliness about it, and—then in a moment he knew. The strange perfume was that of sandalwood oil, and he instantly realised what the circumstance meant. There was a human being in the tent, somebody who had planned murder, or robbery, or both; and the man had oiled himself so that, if his intended victim happened to be awake and grappled with him, he would be able to twist himself loose and escape.

Frobisher was by no means easily flurried, but when he realised that he was alone in a dark tent with a desperate man seeking his life; that he was possibly within arm's-reach of the fellow at that moment; and that in another second he might feel a long, keen blade sliding in between his ribs, it was only with difficulty that he restrained himself from firing off all six chambers of his revolver into the darkness, in the hope that one of the bullets might find its billet.

And then, at the very moment when he felt that his nerves would bear the strain no longer, the spell was broken. Suddenly there came a long, hissing breath close beside him, and immediately afterward a terrific thud, as something—Frobisher could easily guess what—was driven with deadly force into the heap of blankets close beside him.

With a tremendous bound the young Englishman leaped forward, dropping his revolver as he did so, and grappled with the intruder; but the man had been prepared for any mishap by oiling his body, and twisted and squirmed like an eel. So slippery was his skin that Frobisher, with all his tremendous strength, recognised that he could not hold him. He therefore gripped the fellow's wrist as firmly as he could with his left hand, and drew back his clenched right fist for a knock-out blow. But before he could deliver it he received a fearful kick in the stomach from one of the man's feet—which luckily were bare, or he would have been killed—and he doubled up like a jack-knife, involuntarily loosening his grip on the other's wrist. In an instant the man had gained the door of the tent, and was lost in the darkness, while poor Frobisher lay upon the

ground gasping.

It was fully ten minutes before he had so far recovered as to be able to stand upright; but as soon as his strength returned he struck a match and lighted a lantern. By its light he examined the pile of blankets which had formed his bed, and, as he expected, found them pinned to the ground by a long, wavy-bladed knife, very similar in appearance to a Malay kris, which had been driven into the earth up to the very hilt by a blow that would assuredly have killed him, had he continued to slumber for another five minutes.

Frobisher drew out the knife, and tried to remember whether he had ever seen it before—whether he had observed it in the possession of any of the men composing the caravan; but he could not remember having seen a knife of the kind in the hands of any of the drivers. He therefore threw it aside, and cautiously opened the flap of the tent to see whether there was any mischief going on outside. But all was silent, and he could see some of the shadowy forms of the men on guard.

It was then half-past eleven, as he found by looking at his watch, and too late to go to sleep again, even if he felt inclined.

Precisely half an hour later a figure appeared at the door of the tent, and a voice observed quietly: “Time to wake up, mastel. You tellee me wake you one piecee time twelluf. Twelluf now, and me welly sleepy.”

It was Ling.

Chapter Four.

Betrayed.

Frobisher scrutinised the Korean’s face closely, but there was no shadow of change in its Oriental impassivity. For all that the man’s bearing betrayed, he might never have moved from his post since the camp had been pitched; yet the young Englishman could not rid himself of the suspicion that Ling was not exactly what he appeared to be. Moreover, now that the man was standing inside the tent, Frobisher again became

conscious of a faint suggestion of the odour of sandal-wood oil. However, it would not in any way suit his plans to betray his suspicions of the Korean at present, therefore he merely contented himself with remarking quietly:

“Very well, Ling. You had better get to sleep, so as to be rested by the morning; and I’ll wake you as soon as it is time to break camp and be stirring. By the way, I fancied I heard someone prowling about my tent half an hour ago. I suppose you did not notice anything out of the common, or you would have reported it to me at once, eh?”

“Me no undelstand ‘anything outel le common’, mastel; what mastel mean?” enquired Ling, his almond-shaped eyes opening in apparent puzzlement.

“I mean,” replied Frobisher, rather testily—for he now felt almost convinced that the fellow was trying to hoodwink him—“that I suppose you are quite sure that no spy, no one belonging to the enemy, in fact, approached or entered the camp while I was asleep and you were on guard?”

“Oh!” exclaimed Ling, his face breaking out into a smile, “I undelstand now. No, mastel; nobody not come neal camp. If anyone had come he would be dead by now; me shoot any stlangel quick, without ask any questions.”

“All right!” answered Frobisher, permitting himself to be almost persuaded against his better judgment that the man was honest, so absolutely child-like and bland was his manner; “get away to your own quarters and secure as much sleep as you possibly can, for we have a long march before us to-morrow.” And he turned away, to show Ling that his presence was no longer required.

But at the moment of turning he could almost have sworn that he caught sight of Ling’s lips parted in a sardonic smile. Frobisher wheeled again immediately, but when he once more looked at the man, the Korean’s face was as indifferently emotionless as though carved from stone, and Murray was compelled to acknowledge that the expression which he thought he had noticed must have been due to the flickering shadows

cast by the lantern that he carried in his hand.

Thus dismissed, Ling trotted off and threw himself down beside the inner wheels of one of the carts, covered his face with a fold of his ample cloak, and was, to all outward appearance, fast asleep on the instant. Frobisher, after regarding the recumbent form for a long minute or more, silently tiptoed away to his post of observation, having reached which, he extinguished the lantern, making sure, first of all, that his matches were ready to hand in his pocket, so that the light might not prove a convenient target for any prowling sharpshooter of the enemy.

He remained motionless in the one position for at least half an hour, and then, beginning to feel a trifle cramped from his spell of inactivity, made up his mind to traverse the sleeping camp, in order to assure himself fully that all was as it should be. Leaving the lantern behind him, he made his way slowly and silently, by the dim light of the stars, round the sleeping bivouac. And it was not until he had completed the entire circumference of the circle and was back again at his starting-point, that it occurred to him that he had not particularly noticed Ling, who, of course, ought to have been lying asleep where Frobisher had left him.

At once the Englishman's dormant suspicions again awoke into full activity, and, lighting the lantern, he proceeded to repeat his investigation, going his rounds in the opposite direction this time; and, sure enough, when he came to the place where he had left Ling lying, the spot was vacant—Ling had disappeared.

"Now what in the world is the explanation of this?" Frobisher asked himself testily. "I'm certain there is something fishy about the fellow, and I would give a trifle to be able to discover what game it is that he's playing. Where, in the name of Fortune, has he got to now, I wonder?"

As the thought passed through his mind he heard a sudden, suspicious sound right on the other side of the camp. The idea it conveyed to him was that a man had tripped or fallen over something; and this suggestion was strengthened when, immediately afterward, certain low muttered words in the Korean tongue, which sounded remarkably like a string of hearty expletives, issued from the same quarter. And the voice was undoubtedly that of Ling.

Frobisher whipped the revolver out of his pocket and leapt like a deer in the direction of the sound, arriving on the spot just in time to discover Ling sitting upright on the dewy grass, alternately rubbing his head and his shins. The Englishman stood looking down at the other for a few moments, and in that brief interval found time to notice that his feet were soiled and plastered with fresh clay, which had certainly not been on them when Frobisher had left him half an hour previously. It was also certain that he could not have accumulated that clay within the confines of the camp, for the space where the wagons had been drawn up was carpeted entirely with grass, and there was no vestige of clay anywhere within the circle. Frobisher therefore felt more convinced than ever that Ling was something very different from what he represented himself to be.

“Well, Ling,” he remarked sternly, after a pause, during which the Korean had been vigorously rubbing himself, “what’s happened to you? Where have you been; what have you been doing?” And as he spoke he brought his right hand slightly forward, so that the rays of light from the lantern which he carried fell upon the gleaming barrel of his revolver.

Ling observed the motion, and shrank back guiltily. “Oh, mastel,” he quavered, “me thinkee me heal a sound ovel hele—fol me too flightened to sleep—and me come hele to see what the mattel.”

“What kind of sound did you think you heard?” queried Frobisher, looking the man square in the eyes.

Ling tried to return the gaze, but failed. His almond-shaped eyes met the other’s for a few seconds, and then turned ground-ward.

“Me believe me heal someone moving ovel hele,” he replied, “and so me came see if anybody tly to get in.”

“Then what did you fall over?” asked Frobisher.

“Me go look see if anybody hiding outside camp,” explained Ling glibly, “and me fall ovel shafts of calt coming back. Me no see clealy without lanteln,” he continued, volubly.

“If you believed you heard a movement,” said Frobisher, “why didn’t you

come and tell me, instead of going yourself? Besides, it seems strange that you, who ought to have been sleepy after your spell of duty, should have noticed those suspicious sounds, while I, who was wideawake, heard nothing."

"No undelstand, mastel," said Ling, regarding Frobisher with a blank stare.

"No, you scoundrel!" retorted Frobisher angrily; "you only understand just what suits you, don't you? However, understand this, my fine fellow," he went on, bringing the revolver into full view, and shaking it in front of the now thoroughly frightened Korean; "if I find that you've been up to any tricks, I'll shoot you, as sure as my name's what it is, so you had better be very careful. Do you understand that? Very well, then; get over to your place and lie down; and mark this—don't let me catch you slinking about this camp any more to-night. Savvee?"

"Me savvee plenty, mastel," replied Ling, gathering himself up and hobbling away. He added some other words in his own language, in a tone that sounded anything but reassuring; but as Frobisher was totally unfamiliar with the Korean tongue, he was compelled to let the matter pass unnoticed.

The remainder of the night slipped away without interruption. But shortly after the incident above referred to, Frobisher noticed that the stars were becoming obscured, and about two o'clock in the morning rain began to fall, softly at first, then increasing in volume until, in half an hour after the beginning, it seemed as though the very bottom had fallen out of the heavens, and thus allowed the water pent up there to fall upon the earth in an overwhelming cataract.

One by one, as they became chilled by the wet, the sleepers awoke, and crawled drowsily either into or beneath the carts; and soon Frobisher was the only human being in sight anywhere in camp. He was quickly drenched to the skin, but realising how excellent a screen for rushing the camp this downpour would make, he remained at his post, shivering with cold, for the rest of the night; and by the time that morning dawned, was feeling weary and wretched.

As soon, however, as the first hint of dawn paled the eastern sky, the rain ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and Frobisher aroused Ling and gave him orders to call the men to their breakfast, so that an early start might be made.

When Frobisher poked his head under the hood of the cart where the Korean had taken refuge from the rain, he somehow very strongly suspected that that individual had been awake and sitting up at the moment of his approach; yet he was obliged to shake the man vigorously for a full minute before he could be made to comprehend that it was time to bestir himself.

As soon as Ling permitted himself to realise this fact, however, he sprang from the cart with an admirable assumption of briskness, and soon had the mule-drivers at work preparing breakfast and inspanning the wet and wretched-looking mules. He even took the trouble to light a fire himself and prepare a cup of hot tea for the “mastel”, for which the drenched and shivering young Englishman felt sincerely grateful.

The young man had taken only a single sip, however, when he detected a very peculiar taste in the liquid, and spat the mouthful out on to the ground, with an exclamation of disgust. Happening to glance upward at the moment, he caught sight of Ling regarding him with a peculiar expression, in which hate, cunning, and satisfaction were curiously mingled; and Frobisher could scarcely repress his anger as he realised the meaning of that malignant glare. Not content with having attempted to murder him by means of the knife during the night, the scoundrel was now trying to put an end to him by means of poison; a powerful and very painful poison, too, surmised Frobisher, if he might judge by the burning, biting sensation that tingled on his throat, lips, and tongue.

It was not Frobisher’s policy, however, to let Ling see that he was suspected, otherwise the man might become desperate and adopt some still more strenuous measure, which it might be difficult if not impossible to frustrate. Therefore, forcing back the words of indignation and accusation that leapt to his lips, and making a strong effort to command his voice so that it might not quiver, he remarked quietly: “Hi, Ling! This tea is very strong. You’ve forgotten to put in any sugar. I suppose there is some, isn’t there?”

Ling repressed a smile, dived under one of the cart hoods, and presently reappeared with a few lumps of the required sweetening, which Frobisher calmly dropped into his cup, stirring them round so as to dissolve them completely. He then set the cup down beside him, as though to let the liquid cool, and watched Ling keenly until that wily Oriental was looking another way, when he quickly capsized the contents of the cup on to the grass, where the liquid was immediately absorbed by the damp earth.

When Ling returned for the cup Frobisher observed him closely, and could not avoid noticing the expression of satisfaction which even the man's usual impassivity failed to suppress completely. Frobisher was by this time quite convinced that Ling was a traitor, either belonging to, or in the pay of, the Government party; and he began to wonder whether, after all, the man had spoken the truth when he had affirmed that Korean troops were approaching to capture the caravan along the Yong-wol road. Might not the very reverse be the fact, and the troops be hiding in ambush along the very road that they were about to traverse? Frobisher was almost inclined to take the risk of altering the course of the caravan in order to regain the main road; but a few seconds' consideration caused him to abandon that idea. There were no less than four roads to Yong-wol, including the customary route, and the Englishman had only selected the one they were on at the last moment before starting—after the arrival of Ling from the ship, in fact; so that, unless Ling had arranged to have messengers waiting for him ashore, and had found means to communicate with them—which Frobisher could scarcely believe possible—the route they were taking could hardly have leaked out. He therefore made up his mind to stand by his original plan; and, the men having finished their meal, he gave orders for the caravan to proceed, himself leading the way and keeping a sharp look-out for any sign of treachery on the part of the Korean.

It was but a short distance to the banks of the stream, previously mentioned, which crossed the route of the caravan, but when they arrived there a disagreeable surprise was in store for the leader. The heavy rain of the previous night had swollen the river to such an extent that, instead of a placid, shallow stream, little exceeding in size a mere brook, it was now a roaring, foaming torrent, rising higher and higher every minute; and there was no knowing how long it might be before the water would subside to its normal level. Frobisher consequently realised with dismay

that he might be compelled to stay where he was for several days, allowing the enemy ample time to arrive on the spot and capture the caravan.

Evidently, he told himself, it would never do to be delayed by this obstacle; but how was he to overcome it? that was the question.

“Ling,” he demanded, “how long will it be before this water will go low enough to allow us to cross?”

The Korean shrugged his shoulders. “Me no know, mastel,” he said. “Pelhaps by to-night; pelhaps not fol week. No can do nothing, can only stop hele.”

“Don’t you believe that for a minute, my man,” retorted Frobisher tartly, for it annoyed him to observe the calm satisfaction with which the Korean regarded the situation. “We’ve got to get across, do you hear? And we are going to do it; so make up your mind to that. If I have to drown every man of the caravan, and you too,” he added, “I’m going to manage it somehow, so you understand. And now that I’ve told you this, tell me in return whether there is any other place beside this where we can cross?”

“No, mastel,” said Ling, “no othel place. This only place anywhele. And no can closs hele, mastel can see fol himselluf.”

“Well,” said Frobisher determinedly, “if this is the only place, this is where we cross. The river is rising very rapidly, and the longer we delay the worse it will be; you see, therefore, that there’s no time to waste. I’m going to ride in to find how deep the water is, and, what’s more, my friend, you are coming with me.” As he spoke, the young sailor grasped the bridle of Ling’s mule, dug his heels into his own animal’s sides, and together the Englishman and the now thoroughly frightened Korean descended the steep bank and plunged into the river.

Not until he was actually in the water did Frobisher realise how deep and how swift was the current; yet his horse seemed to betray no uneasiness, and the river deepened only very slightly as they pushed forward. He therefore grasped the Korean’s bridle more firmly, took his own bridle between his teeth, so as to have one hand free, drew his feet out of the stirrups in order to get clear of the horse if the animal were washed off its

feet, and brought his open hand down with a resounding smack upon the brute's hind-quarters.

With a snort, the beast plunged forward with a rush, the mule following reluctantly after, with Ling clinging desperately to its neck. Fortunately the water remained shallow, and the adventurous Englishman was just congratulating himself on getting safely across without mishap when there came a despairing shriek from Ling, the bridle was wrenched from Frobisher's hand, and he wheeled in the saddle in the nick of time to see Ling's mule lose its footing and sink back into the swirling torrent, flinging the shrieking Korean off its back into the water. The man immediately disappeared from view, all that was visible of him being a hand and an arm, waving frantically to and fro and clutching helplessly at the empty air. Evidently the mule had planted its foot in a hole, stumbled, and been swept off the narrow ford into deep water; and, unless something were done quickly, it looked as though Ling were in danger of being drowned.

The Korean had twice attempted to take Frobisher's life, and it would have been far more convenient and safer, as regarded himself, for the leader of the expedition to have let the man drown; but that leader was an Englishman, with all an Englishman's traditions behind him, and he could not stand idly by and see a fellow creature perish, however well-deserving of such a fate the man might be. So, without a moment's hesitation, Frobisher dragged his horse's head round by main force, and urged him, by voice, heel, and hand, off the causeway into the flood, and headed downstream after Ling, who had by this time risen to the surface and was yelling madly for mercy and help. But the sailor soon perceived that if he pursued his present tactics the Korean would be swept away and drowned before being overtaken; so, casting his eyes keenly about him, Frobisher picked out a spot a little distance lower down, where the banks appeared slightly less steep than elsewhere, and urged his animal in that direction.

Presently he was fortunate enough to feel solid ground under his horse's feet, and a few moments later was safely ashore and riding hard along the bank, parallel with the stream. By this time Ling had swallowed a considerable quantity of water, and his lungs were already half-full; it was evident, therefore, that in a few minutes the fellow would sink for the last time. But Frobisher was now abreast of him, and a few seconds later he

sighted another low place in the bank where he could re-enter the stream. Urging his animal to top speed, in another moment he was plunging down the bank into the water. The plunge submerged both horse and rider for the moment, and when Frobisher's head again appeared he saw Ling's body swirling past him in the strongest part of the current. Another moment and Frobisher had drawn the man to him, hoisting his head clear of the water on to the peak of the saddle in front of him. He then steered the horse to the bank, and was fortunate enough to be able to regain solid ground without further mishap. He lowered Ling carefully to the ground, dismounted himself, and, after securing his horse by the bridle to a convenient tree, set about the task of restoring the half-drowned Korean to consciousness.

Frobisher had had a good deal of "first-aid" experience during the period of his service in the Navy, and he therefore knew exactly what to do. Laying the Korean flat on his back, he knelt on the ground astride of the body, seized both Ling's wrists in his hands, and then proceeded to move the man's arms slowly backward and forward from a position right above his head forward to the sides of his body, and then back again, thus actually pumping air forcibly into the lungs.

After a few minutes of this treatment Ling began to show signs of returning life, and before long he opened his eyes, coughed chokingly, and then rolled over on his side, vomiting up the water he had swallowed and coughing it out of his lungs as well. Then Frobisher completed his work of restoration by administering a sip or two of brandy from the cup belonging to his emergency flask, and a few more moments later Ling was able to stagger to his feet.

Then, and not until then, did the Korean appear to recover his full faculties and recognise who it was that had saved him from a watery grave.

The Korean licked his dry lips and, carefully avoiding looking his rescuer in the face, stammered out some kind of thanks to his master for saving his life; and Frobisher observing the man's manner, became more than ever convinced that there was treachery in the wind, and determined to be thoroughly on his guard, day and night.

But there was no time to think about such matters just now; the river was rising higher every moment, and if the carts were to be got safely across without the loss of men, mules, or cargo, it was necessary to set things in motion immediately. On the opposite bank of the stream were now collected some of the Sam-riek drivers who had run along so as to be “in at the death” as they fully expected, and Frobisher sharply ordered them back to their posts, telling them to get the caravan in motion and prepare to cross.

The men had seen their leader negotiate the ford in safety, so they were not quite so timid as might have been expected, and as the heavily-laden carts formed a kind of anchorage and support to both mules and drivers, the young man soon had the satisfaction of seeing the entire caravan safely on the desired side without loss, when he immediately got the procession once more in motion toward Yong-wol.

During the whole of that day they travelled along the jungle road, with the thick, solid greenery hemming them in on each side, and the sun pouring down upon them like a flame. Ling marched along, silent and morose, never speaking a word unless Frobisher actually addressed him or ordered him to translate some command to the men; and it was with unfeigned thankfulness that, just as the sun was about to set, the young man saw, not far ahead of him, a small clearing somewhat similar to the one where they had camped on the previous evening, and determined to spend the night there.

The carts were drawn up in precisely similar formation, and supper was cooked; and by the time that this was disposed of, all hands were more than ready to seek their couches. Frobisher had already pitched his tent, and had just entered it to get his cutlass and second revolver when Ling came up to him.

“Me keep filst watch, mastel, same as last night,” he remarked ingratiatingly.

Frobisher looked fixedly at him for a few moments, and Ling lowered his eyes.

“No, my man,” answered the Englishman; “I keep first watch to-night. You

kept it yesterday, I keep it to-day. Now run away and get your rest, Ling. I expect you need it after your experience this morning."

Ling gritted his teeth under his long, scanty moustache. This arrangement would not suit his plans at all. Why could not these eccentric westerners be consistent? he wondered. The Englishman kept second watch yesterday, and Ling had fully expected that he would do the same again; while now—

"Me lathel watch filst, mastel," he pleaded; "me no sleepy. You sleep now, mastel; me look out."

"Look here, my man," exclaimed Frobisher, wrathfully, "who's master here, you or I? Just understand this, as it will save trouble in the future. When I tell you to do a thing, just remember that you've got to do it, and do it at once. Now, get away to wherever you're going to lie down, and I'll call you when it's time for you to go on duty. No, not another word; off you go, without any more palaver."

For a moment it seemed as though Ling intended to disobey. Then the Englishman's great stature and commanding presence had their effect, and he slunk off and lay down under one of the wagons, but not to sleep. He simply lay there leaning on his elbow, regarding Frobisher with a malignant expression. About a couple of hours later, after darkness had fallen upon the camp for some considerable time, and the rest of the men were asleep, he began to listen for something; and Frobisher would have been intensely interested could he but have glanced into Ling's mind and read what was working there.

About ten o'clock Frobisher began to feel so drowsy, that although he had made the rounds only half an hour previously he determined to repeat them, in order to avoid falling asleep at his post; so, taking up the lantern and cautiously feeling his way, to avoid stepping on the slumbering forms of any of the men, he began again to make the circuit of the camp.

Ling had been in his place, apparently sound asleep, when Frobisher had passed half an hour previously, but when the young man now directed the light of his lantern under Ling's cart he saw that the fellow was no

longer there; and a hurried survey of the camp soon convinced him that the Korean was nowhere within the circle of the carts. He must therefore be outside, Frobisher argued; and, if outside, where, and what doing?

There could be but one answer to that question, so, without a moment's hesitation, Frobisher set to work to arouse the slumbering Koreans, afterwards herding them in front of him until he had them all collected together in a little knot in the centre of the camp.

He next endeavoured, in "pidgin" English, to make them comprehend the situation as it presented itself to him; but, unfortunately, they were men who had seldom or never come in contact with white people, and he soon saw that they did not understand a word he was saying. He was compelled, therefore, to fall back upon signs; and after a time they began to comprehend dimly what it was that their leader was trying to tell them.

When at length he had succeeded in impressing upon them the fact that the camp was in imminent danger, he took four of their number to one of the carts, unloaded one of the chests of rifles and one of ammunition, broke both open, and distributed the weapons and a quantity of ammunition to each Korean, at the same time carefully instructing them by repeated action how to load and fire the rifles. Luckily, the men were quick to learn, and appeared delighted with the weapons, which they seemed to look upon as presents; but Frobisher fully realised that, however willing they might be, they would scarcely be able to hold out long against regular troops, even though the latter were poorly trained—especially if those troops should appear, as might be fully expected, in overwhelming numbers.

It was his duty, however, to protect the property committed to his charge as long as he could; and there was always the possibility that the rebels at Yong-wol might come part of the way to meet him, and that the sound of firing might bring them to his assistance. He therefore selected a rifle for himself, stuffed a quantity of ammunition into his breeches pockets—the pockets of his coat being full of revolver cartridges—and then went round, placing his small force of some twenty men in the most sheltered and advantageous positions he could arrange. After this there was nothing to be done but to keep a sharp look-out and await developments.

These were not long in coming. Frobisher had barely found time to get his men to their places, and to arm himself—having previously enjoined strict silence, by signs again, of course—when his straining ears caught slight, rustling sounds in the jungle close at hand. They were the sounds of bush, fern, and shrub being cautiously pushed aside—the sounds of the stealthy approach of a considerable body of men; and it soon became abundantly evident that the camp was entirely surrounded, and that it was to be attacked from all sides at once.

Frobisher flitted hither and thither silently, peering into the jungle from between the carts and underneath the wheels; and he was presently able, by the dim light of the stars, to distinguish that the whole bush was in barely perceptible motion. The attackers were at the very edge of it, evidently only waiting for the command to commence operations; the Englishman, therefore, determined, by being first, to secure the advantage of surprise himself. At his shouted word the Koreans discharged their rifles into the jungle at point-blank range, reloading on the instant; while Frobisher heightened the effect by selecting a spot where he could already see the glint of rifle barrels in the starlight and discharging all six chambers of both his revolvers in that direction.

The effect upon the attackers must have been considerable, for immediately following the discharge there arose a tremendous outburst of shrieks, yells, and groans, shouted orders, and cries of encouragement; and Frobisher saw several forms leap out of the bush and go crashing to earth in the clearing.

He had just time to re-load his revolvers before the surrounding bush burst into a perfect tempest of flame and lead, indicating that the Government troops must be present in force. One of the Sam-riek men, right at his elbow, uttered a pitiful cry, clutched frenziedly at his breast, from which the blood was spouting, and dropped to the ground, his chest torn to pieces by five charges of pot-leg, or stout nails, which had struck him at the same moment; while groans and screams from various parts of the enclosure showed that the little force had suffered pretty severely.

The men were now, however, re-loading and firing as rapidly as they could, each independently of the other, and Frobisher, not knowing their language, found it impossible to control them sufficiently to make them

fire only at the word of command. He realised that, at the rate at which they were firing, an enormous wastage was taking place, but he was powerless, and could only hope that the result would justify the expenditure.

The attackers presently lighted a large fire at the edge of the clearing, that they might have light to fight by; and what with the ruddy flickering of the flames and the incessant flashing of the rifles, the running crouching forms of the troops, and the desperate energy with which the defenders fought, the scene was a fit subject for the brush of a Wiertz or a Verestchagin. Men on both sides were falling fast, and Frobisher himself was half-blinded by the blood from a wound in his forehead inflicted by a ricochetting slug or bullet. And presently he began to realise that, despite the stubborn resistance of his men, the Government troops were slowly but surely closing in on him, and that the end could not be very long delayed.

He himself fought as Englishmen fight, doing as much execution as any four of his men; but he could not be everywhere at once, although he rushed here and there, encouraging and urging the defenders to fresh effort. Grimy, bleeding, and powder-stained, they did their best to obey; but the pelting rain of lead was rapidly reducing their numbers, and as their fire slackened for want of men, the troops edged in ever closer and closer until, at a sudden shouted word of command, they surged forward and stormed the enclosure, carrying it by sheer weight of numbers.

The Sam-riek men were slaughtered like sheep, and Frobisher found himself surrounded by at least a dozen men, shooting and stabbing at him until it seemed miraculous that he still survived. He laid about him desperately, and many a man of the enemy went down under the terrific sweep of his cutlass—his revolvers he had emptied long ago, save for a single shot which he was hoarding against some special emergency.

But the fight could not last much longer; his foes pressed so closely about him that Frobisher could no longer freely swing his cutlass, while the blood running down into his eyes half-blinded him. Out of the corner of one eye, however, he suddenly caught sight of a heap of cartridges that he had emptied on the ground for his men to help themselves from. His foes had driven him almost on the top of the pile, and, seeing that

there was no possible escape, the young Englishman determined to sell his life dearly.

With his cutlass hand he warded off the blows that were raining upon his head, and with the other he fired the last chamber of his revolver right into the middle of the heap of ammunition. The next instant there shot forth a dazzling burst of flame accompanied by a crackling report, and for a brief instant Frobisher had a confused vision of torn and writhing limbs and bodies. Then something struck him sharply; there was a sound as of roaring, tumbling, thundering waters in his ears; and he knew no more.

Chapter Five.

On the River.

When Frobisher recovered consciousness he became aware of most excruciating pains in his head and his left side, and so extreme was his suffering that he could scarcely restrain a groan. To add to his discomfort he was in complete darkness, and furthermore he was being jolted and shaken about in a most agonising manner.

Sick and faint with pain, it was several minutes before he was able to recall what had happened to him; and then he remembered the last scene of the fight, when, in the hope of destroying as many of his foes as possible, he had discharged his revolver into the heap of ammunition. There must, he recollected, have been some hundreds of rounds of cartridges lying loose within a very few feet of him, and it was doubtless a bullet from one of those that had struck him in the side and, he felt pretty sure, shattered one or more of his ribs. As for the pain in his head, that was of course accounted for by the stroke which he had received across his forehead early in the fight.

He put up his hand to his aching brow, and discovered to his surprise that it had been carefully bandaged, and that the wound had evidently been cleansed, for his hair was still damp, and there was no clotted blood adhering to it. Also he found, upon further investigation, that his jacket had been removed, and that his body had been strapped up with rough wrappings. It appeared probable, therefore, that his captors had received orders to capture him alive, if possible; otherwise, knowing as he did the usual methods adopted by the Chinese and Koreans toward their wounded prisoners, he felt tolerably certain that he would have been barbarously destroyed while still unconscious—particularly as he had been the direct means of bringing a dreadful death upon so many of his assailants. As he thought of this he could only come to one conclusion—he had been kept alive in order that, upon his arrival at head-quarters, he might be examined, by torture if necessary, as to the extent of his knowledge of the plot against the Government, and as to the existence of any other schemes for bringing arms into the country.

Now, he had no intention of being submitted to the diabolically ingenious torments practised by the Korean executioners; the important thing, therefore, was to contrive, if possible, to escape while there was yet time. But before thinking about escape it was absolutely necessary that he should discover his own whereabouts, and the number of men by whom he was at present guarded. He was now entirely unarmed, having no doubt dropped his cutlass and one of his revolvers at the time when he had been struck down; while the second revolver, which had been in the side pocket of his coat, had probably been discovered and seized when the jacket was stripped off him by the individual who had attended to the wound in his side.

With a great effort and a wrench that caused him to bite his lips to bleeding-point, to keep back his groans, Frobisher contrived to raise himself to a sitting posture, and he then discovered that he was in a closed litter of some sort, or palanquin, which, he could tell by its short, jerky motion, was being borne over very rough ground.

Feeling cautiously around him, in the faint hope that his jacket might have been thrown into the palanquin, and with it, perhaps, the revolver still in the pocket, Frobisher’s fingers encountered one of the curtains, and gradually gathering it up, he was presently able to pull it aside sufficiently to enable him to see out.

It was still dark, but the stars were shining brightly, and a thin slice of moon had risen just clear of the treetops that bordered the jungle, so that the young Englishman was able to make out his surroundings with comparative ease. Marching alongside the palanquin, on each side, at a distance of a few feet only, so narrow was the jungle path, was a line of Government troops, their weapons, consisting of flint-locks, match-locks, halberds, old muzzle-loaders, and, in a few cases, modern breechloaders, sloped over their shoulders; while close beside the litter, but a little in advance, so that Frobisher was unable to see the man’s face, walked an officer with a drawn two-handed Chinese sword in his hand. He was evidently quite prepared to cut the prisoner down without parley, should he make the slightest attempt at escape.

Beside him walked another man, whom Frobisher had no difficulty in recognising as Ling; and he was by no means grieved to observe that the

Korean had also suffered damage; for Ling's head was roughly bandaged, and his right arm hung down limp and useless, while he walked with a limp that proved he had received an injury to his leg as well. A cautious glance rearward through the open curtains disclosed the fact that the caravan of carts was coming along in the rear, escorted by a few files of troops; but there was nothing to be seen of the unfortunate Sam-riek drivers, and Frobisher was forced to the conclusion that, rather than encumber themselves with other prisoners, the soldiers had simply shot down and butchered the few who might have remained alive after the capture of the encampment.

Having thus discovered all that was possible at the moment, Frobisher closed the curtains again and threw himself back in the litter, a trifle relieved by his few breaths of fresh air, and determined to sleep, if he could, so that he might the sooner recover his strength, and be fit to attempt his escape should the chance occur. As he painfully twisted his body round so as to lie on his back, and thus take as much weight as possible off his broken ribs, he became aware of something hard in his hip-pocket, and thrusting in his hand, he brought out the little travelling-flask of brandy which he had used to revive Ling that very morning.

How little he had thought when he did so, that the next occasion on which he was to use it would find him a prisoner in the hands of a barbarous soldiery, on his way—he had not a shadow of doubt—to imprisonment and, only too probably, a revolting, lingering death at the end of all!

However, as he told himself, he was not dead yet—very far from it indeed; and while there was life there was always hope. So he took a good long pull at the flask, and felt so much benefited and restored thereby that a very few minutes afterward he fell into a doze which, although not exactly amounting to complete unconsciousness, yet served to mitigate to a considerable extent the pain from which he was suffering, and mercifully prevented his mind from dwelling unduly upon the horrid possibilities of the future before him. Finally, he fell into a deep and refreshing sleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, and the atmosphere was perceptibly cooler. This, together with the fact that the palanquin was frequently tilted to a considerable angle, and that the bearers seemed to

be finding some difficulty in retaining their footing, convinced him that they must be descending the other side of the range of hills which he knew he would have had to cross if he had been allowed to continue his journey to Yong-wol. But he felt pretty certain that Yong-wol was not the objective of the party. Since they had been informed of the presence of the caravan, they must naturally also have been told that a rebel force awaited its arrival there; and they would, of course, take particular care to avoid an encounter, especially if it were known that the rebels were there in force.

It was just noon by Frobisher's watch—which he had been allowed to retain, or which had escaped the notice of his captors—when they regained level ground; and half an hour or so later the company came to a halt, the litter was set down, and all hands, as Frobisher could see by looking through the curtains, prepared to make a meal.

He was by this time beginning to suffer very severely from thirst, and had about made up his mind to call for Ling and order him to bring some water, when that individual softly pulled the curtains aside and stood looking down at the prisoner with an expression on his face that Frobisher found difficult to fathom. Then, seeing that the Englishman was conscious, Ling remarked:

"Me glad see mastel open eyes again. Me thinkee once that mastel killed dead."

"It is no fault of yours that I was not, you treacherous rascal!" returned Frobisher, so savagely that the Korean involuntarily stepped backward a pace. "If ever I get out of this and can get my hands on you, I'll make you sorry for your betrayal of me!"

"Ah, mastel," exclaimed Ling, glancing apprehensively over his shoulder; "no speak so loud. Listen. When you save my life this molning, me wish velly much that me could wain you, but me dale not then—it too late. But Ling nevel folget kindness of mastel; and me tly to savee you, if can. But to do that me must pletend me velly glad you caught; pletend me velly angly against you. Allee same, me not so leally; and me do allee can fol you on q.t."

Despite his anger and pain Frobisher could scarcely refrain from smiling at the quaint “pidgin” English, especially the phrase “q.t.”, which the man had evidently picked up from some Englishman, and of which he seemed quite proud. But he sternly repressed the inclination, and looked keenly at Ling, to ascertain, if he could, whether the man were really in earnest in saying that he would help him if he could. The Korean now bore the scrutiny boldly, and did not lower his eyes; and from the expression of his face Frobisher felt almost convinced that Ling meant what he said. If the fellow could be relied upon implicitly, he would be simply invaluable, and might be the means of getting Frobisher out of the clutches of the Koreans; whereas, without assistance, escape seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility. It was therefore in a gentler voice that the Englishman said:

“Very well, Ling; I’ll believe you. And, what’s more, if you prove yourself true to me, and help me to effect my escape, I’ll see that you are given a reward such as you have never before dreamed of. But if you want to prove that you are in earnest, for goodness’ sake bring me water, and plenty of it; I am nearly dying of thirst.”

After another anxious glance round, as though he feared that, even at that distance, his and Frobisher’s conversation might have been overheard, Ling turned away with a heavy scowl on his face—presumably to give the correct colour to his proposed part—and with an admirable assumption of indifference went toward the place where the soldiers were already partaking of their simple meal of boiled rice and a thin kind of soup, washed down by copious draughts of raki, a strong, pungent spirit distilled from rice.

Here he picked up an empty cooking-pot, washed it out in the little brook by the side of which they were encamped, filled it with water, and then sauntered back to Frobisher with it, dashing it down on the ground so violently that at least half the contents were spilt. This did not greatly matter, however, since there was still sufficient left for the Englishman’s requirements, and the effect of the action was good. If there was one man among them who appeared to hate and despise the Englishman more thoroughly than the others, that man was Ling; and Frobisher could scarcely bring himself to believe, even after Ling’s assurance, that the feeling was not genuine, so excellent was the man’s acting—if acting it

were.

Much refreshed by the water, Frobisher was able to swallow a little of the rice which the Korean officer brought to him on a fibre mat, and immediately felt benefited by it. With the cessation of the jarring movement of the litter, too, the pain of his wounds became considerably less acute, and altogether he was soon feeling much stronger and better. All the same, he decided that it would be wise policy on his part to feign a continuance of extreme weakness and pain for some time longer, in order to throw the enemy off their guard. Naturally, they would not be likely to watch him so closely if they believed him to be too feeble and too seriously injured to be capable of making any attempt at escape; and perhaps before long a favourable opportunity might present itself.

The soldiers did not linger very long over their meal, and the caravan was soon in motion again; but Frobisher observed that this time their course was almost parallel with the hills, instead of leaving them directly behind. It was therefore now certain that they were going to avoid Yong-wol, and consequently there would be little or no chance of rescue by the rebels.

Frobisher hoped that by keeping his ears open he might be able to gain some idea as to the place which they were making for; and a little later, by hearing the constant repetition of a certain name, he came to the conclusion that they were bound for some place called Chhung-ju—though where it was situated, and even whether it was really the name of a place, he could not be at all certain.

Shortly after nightfall of the third day after crossing the hills, they entered a walled town of some size, situated on a river; and Ling contrived an opportunity to inform Frobisher that the name of the place was indeed Chhungju, and that the river was a branch or tributary of the river Han. He also stated that news had been brought by a Government spy that the rebels at Yong-wol had somehow obtained knowledge of the capture of the caravan, and that they had rapidly collected their forces with the object of starting in pursuit of the party for the purpose of recovering the arms and ammunition before they could be delivered to the authorities in Seoul. The rebels, reported Ling, were only some twenty-four hours' journey behind; and, as it would be quite possible for them to cut off the troops by making direct for the capital, the commander of the present

force had determined to remain but a few hours in Chhung-ju, in order to rest his men, and then to transfer the whole party, cargo and all, to boats or barges, and so proceed down the river Han as far as Yo-ju. There the river would be left, and they would proceed by road to Su-won, and so to the port of Asan, where there were enough Korean troops to enable the two parties combined to keep the rebels at bay until reinforcements could arrive from Seoul.

Accordingly Frobisher was not at all surprised when, at midnight, the palanquin bearers arrived at the house where he had been confined under guard, and made signs for him to step into the litter. He did so, affecting great debility and pain, and was soon being carried at a rapid rate through the narrow, evil-smelling streets, strewn with garbage and the putrefying carcasses of dogs, cats, and rats, down to the bamboo wharf where the force was to embark. Several barges, equipped with large, square sails made of matting, could be dimly made out by the starlight riding in mid-stream, and in these the cargo had been placed, while two large flat-bottomed boats were moored alongside the landing, ready for the conveyance of the men.

Great haste was displayed in getting the troops on board, which rather surprised Frobisher, until, under cover of the shadow cast by one of the sails, Ling found time to whisper that the rebels had made a forced march, and were even then close to the town. Another spy in the service of the Government had brought the news an hour previously, and no time had been lost in arranging to beat an immediate retreat. The northern gates had been shut and barricaded, so as to delay the pursuit as long as possible; and the commander of the force had already begun to sink the remainder of the craft lying in the river, that they might not be used by the rebels.

Frobisher was watching the process of sinking one of these, when suddenly he became aware of a commotion in the distance, gradually becoming louder and more insistent until he recognised it for what it was —the clatter and tramp and shouting of a large body of men.

In a moment the air was vibrant with shouted orders, warnings, and instructions. The men who had been told off to sink the river boats were instantly recalled; and the little fleet hastily pushed off and got under way

at the precise moment that the rebels reached the northern gate and, finding it shut, proceeded to attempt to batter it down. Frobisher, lying in his palanquin, listened to the tumult with feelings of the utmost joy and relief. There were plenty of boats still uninjured and afloat in the stream; and if the pursuers could but break down the gate quickly enough, secure the remaining craft, and come in pursuit, it was quite on the cards that he would be rescued, and thus avoid making acquaintance with that torture chamber, the idea of which persistently haunted him.

The Korean officer was clearly a man of considerable courage and resource, for in the face of this sudden new danger he remained perfectly cool, giving his orders clearly and concisely; and before a favouring slant of wind the little fleet drew away in good order from the shore, and began to glide quickly downstream before wind and current.

Looking behind—for he was placed in the high stern of one of the boats, where his view was unimpeded—Frobisher saw a glimmer of light spring up from the direction of the gate, which presently brightened to a lurid glare as the wind fanned the flames. Unable to batter down the stout gate as quickly as they desired, their pursuers had evidently collected a quantity of combustibles, and had started to burn it down; and a few minutes later their yells of triumph, floating down the wind, indicated that they had succeeded in the attempt, and that they had entered the town. It would therefore be now only a matter of minutes before they discovered that their prey had escaped them by the skin of his teeth; and unless the rebels were content to leave matters at this juncture, they would soon secure possession of the remaining boats and start down the river in pursuit.

The officer in command of the Government troops was evidently fully alive to the danger of the situation, for he continually shouted orders and exhortations for speed to the various boats comprising the little squadron. And presently Frobisher observed that, finding their progress unsatisfactory, the crews had got out the long oars customarily used for forcing the craft upstream against the current, and were employing them as sweeps. With this additional power the boats began to slide through the water more rapidly, and Frobisher began to fear that, unless the pursuers were very quick indeed, they would fail to overtake them, even now.

By this time, however, he could plainly perceive the flicker of torches moving about the wharves and piers of Chhung-ju, and presently a few of those same lights appeared on the bosom of the river. The rebels had evidently rowed out in small boats, and were towing the barges left anchored in mid-stream to the shore. A moment before a sharp bend in the river shut off his view of the town, the Englishman saw, to his great satisfaction, the dark loom of matting sails, as the pursuing force drew away from the banks.

It was now a race of Korean against Korean; and it remained to see which party would win it. The troops, with their prisoner and the captured arms and ammunition, had managed to secure nearly an hour's start, and what with wind, current, and sweeps, were making downstream toward the main channel of the river at a speed of about four knots an hour; and of course, as soon as the main stream of the Han was entered, the current would become stronger and would sweep them along still more rapidly. Also, the fleet arriving first in the river would obtain the advantage of the increased rapidity, and might very easily be out of sight before the pursuers arrived there; and, if that happened, it was not unlikely that the latter might abandon the chase as hopeless.

It soon became evident, however, that the rebels were not going to be thrown off so easily; for, as the fleet emerged upon the broad bosom of the Han and began to turn westward, Frobisher perceived that the pursuing squadron was not a very long distance behind, and was undoubtedly overhauling them rapidly. He was at first at a loss to understand how this could be, but a few minutes later his quick ear caught a certain sound floating down the breeze—a steady, monotonous, throbbing sound, something like— Ah, he had it now! Could it be possible?

Yes, undoubtedly it was the throbbing of machinery and the quick, muffled puffing of exhaust-steam. Evidently the rebels had discovered something that the troops had overlooked—a small steamer, or pinnace; had promptly raised steam in her, probably by firing up with plenty of oil and wood so as to obtain power quickly; and were utilising the craft to tow their squadron downstream, which, when once the boats had been put in motion, would be a much quicker method of progression than the use of sails and sweeps alone.

In any case, the rebels were quickly overhauling them; and before another hour had passed, Frobisher, continuing to watch the race with absorbed interest, saw a streak of flame cut the rearward darkness, and almost immediately he heard a vicious hum close above his head, followed shortly afterwards by the whiplike crack of a distant report. They were well within range, then; and it was clear that the pursuers must be armed with modern rifles, for a smooth-bore would not have sent a bullet nearly so far.

There was instantly an outburst of excitement among the soldiers; muskets and rifles were hastily unslung and loaded, and a sharp fire was opened over the sterns of the various craft. But apparently only very few of the weapons employed were equal to the range, for Frobisher could distinctly see that the missiles were falling short, by the little spirts of foam which shone white in the moonlight where the bullets struck the water and ricochetted off. A moment later a much bigger flash burst from the bow of the little steamer, which could now be plainly made out as a small craft driven by a screw, and had the appearance of a launch that might have at one time belonged to a battleship; and the next moment a perfect storm of bullets came hurtling close overhead.

Things were beginning to get rather too warm for the prisoner where he was, he felt; especially as certain screams and cries from those about him indicated that the volley had been excellently directed. He therefore determined to seek shelter without further delay—for he had no wish to be killed by his own party—and hastily dragged himself into the shelter of the lighter’s low bulwark.

The soldiers, encouraged by their officer, responded gamely to the attack upon them, and opened a well-sustained fire on their opponents, who by now had drawn within range, even of the muskets. From his new position Frobisher could see the splinters flying aboard several of the pursuing boats, while an occasional yell or scream showed that some at least of the Korean bullets were finding their billets; but several stark, motionless forms lying about the deck of the lighter showed the superior marksmanship and weapons of the rebels.

The latter were now beginning to steal up alongside, though about a hundred yards still separated the combatants, and the firing became

general on both sides. Indeed, so determined and persistent was the fusillade, that there was a continuous roar and rattle of sound; while the silvery sheen of the moonlit night was reddened by the glare of the rifle-flashes.

Before coming to the East, Frobisher had believed, in common with many other people, that the Koreans were a cowardly and effeminate race, always more eager to avoid than to engage in a conflict—a race which brought about its ends by cunning and treachery rather than by force of arms. But, whatever the characteristics of the nation as a whole might be, he could not fail to admire the vigour and energy with which both sides were conducting this already sanguinary little battle on the waters of the Han.

To ensure that there should be no lack of ammunition the soldiers had adopted the same expedient as Frobisher's at the camp. They had opened up several of the captured cases of ammunition, and had thrown their contents into one big heap in the middle of the lighter's deck, so that every man might the more easily help himself; and the prisoner congratulated himself that he was at some distance from the pile, for he had no desire to repeat his experience of a few days previously.

The two squadrons were soon running downstream level with each other, the steam pinnace having reduced speed so that she might not pass the Koreans; and both fleets were gradually edging closer and still closer together. As they did so, the volleys of musketry became ever fiercer and fiercer, until the air fairly vibrated with the sound, threaded with the shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying.

Scattered everywhere about the decks could be seen the forms of men who had been struck down; and the splintered, chipped decks were already deeply stained with blood. And although the action was general throughout the two fleets, it appeared as though the hottest part of the fire was being directed against the particular boat in which the young Englishman lay a prisoner.

Frobisher soon found that, at such close range, his position under the lee of the low bulwark was anything but secure, since the nickel-jacketed bullets which the rebels were using were already drilling holes clean

through the thick planking and passing out through the opposite bulwark. He therefore again painfully removed himself, taking up a new position with his back against the stout mast of the barge, with it between himself and the point from which the volleys were coming. From this new position he made a fresh survey of his surroundings, and assured himself that if matters went on like this much longer, there would be none left alive on board to defend the craft, and her capture would be certain. He rubbed his hands with satisfaction at the thought that, perhaps, another hour might see him safely aboard the rebel squadron.

But where, meanwhile, he wondered, was Ling? If he were really sincere in his desire to show his gratitude, the time was at hand for him to do so. The number of able-bodied men on board was growing less every moment; and if Ling could only be persuaded to bring the Englishman his two revolvers, loaded, he and the Korean might be able to obtain possession of the craft, and steer her over to the shelter of the other squadron. But alas! Frobisher had not far to look in order to discover the whereabouts of the man he was thinking of.

Ling was close at hand, reclining in a half-sitting posture with his back against the bulwark. His hands were spread open on the deck, his musket having fallen from the nerveless fingers; his head was tilted back until his high, conical hat had fallen off; and there, plainly visible in the moonshine, was a great patch of coagulating blood on his throat, showing where a bullet had drilled him clean through the neck. Ling would never speak again in this world, and his career, whether for good or for evil, was closed for ever.

It was useless, therefore, for Frobisher to look for help in that direction; so if he were to escape at all he had only himself to rely upon. Unfortunately he was still much too weak from the effects of his wound to be able to deal with the situation singlehanded; and there were, as yet, quite enough of the barge’s men remaining alive to overpower and murder him in a moment if he were foolish enough to attempt any such thing.

At this instant there occurred a fresh outburst of firing from the Korean boats, followed, a second later, by a loud booming report in the direction of the rebel squadron that caused the very atmosphere to vibrate and the

barge to quiver as though she had struck a rock. Frobisher painfully hauled himself to his feet and staggered to the bulwarks to ascertain what had happened, and a sufficiently disheartening spectacle met his eyes. Several shots from the last volley had evidently penetrated the plating of the steam launch's boiler, causing it to explode, blowing the frail sides of the little craft asunder and killing nearly every man of her crew. The Englishman was just in time to see her disappear below the surface of the river in a great cloud of steam, and to hear the shrieks of her wounded and dying people as the engulfing waters swirled about them, the cries of execration from the rebels, and the exultant shouts of the Koreans; and he realised that his last hope of escape was slipping away from him.

Thrown into confusion by the loss of the steamer, the entire rebel fleet came to a standstill, involuntarily brought to an anchor by the sunken launch, which rested on the river bottom, still attached to the hawser by which the squadron was being towed. And as the hawser happened to consist of chain cable instead of rope, and as it had been made fast with a complicated system of hitches, that it might not slip, it was likely to be some time before it could be cast off and the boats set free to pursue once more.

But the troops were not to escape without further punishment, after all. Maddened by this sudden wreckage of their hopes, the rebels again seized their rifles and poured a concentrated fire into the nearest vessel of the enemy, which chanced to be the boat containing Frobisher and his fortunes, she being last in the line; and that parting volley did more damage than had been sustained during the whole of the fight. The aim was good, and the bullets swept the decks of the barge like a tempest of hail, sending every man who was not under cover into eternity. Once again, also, the folly of leaving loose piles of ammunition exposed was demonstrated; for, penetrating the thin bulwarks as though they were so much paper, several of the shots ploughed into the heap of cartridges, exploding it and scattering death and mutilation all round.

When the smoke of the explosion cleared away, it was seen that there were scarcely half a dozen men left alive; and if the boat next in line had not very promptly responded to the frenzied hails of the survivors, and at once put back to take them on board, with their prisoner, every man

would have been lost; for they had scarcely transferred themselves to the deck of the other craft before Frobisher's barge, with a large hole blown in her bottom by the explosion, heeled over and sank, taking her dead and wounded to the bottom with her.

The fight was now virtually over, and only a few more long-distance shots were exchanged before the Korean fleet was out of range, leaving the rebel squadron behind them in a state of hopeless confusion. Late that same afternoon the town of Yo-ju was reached, and the men and cargo were disembarked without any signs of the reappearance of the rebels. In fact, the latter had given up the chase, thoroughly disheartened, after the destruction of the steamer, and had reconciled themselves to the loss of the arms.

Fortunately for them, the Englishman, Drake, had not been paid in advance, and the money was therefore still intact and available for the purchase of another consignment; so, with true Oriental submission to fate, they retraced their steps to Yong-wol, and subsequently sent a messenger to Drake, informing him that the convoy had been attacked and overpowered, the whole of the cargo captured, and the young white man in command either slain or made prisoner.

Frobisher, very much alive, but still weak from his wounds, arrived in due time at Asan, closely guarded by a file of soldiery, and was carried direct to the fort at the mouth of the river.

Here he was immediately haled before the officer in command of the garrison and closely questioned, through an interpreter, as to his connection with the matter of bringing arms to the rebels. But he had already foreseen that this would happen, and had decided upon his line of conduct; so he steadfastly refused to supply the required information, even when threatened with the naked sword which the official, in a towering rage, drew and flashed before his eyes.

Seeing that this demonstration produced no effect upon the intrepid young Englishman, Sung-wan—for so the officer was named—gave a few curt orders to the men who were guarding him, and Frobisher was hurried from the room, conducted down several long, gloomy corridors, and finally thrust into a large cell. This, as soon as his eyes became

accustomed to the semi-darkness, he could see was furnished with several instruments of a horribly suggestive character; and it did not take a man of his intelligence long to realise that he had at last made the acquaintance of that supremely diabolic institution—a Korean torture-chamber.

Chapter Six.

In the Prison Cell.

“By Jove!” exclaimed the prisoner to himself, as his eyes gradually took in his dreadful surroundings, “I’m sadly afraid that all this means the end of Murray Frobisher, and a mighty unpleasant end it promises to be. No escape possible either,” he went on, carefully making a tour of the apartment, and at intervals tapping on the walls with an iron tool which he had picked up, in an endeavour to obtain some idea of their thickness, and so to judge as to the possibility of digging himself out, if he were left alone long enough. But the results were disheartening, to say the least of it. Every spot where he tapped gave back a dull, solid sound, indicating that the walls were quite unusually thick, and that escape by means of excavation or anything of that kind was absolutely out of the question. The room was somewhat peculiarly shaped, being evidently situated in one of the angles of the fort. The wall containing the thick, oaken, iron-studded door through which he had been thrust was evidently enormously thick, while the chamber itself was some fifteen feet wide by about thirty-five feet long, the end wall opposite the door being curved somewhat in the form of an ellipse, meeting in a blunt angle exactly opposite the door. And high up in this angle, about eight feet above the floor, was a small, iron-barred window, which might, but for the bars, have been large enough to permit of the egress of a man of ordinary size.

The total height of the chamber was about ten feet, and the walls were almost entirely covered with weird and terrible-looking instruments. Some of these Frobisher recognised through having read about them in books, but of others he could not possibly guess the use. Their shapes and forms were, however, so dreadfully suggestive that he felt it to be a mercy that he was ignorant of the more subtle and refined forms of

Oriental torture, otherwise he would soon lose his reason in contemplation of the frightful uses to which those instruments could be put.

Also, strewn about the floor, in such profusion as to leave little room for anything else, were larger implements, whose use Frobisher was fortunately unable to guess at; while in the two corners of the room there were piles of variously-shaped knives and swords which he guessed the torturers were wont to employ in the discharge of their ghastly business, among which he recognised the long, razor-edged weapon used for administering the terrible “death of the thousand cuts”, also a sword with a saw, instead of smooth edge, and a big, broad-bladed, keen knife or short, heavy sword, used upon those victims who were lucky enough to be sentenced to a quick death by beheading. To Frobisher it seemed that merely to immure a prisoner in such a ghastly museum was in itself an act of torture which might easily drive a less well-balanced man than himself mad within a very few hours.

One thing that rather astonished him was the fact of those swords being left lying loose in the cell. Surely, rather than submit to the tender mercies of a Korean torturer, any prisoner, however weak or timid, would arm himself with one of them and die fighting, or even put an end to his own existence, rather than have his life wrung from him inch by inch and minute by minute in agony indescribable! At any rate it did not take Frobisher a moment to determine that when the end should come he would take the long weapon used for the “thousand cuts” and, standing in the middle of the chamber where he could have a clear sweep for the sword, fight his enemies to the death.

He strode over to the corner and drew the weapon he had selected out of its scabbard. It had a long handle, permitting two hands to be employed, and the blade was made of very highly-tempered steel, as stiff and springless as an English razor, and as keen. It was about four feet in length and quite two inches wide, and the steel at the back was fully a quarter of an inch thick. There was a very slight curve in the blade, and the point was sharply curved round, similar to the points found on the old Japanese swords; and in the hands of a powerful man like himself it would undoubtedly prove a very terrible weapon. Indeed, it was so heavy that Frobisher wondered how it could be possible with so ponderous a

blade to carry out the particular form of execution for which it was designed. But it would serve his purpose admirably, the sailor told himself; and he sheathed the weapon and placed it at the far end of the chamber, where it might be ready to his hand if necessity arose for him to use it.

The next step in the examination of the cell was to get a glimpse, if possible, out of the little window, high up in the wall, to learn something concerning the whereabouts of his prison and how it was situated. Then, in the somewhat improbable event of an opportunity offering for escape, he would not be handicapped by ignorance with regard to his surroundings.

To this end he hunted about for something wherewith to construct a platform, and presently managed to collect together a pile of instruments, pieces of ancient furniture, and odds and ends of lumber which, piled together, enabled him, assisted by his great height, to bring his eyes to the level of the bottom of the window; and having climbed up, using great care not to upset the pile in so doing, Frobisher seized the iron grating protecting the window and, thus supporting himself in position, looked out.

Narrow as was the window on the inside, the view which the young Englishman was able to obtain from it was quite extensive, for the embrasure which formed the opening was splayed widely outward on both sides, in a manner frequently seen in old English castles in the construction of the “arrow slits” in the walls; and the first thing he noticed was that he had been correct in his estimation of the thickness of the walls. They were at least six feet thick, and there was therefore no hope whatever of being able to break out through them.

The fort itself was situated on the right bank of the river; and, judging from the open country in its neighbourhood, must be at some little distance from the town of Asan itself. Indeed, as Frobisher afterwards ascertained, the building was situated on a small peninsula of land jutting out into Prince Jerome gulf, and was therefore nearly four miles distant from the town. The window embraced a view of part of the gulf, including the entrance, and a strip of jungle-clad country running right down to the water’s edge; while beyond these two points the outlook was restricted

by the outer edges of the splay in which the window was built. From the same cause, also, Frobisher was unable to see the ground close enough to the wall to judge whether the fort was surrounded by a moat or a dry ditch of any description, although from the general appearance of things he surmised that it was.

By estimating the angle at which his line of sight was cut off by the outer edge of the sill, he calculated that he must be confined in a room situated on the second story of the fort, and that there would consequently be a considerable drop from the bottom of the window to the ground, without taking into consideration the probable existence of a ditch of fifteen or twenty feet deep running round the base of the walls.

In any case, even if the iron bars could by some means be removed, it did not appear as though it would be possible for him to squeeze his big body through the opening, so the question of the depth of the drop outside was hardly worth worrying about. His one and only means of egress seemed to be the door by which he had entered, and to that he now turned his attention, with the view of ascertaining whether any hope lay in that direction.

As has been mentioned, the door was constructed of timber very much resembling oak, and its inner surface was reinforced by stout iron straps some three or four inches wide, at least half an inch thick, and extending across the whole width of the door. The round heads of bolts studded at intervals along the whole length of the straps indicated that similar iron bands existed on the other side of the door, and that the straps, inside and outside—of which there were no less than seven pairs—were connected together, thus clearly indicating the immense strength of the door. It was thus hopeless to think of cutting a way out through it; the only manner in which it could be passed was by opening it in the usual manner.

Frobisher therefore set to work to examine the lock, to discover whether there existed any possibility of picking it. It was an old-fashioned piece of mechanism, and, luckily, the iron case was on the inside of the door, the great keyhole being placed near the centre. Now for a piece of stout wire, the stouter the better! The young Englishman proceeded at once to hunt about among the various machines and instruments in the dim corners of

the chamber in search of what he required. For some time he was unsuccessful, and he had reluctantly arrived at the conclusion that the search must end in failure, when his eyes happened to fall upon the very thing he needed.

Standing at the far end of the apartment, in that part of it enclosed by the circular portion of wall, was a sinister-looking machine, and to the gearing of one of its handles was attached a short piece of iron rod which he thought he might disengage without much difficulty. Forthwith he applied himself to the task, with such success that, half an hour later, he found himself in possession of what he required. True, it was somewhat stouter than it should have been for his purpose, but this was one of those occasions upon which he found his exceptional strength very useful, and after a few experiments he succeeded in bending it to the shape he wanted.

He was experimenting with the bent rod in the lock when, fortunately, his quick ear caught the sound of footsteps hurrying down the stone-flagged corridor toward his cell.

Snatching the wire out of the lock, he hastily dropped it into the nearest available place of concealment, and sauntered toward the opposite side of the chamber. There would be no time, he knew, to take down and redistribute the pile of articles he had used to enable him to look out of the window, so he was compelled to leave them as they were, trusting that, in the dim light, the visitor, whoever he might be, would not particularly notice the arrangement. A moment later there was a sound of keys rattling outside, the lock clicked loudly, and the door opened and closed behind a man carrying a lamp, which he set down on the floor just inside the room, after carefully locking the door again.

The thought instantly flashed through Frobisher’s mind that perhaps after all there would be no need for him to go on with the manufacture of his skeleton key; for was not the actual key of the door in the room at that very moment? True, it was in the possession of another man; but unless he happened to possess fire-arms, it would be queer indeed if a desperate prisoner could not overpower him, tie him up somehow, and secure the key to obtain his liberty. Frobisher’s eyes glistened at the thought, and his muscles braced themselves for a spring. But at the

critical moment the idea occurred to him that the other was in his power anyhow, and that he could secure the key later on, just as well as now; and that, meanwhile, before he acted hastily, it might be well to hear whether the fellow had anything to say. Perhaps this was an official come to set him at liberty, or perhaps— Well, he would wait a little, at all events, and see what developments ensued.

Having locked the door and pocketed the key, the visitor picked up the lantern and advanced into the room, holding the light high and glancing keenly round until his eyes fell upon Frobisher, whereupon he gave a short grunt of satisfaction and hung the lantern on a convenient peg.

By the additional light thus afforded, the Englishman was able to examine his visitor more closely, and to estimate his chances of success if things came to a rough-and-tumble fight for possession of the key.

The stranger was tall, almost as tall as Frobisher himself, but not nearly so heavily built, and appeared to be about fifty-five to sixty years of age, so that the young Englishman did not anticipate any serious difficulty in mastering him. He was very richly dressed in garments of fine silk, elaborately decorated with embroidery, and wore round his neck a heavy gold chain, the centre of which was studded with a single enormous ruby. As a head-covering he wore a round Chinese cap, which was ornamented by a single magnificent peacock's feather, fastened to the cap by a brooch of solid gold set with another huge ruby.

The man's whole appearance was indeed imposing and magnificent in the extreme, and Frobisher instantly guessed that he was in the presence of a very important official indeed. This man, he told himself, could surely not be a Korean. No Korean ever attained to such a commanding stature, no Korean had ever been known to display so haughty a bearing, so dominant a personality; and as his eyes slowly travelled from the details of the man's costume to his face, the prisoner recognised that his visitor was indeed not a Korean, but a Chinaman, and a Chinaman of the highest grade, too—without doubt, a mandarin. There was no mistaking the thin, ascetic, high-bred face, the prominent cheek-bones, the almond-shaped eyes; and the long but scanty moustache scarcely concealed a strong, resolute-looking mouth, the lips of which were, however, rather too thin, lending an expression of cruelty and relentlessness of purpose

which was anything but reassuring to the prisoner.

For a few moments the two men stood gazing at one another, each taking the other's measure. Then the Chinaman spoke, using excellent English.

"I am the Governor of this fortress of Asan," he began coldly, "and have just been informed of your presence here. You would have been brought before me on your arrival, but it chanced to be the hour of my afternoon rest. Who and what are you?"

"My name is Murray Frobisher," answered the Englishman, "and I was formerly a lieutenant in the British Navy."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Governor. "You say 'formerly'. I take it, then, that you are no longer in your country's service, and that it is not known to your Government that you have turned gun-runner in order to supply arms to rebels against their lawful sovereign?"

"You are correct in both suppositions," answered Frobisher. "You tax me with gun-running; and I plead guilty to the charge. I certainly was bringing arms to the rebels, as you term them; but my conscience is quite clear upon that point. It is well known that the Korean Government has been treating its subjects in a most outrageous manner; and if some of them with more pluck than the rest have made up their minds to put an end to such tyranny, more power to them, say I, and may somebody else be more fortunate than myself in providing them with weapons wherewith to uphold their liberties and rid themselves of the rulers who are oppressing them."

The Chinaman looked at Frobisher for a moment, and then gave vent to a harsh, sneering laugh.

"Well spoken, my young friend!" he mocked. "You have told me something that I wanted to know; and now perhaps you will answer a few more questions. I would very strongly advise you to do so, since it may save you a good deal of—inconvenience, shall I say?"

"You may ask what you please," retorted Frobisher, "but I do not promise to answer."

“I shall ask the questions, nevertheless,” said the Governor; “and if you will not speak now, other means of obtaining replies can doubtless be found. First of all, what ship brought those arms; who was her captain; what quantity of arms and ammunition did the consignment consist of—some have been lost in transit, I understand—and, finally, how many more shiploads are being sent out here from your country?”

Frobisher laughed, but made no reply.

“Did you hear me?” demanded the Governor, and there was deadly menace in his voice.

“Quite distinctly,” answered Frobisher coolly. “But surely you cannot have already forgotten that I gave you to understand clearly, scarcely a minute ago, that I will tell you nothing whatever. And when I say a thing, I mean it.”

“Soh!” remarked the Chinaman. “Well, you shall have to-night to think matters over; but if you have not altered that stubborn mind of yours by morning, you shall make the acquaintance of some of these little playthings”—indicating the various machines and instruments with a delicate, long-taloned finger. “There are some here which are probably new to you, but we, in this place, understand their use well. I will leave you this lantern, so that you may study them carefully during the night, and decide what you prefer to do.”

With an ironical bow, the Governor then turned toward the door, his fingers seeking the pocket where he had placed the key.

This was the moment for which Frobisher had been waiting; and with a spring he hurled himself at the retreating figure of the Governor. But that individual was not to be caught so easily. He must have glimpsed the prisoner’s face out of the corner of his eye as he turned, for he was round again in a moment, and, dodging the Englishman’s furious leap, thrust a hand inside his jacket, and before Frobisher could get to grips with him, he found himself confronted with the muzzle of a heavy revolver, pointing straight at him, the Governor’s forefinger already crooked round and pressing the trigger.

“Not this time, my friend,” smiled the Governor sardonically. “One step

farther, and I shoot to wound—painfully. Do you want an immediate taste of what is in store for you to-morrow, or—" And, leaving the sentence unfinished, the Chinaman slowly backed to the door, leaving Frobisher glowering helplessly in the middle of the room.

With his back against the door and the pistol still levelled, the Governor felt behind him, inserted the key, and turned the lock. Then, with one swift movement he was outside; the door slammed, the key grated, and the prisoner was alone once more.

"Well," he murmured, half-amused, despite his anger and disappointment, "the rascal was too smart for me that time. But,"—here he lifted the executioner's sword from its place in the corner—"things will be a little different to-morrow, if that man is foolish enough to trust himself here again alone."

Frobisher waited until the sound of his visitor's footsteps had died away along the corridor, and then, congratulating himself upon the fact that that worthy had left the light behind him, re-possessed himself of his piece of iron rod, and with the assistance of the lantern set to work upon the lock again, in the hope that he might be able to complete his skeleton key and let himself out before the Governor returned to carry out his threat. But this was a more difficult matter than he had anticipated; and after about two hours of ineffective tinkering he was compelled to acknowledge himself defeated.

With a bitter objurgation he flung the useless and twisted rod into a corner, and, not being able to find anything else that would serve his purpose, made up his mind that he would have to await developments, and rely upon his own strength of arm to get himself out whenever the Governor or somebody else should visit the cell. Meanwhile, if he were to be in good form for a possibly strenuous morrow, it was necessary that he should sleep, seeing that nobody had thought it worth while to provide him with any food; so, unsheathing the sword, with the help of which he proposed to effect his deliverance, he flung himself down at the far end of the chamber, laying the weapon beside him, and had scarcely touched the floor before he was fast asleep. He had been more worn out and weary than he had at all suspected.

It seemed as though he had just closed his eyes, when he was awakened by a thundering crash of sound, apparently close at hand. The chamber in which he was confined quivered perceptibly with the shock; while, right upon the heels of the concussion, came the noise of a distant explosion.

“A heavy gun, by Jingo!” ejaculated Frobisher, springing to his feet; “and whoever fired it is using this place as a target! That shot must have struck close outside here. What is in the wind now, I wonder? Anyway, if they are attacking this fort, they must, in a certain way, be friends of mine, for they are certainly the enemies of my enemies within the walls. Pound away, boys!” he exclaimed cheerfully, apostrophising the unseen gunners; “pound away! If you don’t kill me first, you may perhaps make an exit for me through that wall.”

At that moment he heard the sound of voices raised in alarm, the shouting of orders, and all the indications of a suddenly-awakened and thoroughly-alarmed garrison. Men were rushing about here and there, the rattle of arms sounded distantly through the iron-bound door; and presently, from the battlements, apparently directly over his head, there boomed forth the crash of the Korean garrison’s answering gun, followed almost immediately afterwards by still another tremendous shock, accompanied by the rumble and rattle of falling masonry as another shot from the attacking force struck full upon the fortress wall, this time seemingly just above him. The foemen gunners seemed to have waited for the flash of the gun on the battlements, and aimed for that, and they appeared to be making pretty good practice.

The young Englishman looked at his watch—which had somehow escaped the fingers of his captors, and which he had kept wound regularly—and found to his astonishment that it was close on half-past four o’clock in the morning, and that therefore daylight could not be very far distant. It would not be long before he could climb up to his perch at the window, and see who the attackers were. Meanwhile the explosions had increased from the exchange of single shots to a general cannonade on both sides; and now the very atmosphere was vibrating with the deafening concussions, as the guns on the battlements roared and the heavy conical shot from the attacking party plunged against the thick masonry of the walls, toppling down great masses of stone, mortar, and

débris at every hit.

The gunners were evidently directing their fire mostly on that portion of the building wherein Frobisher was confined, and he told himself that it would require but little more of their attention before the walls became so shattered that the shot would come plunging right into the cell. He began to speculate on what would then happen first—whether he would be blown to pieces or smashed into shapelessness, or whether an opening would be made by which he might be enabled to escape. If only a shot would strike directly upon the iron bars of the window, perhaps it would enlarge the aperture sufficiently to allow him to crawl through.

Looking up at the window, as the idea entered his mind, he saw that the sky was already flushed pink, and knew that there would therefore be light enough outside to enable him to see what was going on; and he at once climbed up on the pile which he had collected, and, hauling himself up to the opening, looked out.

At the edge of the jungle he observed half a dozen big field-pieces drawn up in line, and he could see the gunners busily loading and reloading from the piles of ammunition placed beside each gun; while behind, on the slightly-rising ground, and partly concealed by the jungle, it was possible to make out a large body of riflemen who, now that the light was increasing, were preparing to take their part in the attack. There was no doubt as to the identity of the attackers, for Frobisher could now distinguish several flags similar to those flown on the boats of the rebel squadron a few days previously, during the fight on the river. That particular force had evidently been joined by another contingent, and the two combined had decided to make another attempt to recapture the all-important cargo which now reposed within the walls of the fortress of Asan.

But suddenly, as the interested Englishman watched, he heard a loud, shrieking, whirring sound, somewhat resembling the very rapid exhaust from a locomotive, and a flash of flame leaped out close alongside one of the guns, followed by a loud explosion and a great cloud of smoke and dust. And when this cloud had cleared away, he saw that one of the besiegers' guns had been temporarily put clean out of action, for the right wheel was blown completely away, and the gun itself was lying on its

side, half-buried in the sand; while, as for the crew who had been working it, so far as he could ascertain they had been blown completely out of existence, for there was no visible sign of them.

That high explosive shell had obviously not come from the fort; where, then, had it come from? And what new surprise had fate in store?

Chapter Seven.

Saved by a Hairbreadth.

The furious fusillade directed against the fort at once slackened, after the explosion of that shell amongst the guns; while the fire from the fort redoubled, the rounds of solid shot, grape, chain, and shrapnel, with withering volleys of small-arm fire, sweeping through the rebel ranks like hail, and playing awful havoc among the closely-packed masses of men only partially concealed by the jungle. But the besiegers, as Frobisher had already had an opportunity of observing, were not easily to be discouraged, and after the first shock of surprise had subsided they quickly pulled themselves together again.

Another gun's crew came leaping out from the cover of the jungle and gathered round the wrecked field-piece; pieces of timber, empty ammunition-boxes, and even small branches of trees were secured and placed alongside the gun; and several more men seized the piece and lifted it up until it was partly supported upon its remaining uninjured wheel. The pile of material which had been collected was then built solidly up in place of the wrecked wheel, and the fresh gunners began to serve the weapon as coolly as though its original crew had not been blown into eternity a few minutes previously. There could be no doubt that these Korean rebels were showing themselves to be a remarkably brave and efficient body of men.

While the wrecked gun was once more being made serviceable, the Englishman observed that two of the other guns were being slewed round until their muzzles pointed seaward, and he at once surmised that this must be the direction from which that devastating shell had come. But crane his neck as he might, although he could see a portion of the sheet of water forming Prince Jerome Bay, he could not see the whole of it. The entrance was clear, however, and it was therefore obvious that the vessel from which the shot had been fired—for vessel it must be—had contrived to enter the bay unobserved, and must now be cruising about somewhere near the south shore.

Frobisher was very anxious to obtain a sight of her, for he greatly desired

to get some idea of what her nationality might be. She might belong to any of the fleets of the various Powers that maintained squadrons in Chinese waters at that time; or she might be either a Chinese or a Japanese war-vessel. Any man-of-war would consider herself at liberty to interfere, in the event of a battle taking place on Korean soil, if only for the protection of the foreign inhabitants, whose lives might be imperilled in consequence of the hostilities; but Frobisher could not help thinking that the captain of the man-of-war was taking matters with rather a high hand in deliberately firing on one of the parties concerned, without first offering that party the opportunity to come to a peaceful arrangement. Such high-handed action did not appear like that of a European naval officer, and therefore the most obvious conclusion was that the vessel must be either Chinese or Japanese.

Even as Frobisher looked, however, the question answered itself, for moving slowly into his field of vision there appeared the bow of a cruiser, quite close inshore; and as she gradually revealed her whole length, her guns flashing continuously meanwhile, the Englishman saw that the Dragon ensign was flying from her peak, and that she was therefore a Chinese man-of-war. China, then, had at length decided to take a hand in the game, and her efforts were to be directed against the rebels. Knowing as he did the terms of the Tien-tsin convention of 1884 between China and Japan, the words “international complications” at once suggested themselves to Frobisher’s mind, and, despite the awkwardness of his own position, he could not help rubbing his hands gleefully. Matters were rapidly developing; and if he could but escape from his present unpleasant predicament there might be an excellent chance for him to see active service again, either in the Chinese or the Japanese Navy—he cared very little which—for that was what things would evidently come to, sooner or later. Japan was herself too much interested in Korea to permit China to play out her own game there alone.

Frobisher had little leisure, however, for the contemplation of possible diplomatic action on the part of the Chinese or Japanese, for he had now other things to engage his attention. To his astonishment, as he watched, he saw that the ship which had just steamed into view was not alone; she was followed, close astern, by another cruiser of her own size and class, also firing heavily with her broadside batteries, and also flying the Chinese flag. A third and fourth vessel—gunboats these—followed in her

wake; and, bringing up the rear, there were three hired transports which appeared to be crowded with men.

So this was no chance appearance of a single cruiser at a critical moment; it was evidently part of a preconcerted scheme—some arrangement previously made between Korea and China whereby the latter country was to lend her assistance for the crushing of the rebellion, a task which the Korean Government had apparently decided to be beyond its capabilities.

The Chinese squadron had been steaming exceedingly slowly when it had first come into view, and Frobisher could now see, from the flash of white water under the ships' sterns, that their engines were being sent astern; and a few seconds later the entire fleet came to an anchor, their cables flying out through the hawse-pipes with a roar which was plainly audible at the fort. The four men-of-war anchored stem and stern, broadside-on to the shore, while the three transports took up their berths about half a mile farther seaward, the ships themselves being screened from the rebel fire by the steel hulls of the men-of-war.

Fully recovered now from their first surprise, the rebels resumed their cannonade most pluckily, two of the field-pieces being directed against the fleet, while the remaining four retained their original position, and poured a well-directed and concentrated fire on the fort. It was apparently the intention of the rebel commander to reduce and take possession of the fort, if he could, before the Chinese troops should be enabled to effect a landing, so that he might have some shelter behind which to hold out until he could summon more rebel troops to his aid.

But the commandant of the garrison had evidently no intention of letting the fort slip through his fingers, now that assistance was so close at hand; and from what Frobisher had already seen of him, he felt sure that his visitor of yesterday was the exact type of man who would blow the building into the air, with himself and all that it contained, rather than surrender, even to an overwhelming force. The guns from the battlements crashed out anew, and although their fire was not nearly so accurate as that from the rebel pieces, yet, in the long run, weight of metal was bound to tell; and, while the shot was solid and had not therefore the devastating effect of the percussion shell fired from the war-ships, it

began to be apparent that some of them at least were getting home, and that their effect was already becoming very galling to the rebels. The latter, now harassed almost beyond endurance by the combined fire of the fort and the ships, brought up, about midday, a company of sharpshooters armed with the latest breech-loaders, which they had somehow managed to secure; and by means of well-directed volleys, contrived to keep the men of the fort from their guns to such an extent that the fire from that building dwindled almost to nothing, so that one more of the rebel guns was released to be trained on the anchored cruisers, when the effect of the increased cannonade soon became apparent in that direction also.

Now and again Frobisher saw flashes of fire leap up on board the men-of-war, for it appeared that the rebels were also possessed of a few percussion shells; and he further observed that the ten-inch gun in the bow turret of the foremost cruiser had been put out of action entirely, thus giving a good deal of relief to the men who had been exposed to its fire. The weapon had been struck full upon the muzzle at the precise moment when a shell was leaving it, and the combined explosion had torn a length of about four feet off the end of the gun, and had lifted it clean out of its bearings, so that it now pointed skyward, its under side resting on the edge of the turret and threatening to crash down on deck outside at any moment. The ruddy orange tint of the light and the length of the shadows told that the sun was near his setting, yet up to this time no effort had been made to land any of the men from the transports. But now Frobisher observed that boats were being lowered from the steamers, and that soldiers were beginning to clamber down into them, while the war-ships redoubled their fire, with the evident purpose of putting the rebel guns out of action, and so making it the easier for the troops to effect a landing.

And now at length that terrible and continuous cannonade began to have its effect, especially as the garrison of the fort had begun to imitate the rebel tactics and were now harassing the foe with rifle fire. The garrison, being sheltered by the parapet of the battlements, were able to fire at leisure and without much danger to themselves; so that, although they were not such good marksmen as their opponents, the mere weight of their fire eventually began to tell upon the unfortunate men in the open, who had nothing but the fringe of jungle to protect them.

The field-piece which had previously been put out of action was now struck a second time by a fragment of flying shell, and collapsed once more on to the sand; and so fierce was the rifle and shell fire that was now being directed upon the little band of gunners that, although they made the most valiant and desperate efforts to repair the damage, they were driven away from the spot time after time, and were at last compelled to abandon their efforts. Then a second field-piece was blown completely off its carriage by one of the solid shot from the fort, and a few seconds afterwards a third gun was dismounted and its crew shattered to pieces by a shell from one of the Chinese gunboats.

Stubbornly, however, the rebels still clung to their position, and, again swinging round the two pieces with which they had been playing on the ships, they resumed the bombardment of the fort, in the hope of battering in a breach through which the place might be carried by storm, or compelling its surrender before the approaching reinforcements could arrive from the fleet.

So absorbed was Frobisher in the little drama that was being enacted before his eyes that, even when the muzzles of the rebel guns were trained on what appeared to be the very window out of which he was peeping, the idea never once occurred to him that he was in a position of considerable danger, and that he would be well advised to climb down; so that it was not until he saw the flashes of flame leap from the pieces as they were all fired simultaneously that he realised the full extent of his temerity.

Then, even as he flung himself backward off the support on which he was standing, there came a terrific concussion, followed by a rumbling roar as an avalanche of stone went crashing to the ground below; while the very building itself, massive as it was, quaked as though the whole edifice were on the point of crumbling to pieces. Frobisher, dazed and half-stunned by the tremendous shock, and nearly blinded by the shower of dust and mortar that came pouring in upon him, found himself lying on his back on the floor, surrounded by a pile of instruments and machines, blocks of stone, and other débris, until it seemed nothing short of a miracle that he had not been crushed to pieces.

As it chanced, however, he had not received so much as a scratch, and

found, as he picked himself up, that nothing worse had befallen him than the acquisition of sundry fresh bruises. And as he was already a mass of contusions from head to foot, he felt that one or two more made very little difference.

He was just about to climb up again to his point of vantage—for he was intensely interested in learning the outcome of this stubborn little fight by the sea-shore—when he happened to glance upward in order to ascertain whether there were any more loose blocks of stone likely to be dislodged and fall on him. As he did so he caught sight of another ray of daylight shining into the gloom of his prison. Upon investigation he saw that the last three shots from the rebel guns must have been so well aimed as to have struck practically the same spot, for, sure enough, there was a ragged hole in the wall, slightly above the window and a little to the left of it, apparently at the junction of the ceiling of his cell and the floor of the chamber above, just big enough for him to thrust his head through. Also, what was more to the point, it was evident that very little effort would be needed to pull down more of the shattered masonry, and so enlarge the hole sufficiently to enable him to crawl through.

But, he decided, it would be sheer suicide for him to attempt to escape at this particular juncture. The mere appearance of his head through the hole would be enough to attract the entire fire of the rebels, since they would naturally take him for one of the garrison; and there was also the very probable chance of his being seen by the riflemen on the battlements, who would be able to pick him off with the utmost ease as he climbed out. No; it would be necessary to delay the attempt until after dark, trusting that meanwhile everybody in general, and the Governor in particular, would be much too busy to pay him a visit of investigation and inspect the damage done.

He therefore placed himself at the window once more, and soon saw that, even during the short interval of his absence, matters had altered considerably. Another rebel gun had been dismounted, leaving only two remaining, while of these one had had its carriage very badly damaged. Also, several more shells from the war-ships must have fallen among the riflemen, for the dead and wounded were now lying scattered about in heaps upon the sand, while the fire from the men in the jungle had dwindled very considerably.

The boats, too, had by this time pushed off from the sides of the transports and were heading—twelve of them altogether, crowded with men—in three lines, “in line ahead”, as Frobisher would have phrased it, for the shore. Each of the leading boats was a steam pinnace whose work it was to tow the rest, and in the bow of each pinnace the Englishman was able to make out a small swivel-gun, with the gunners standing by ready to open fire as soon as the boats drew within range. It could not now be long before the end came, for, when once the boats had landed the troops, the rebels would be hopelessly outnumbered; and it seemed evident that Frobisher’s hope of being rescued by the latter was doomed to disappointment.

By this time the dusk had closed down sufficiently to enable Frobisher to distinguish the trains of small sparks left behind by the fuses of the time-shells which were now bursting thickly over the jungle, the idea of the Chinese evidently being to drive the men concealed there out into the open; and the plan succeeded admirably, although not quite in the manner anticipated.

Frobisher had watched shell after shell fall among the brush and reeds, and had seen group after group of men come reeling out from cover, only to be mowed down by the rifle fire from the fort, when suddenly he perceived a small tongue of flame shoot upward from the seaward corner of the jungle—the corner which was, unhappily for the rebels, right to windward of them; and although a number of men immediately rushed to the spot and did all in their power to trample or beat out the flames, it was of no avail. The fire spread with appalling rapidity, and five minutes after that incendiary shell had fallen the whole of the outer edge of the jungle was a continuous sheet of flame, the roar of which was plainly audible to the imprisoned spectator.

Great masses of dense smoke were driven upward and forward through the jungle, and presently the hidden rebel soldiery came streaming out, driven forth by the flames and smoke; and so swift had been the advance of the fire that the clothing of some of the last to escape was actually smouldering.

Darkness was now falling rapidly, and, sorry as he felt for the rebels in their defeat, the young Englishman could not but admire the weird

magnificence of the scene displayed before him. A section of thick jungle, fully a quarter of a mile long and a hundred yards wide, was one roaring, crackling mass of fire. The flames were leaping forward at the rate of many yards a minute, while they must have attained a height of fully thirty feet. Clouds of dense smoke billowed upward, their under surfaces vividly illuminated by the ruddy reflection of the leaping flames. Even the sea itself, for a mile round, was brilliantly illuminated by the glare, and the three little fleets of boats, which were now approaching the shore, with jets of flame spurting from the muzzles of their swivel-guns, appeared to be floating in liquid flame.

Here, there, and everywhere could be heard the explosions of ammunition as the flames reached the loose piles of cartridges which each man had placed beside himself while firing on the fort; and, with the continuous flash and explosion of the shells as they plunged into the earth, the black silhouettes of the men and guns upon that background of smoke and flame, and the deep, orange glow of the reflected flames in the sky, the scene so indelibly impressed itself upon Frobisher’s memory that he is not likely to forget it as long as he lives.

The fire greatly assisted the garrison and the men in the boats, for it afforded them ample light to direct their volleys accurately, and also to choose the most favourable spot at which to effect their landing; and it soon became perfectly clear that all hope of success on the part of the rebels was at an end. Yet, even now they would not admit, to themselves, much less to their enemies, that they were beaten. Slewing round their two remaining guns, and collecting their scattered and sadly-depleted forces into one compact body, they abandoned the attack on the fort, and directed the whole of their energies to the task of preventing the troops from landing from the boats; enduring the persistent volleys poured into their ranks from the fort with the most stoical resignation. The gunners pointed and elevated their pieces as coolly as though they were firing for practice at a target, and the riflemen loaded, and fired their volleys at the word of command as steadily and as accurately as though there were no foemen returning their fire, and no remotest possibility that every man of them would be shot or cut to pieces within the next quarter of an hour.

And, had their numbers not been so dreadfully reduced during that fierce, all-day struggle, it is quite possible that they might have won, after all; for

the guns were so well served, and the rifle volleys directed with such deadly aim, that the boats and their crews were beginning to suffer severely. Already two of the towed boats had been sunk, and had been cut adrift so that they should not delay the others; and so terrible was the punishment inflicted by their enemies that the landing party could not afford to stop to pick up their crews. The bay was known to be swarming with sharks, and it was not therefore probable that very many, even of the unwounded, would reach the shore alive.

One of the swivel-guns, too, mounted aboard the steam launches, had been struck and hurled overboard by a well-directed shot, and Frobisher could distinguish many a limp and lifeless form hanging over the boats' gunwales, with arms trailing helplessly in the water.

But the Chinese were no less obstinate and determined than their opponents. They had set out with the intention of landing, and they meant to carry out their resolve. The three steamers were still puffing bravely onward, and moment by moment the distance between their bows and the beach became less.

Then, suddenly, high above the crackling of flames, the rattle of rifle fire, and the crashing explosions of the guns, the young Englishman heard the clear notes of a bugle pealing out. It was evidently the command to fix bayonets, for the flash and glitter of steel could be seen as the Chinese drew them from their scabbards and fixed them to their rifles. A second call pealed forth, and the towropes were cast off, oars splashed into the water, and, with a wild exulting yell from their occupants, the boats dashed for the shore, the men in them hurling themselves into the shallow water as the keels ground into the beach.

And now the time had plainly come for the rebels to make their last stand. They were hemmed in on three sides—on one side by the fire, which was now raging furiously; on the opposite side by the cannon and rifle fire from the fort; and on the third by the men from the ships, who were now forming up in line on the beach. The only avenue of escape left to them was in the direction of the town, nearly four miles distant. But if they chose to retreat in that direction they could scarcely avoid being cut to pieces by their pursuers; there seemed, therefore, to be nothing for them but to remain where they were and fight until they were overwhelmed by

superior numbers, killing as many of the enemy as possible before they died. And this was evidently what they meant to do.

The two remaining field-pieces were brought close together, their muzzles pointing seaward, and all the ammunition-boxes belonging to them and to the wrecked guns were brought up and placed behind them. Then the survivors from the day-long struggle formed up, three deep, on either side of the guns, the first line lying down, the second kneeling, and the third standing, so that the rear-rank men should not fire into their comrades in front when the volley firing commenced. The gunners loaded their guns to the very muzzle with solid shot—case, chain, grape, and whatever else they could find—and then took up their positions behind the pieces, waiting for the command to fire.

For a few tense seconds the two bodies of men remained motionless, forming a tremendously impressive tableau. There was the line of uniformed Chinese soldiery, their bayoneted rifles held at the charge, their officers standing in front and on the flanks with drawn swords; and on the other side was the little body of rebels, smoke-grimed, blood-stained, ragged and weary, but with indomitable resolution written all over them. Then the Chinese bugles again sounded, the officers shouted a word of command, and the landing party, with a wild yell of defiance, charged headlong up the beach, their swords and bayonets flashing in the lurid light of the flames. But they had scarcely covered half a dozen yards when the rebel guns crashed out, and their contents went hurtling through the closely-packed ranks, leaving wide lines of dead and wounded in their track, while immediately afterward came the rattling report of volley-firing as the rebels discharged their rifles. The Chinese troops seemed to be literally smitten to a halt before that awful storm, almost as though they had charged up against a solid wall, while the cries, shrieks, and groans that uprose into the still evening air thrilled Frobisher with horror.

The check, however, was but momentary. The troops instantly rallied, and before those cruel guns, or even all the rifles, could be reloaded, the Chinese were among the rebels, the cold steel got to work, and a scene of sanguinary, relentless, hand-to-hand fighting ensued, the memory of which was to remain with Frobisher for many a long day. Before the end was reached he could no longer bear to look on, but, climbing down from

his perch, seated himself on the floor and covered his face with his hands.

For another ten minutes the fearful sounds continued unabated, and then silence gradually fell; and a little later the moon rose over a scene of carnage such as had seldom been witnessed even upon the blood-stained soil of Korea. Of the rebels not a single man remained alive.

So completely overwhelmed was Frobisher by the horror of what he had witnessed, that he sat motionless and so utterly oblivious to his surroundings that he never heard the grating of the key in the lock of his cell door, never heard that door open and close, and never knew that he was not still alone until he happened to glance wearily up, and beheld the Governor gazing down at him with a sardonic smile; while two other men, with masks over their faces, stood at attention but a few paces from him. One of them held a coil of stout rope in his hand, and Frobisher stared at it apprehensively. It was then too late to put into practice his resolves of the night before. The sword with which he had meant to do so much execution was out of reach; and he knew that the slightest movement to secure possession of it would mean a disabling wound from a bullet of the revolver which the Governor held suggestively in his hand. And he could not afford to take the risk, since with such a wound all chance of escape would be at an end; although, as appearances went, chances of escape appeared to be singularly scanty just now. The prisoner felt instinctively that a momentous crisis was at hand.

“Well, Mr Frobisher,” presently exclaimed the Governor, speaking in his perfect English, “have you seen fit to change your mind since I last had the pleasure of seeing you? You will of course be aware by this time that you cannot hope for help from your friends outside—they have been very effectually wiped out, to the last man—and I really think you would be well advised to fall in with my suggestions.”

“Sir,” returned Frobisher, “I have already stated my final decision; and no amount of argument you can bring to bear will make me alter my resolution. You may do whatever you please, since you have the power, but I assure you that you will draw no information out of me.”

“Very well,” retorted the Chinaman; “you have spoken, and we shall soon

see to what lengths your determination will carry you. I have known many men who, at the outset, seemed to be quite as resolute as yourself; but it has invariably happened that, after receiving the attentions of these assistants of mine,"—here he indicated the masked men in the background—"they have come to their senses with marvellous swiftness. As I really need the information I have asked you for in all courtesy, I have no option but to obtain it by the only other means available, therefore—"

He uttered a few rapid sentences in Chinese, indicating certain machines and instruments by pointing at them. Frobisher shrewdly guessed, from the man's actions, that he was instructing his assistants to apply some form of torture to the prisoner; and the young Englishman braced himself for the struggle which now seemed inevitable. The chamber was but dimly illumined by a single lantern, which his unwelcome visitors had brought with them, and by the flickering light of the dying flames from outside; and of this uncertain light he sought to take advantage, hoping that he might succeed in securing possession of a weapon of some sort before his enemies could divine his intentions.

Availing himself of the fact that the attention of the two assistants was momentarily diverted from himself to the Governor while the latter issued his instructions, Frobisher cautiously edged his way toward the spot where lay the sword which he had already fixed upon as a particularly suitable weapon, should he need one for purposes of self-defence; but just as he was in the very act of reaching for the weapon, the Governor happened to glance toward him, evidently guessed what his prisoner contemplated, and promptly levelled his revolver. As the muzzle came up it spouted flame, and Frobisher heard the bullet sing past his ear, to flatten itself against the massive stone wall. Again the vicious little weapon was fired; but at the precise instant that the Chinaman's finger pressed the trigger, Frobisher leaned over and grasped the hilt of the sword; and again the bullet missed. A third time the revolver spoke in as many seconds, and Frobisher's arm tingled to the elbow as the bullet struck the blade and glanced off the steel, luckily away from instead of toward his body; and at the same instant the two assistants, recovering from their momentary paralysis, hurled themselves upon him.

Standing where he now was, close to the pile which he had reared

against the wall to serve as a platform, the prisoner raised his weapon and quickly swung it over his shoulder, intending to make a sweeping cut at his assailants as they came on; but the blade came into violent contact with the erection behind him and baulked his blow. Nevertheless he was able to bring the weapon into a position which afforded him the opportunity to receive the most eager of his adversaries upon its point. With a smothered groan the man dropped writhing to the ground, while Frobisher, hitting out with his left fist, caught the second man fair on the point of the jaw. The man went reeling backwards against the Governor at the precise moment when that individual again pulled trigger. The result was another miss, which so utterly exasperated the Chinaman that he hurled the revolver at Frobisher's head and incontinently turned and fled, locking the cell door behind him.

With two of his foes *hors de combat* and the other fled, the Englishman felt himself to be master of the situation.

Keeping his eyes warily upon his prostrate foe lest he should be shamming and should strive to take him unawares, the young Englishman now seized the lighted lantern and proceeded to hunt for the Governor's revolver, which he presently found and thrust into his belt, after satisfying himself that it still contained two live cartridges. Next he picked up the coil of rope and bound the prostrate man.

Hardly had he accomplished this business when he thought he detected the sounds of voices—that of the Governor and some other—and footsteps approaching outside his prison door. The next instant he was sure of it. The voice of the stranger was raised as though in anger or altercation, while that of the Governor was pitched lower, in tones that seemed to convey the idea of expostulation, entreaty, and apology.

There seemed to be a further altercation outside, the stranger speaking in an angry, authoritative voice; then the lock grated harshly as a key was inserted and turned, the door flew open, and a man entered, dressed in Chinese naval uniform, or what passed for uniform in those days, closely followed by the Governor, whose countenance betrayed a curious mingling of ferocity, apprehension, and anger.

Chapter Eight.

Frobisher’s Commission.

The Chinese naval officer—who, Frobisher decided, was undoubtedly a man of high rank and very considerable distinction—looked keenly about him for several minutes, evidently taking in and forming his own opinion as to the details of the scene which met his gaze. Then he stared long and appraisingly at the young Englishman, who thought he detected the ghost of a smile hovering about the new-comer’s mouth as he again glanced at the forms of the two assistants. Turning to the Governor, the navy-man sharply addressed what seemed to be a series of questions to him. The Governor replied, making what Frobisher guessed to be a long and elaborate explanation. Finally, with a gesture expressive of anger and impatience, excited apparently by the unsatisfactory character of the Governor’s explanation, the stranger cut him short and turned to Frobisher.

“Sir,” he exclaimed, touching his cap as he stepped forward, and speaking almost as excellent English as the Governor’s own, “permit me to introduce myself. I am Admiral Wong-lih, of the Imperial Chinese Navy; and I deeply regret that it should have become my duty to offer apologies, on behalf of my illustrious master, to an Englishman who has been unfortunate enough to undergo such treatment as you have suffered at the hands of a countryman of mine.” Here he turned and glowered at the Governor, who bowed deeply, probably to hide the chagrin and annoyance that showed themselves only too plainly in his yellow face.

“My name,” returned the Englishman, “is Murray Frobisher; and I was, some time ago, a lieutenant in the British Navy. I came out here for the purpose of delivering a cargo of arms and ammunition to the Korean rebels at a certain Korean town. Owing to the treachery of a native in my employ, I was betrayed into the hands of the Korean regular troops, and brought here a prisoner. The situation in which you found me was the result of his Excellency’s desire to obtain further information respecting the rebels and their arrangements. Of such information, I may tell you, sir, I possess very little, and under any circumstances I should not have felt

myself at liberty to divulge even that little. I should like to add that I by no means range myself on the side of the rebels, for, as a matter of fact, I know too little of the circumstances of the case to judge between them and the Government, although, from what I have already seen, my sympathies, such as they are, are on the side of the insurgents. I am in no way connected with the insurgent forces; and when captured I was merely acting the part of agent of another private individual in convoying that caravan across country. But of course, when an attempt was made to take that property out of my hands, I had no option but to try to defend it. That, sir, is the full truth of the matter; and I desire to place myself under your protection as an officer of the Chinese Navy, that I may not again be subjected to the kind of treatment which I have suffered since my arrival here."

"I thank you," returned the officer, "for your voluntary explanation with regard to your connection with the rebel forces; which explanation, I may mention, differs very considerably from the statement made to me by his Excellency here. At the time that that statement was made it struck me as being somewhat faulty, and therefore I determined to investigate matters for myself—a course which I am now very glad I adopted. I was informed by his Excellency, when I enquired whether any prisoners were confined here, that there was but one, yourself; and that you were merely undergoing temporary imprisonment as a result of your being captured in arms, so to speak, against the Korean Government; and it was not until I entered this chamber and saw—what I saw—that I dreamed of the occurrence of any such atrocity as has been practised on you. Again I offer you my most heartfelt apologies."

"Which I most cordially accept, in the spirit in which they are offered," said Frobisher, extending his hand, which Wong-lih grasped and pressed in a friendly fashion.

Then, turning to the Governor, the admiral icily remarked, still in English:

"I will detain you no longer, your Excellency. I desire to have a little private conversation with this gentleman; and when I require your attendance again I will send for you. Pray leave us."

"Your Highness's commands shall be obeyed," replied the Governor,

bowing; and with a sullen scowl on his brow the man turned and left the room, giving the impression that he would gladly have slammed the door behind him, had he dared.

“Highness!” thought Frobisher to himself, during the short pause that ensued. “I seem to be suddenly getting among very important personages—with a big ‘P’, too. This particular prince must be quite a celebrity in his own country, I should judge, by his behaviour. The Governor seemed to be a man of considerable importance, I thought; but even he has to curl up and eat humble pie when this man speaks to him.”

“Now, Mr Frobisher,” continued the admiral, “I trust that you will excuse my claiming your attention for a few minutes longer, for I should like to have a little conversation with you, and this appears to be the only room in the fortress where we can talk without being overheard. You informed me, just now, that you are an ex-naval officer. Would you object to informing me of the reason why you are no longer in the Service?”

“Not at all,” replied Frobisher. And thereupon he proceeded to give the admiral a circumstantial account of the accident which led to his dismissal from the Navy. When Frobisher had finished his recital, Wong-lih pulled his long moustache thoughtfully for a few moments without speaking; then he said:

“Well, Mr Frobisher, I am bound to admit that I think you have been very harshly treated. I do not consider that the fault lay with you at all, but with the men who ought to have been on the look-out aboard the steamer which ran you down. There was never any question, I presume, as to your efficiency as a seaman?”

Frobisher flushed slightly. “None whatever, sir,” he answered. “I have always been considered a quite capable officer, I believe; and, previous to the accident of which I have spoken, my skill as a seaman was never once called in question.”

“I am glad to hear that,” was the admiral’s reply, “for I have a suggestion to make which I trust may meet with your approval. I suppose I may take it for granted that you are open to an offer of employment in your own vocation?”

“Well,” returned Frobisher, hesitatingly. “I scarcely know how to answer that question. You see I signed on under—under—”

“You may safely continue, Mr Frobisher,” smiled the admiral. “Everything you may say to me here shall be considered as absolutely private.”

“Under Captain Drake, of the *Quernmore*, then,” Frobisher continued; “and although I did my best to carry out his orders, I failed, and he will consequently be a very heavy loser. My failure cannot, I think, be considered my fault; and, as I only signed on for the voyage out here, I suppose I may now consider myself a free agent, especially as I have not yet drawn any pay for my services. But I feel that it is perhaps my duty to go back to Sam-riek, to see Captain Drake and explain matters; for he may be waiting there for me, expecting my return.”

“Of course I do not know Captain Drake, or how he would be likely to act under the circumstances,” rejoined Wong-lih; “but I feel sure that by this time he will have learnt of the capture of the consignment—news travels fast out here, you know; and knowing that you had fallen into the clutches of the Korean troops, he will, to put it bluntly, expect never to see you alive again. Nor would he ever have done so, but for the fortunate circumstance of the arrival of my squadron here on this particular day. This being so, it occurs to me that Captain Drake would not be at all likely to risk a long stay at Sam-riek in the very forlorn hope of your returning, but would get away from the place as quickly as possible. I should not be at all surprised if his vessel were to be found in Chemulpo harbour within the next few days. In any case, if you really wish to communicate with him you can write him a letter, and I will engage to get it delivered to him, if his ship is still in these waters. How would that suit you, Mr Frobisher?”

“The arrangement will suit me admirably, sir,” replied Frobisher, “though I cannot quite see why I should not endeavour to rejoin Captain Drake. You mentioned, however, I remember, something as to my being open to accept other employment. Possibly that may have some bearing upon the matter.”

“It has everything to do with it,” said the admiral, “as I will endeavour to show you presently. But, first of all, I must ask you to listen to me for a few minutes while I try to give you an insight into the trend of recent

events out here; for unless I do so, you will be unable to understand what I am ‘driving at’, as I believe you English call it.”

“Pray proceed, sir,” was Frobisher’s reply.

“Very well then. You are of course aware that rebellion has been rife in Korea for some months past, hence the endeavour of the insurgents to procure arms; while the Korean Government has been making every effort to put down the rebellion without the necessity of asking for outside assistance or intervention. The attempt, however, has not been a success, for the rebels are making headway all over the country; to such an extent, indeed, that the Korean Government has at last been obliged to apply to my Imperial master, the Emperor, for assistance. That application arrived some weeks ago; but it was only a few days ago that the necessary arrangements could be completed for armed intervention on our part. It was necessary to get together troops, transports, and so on, and to recall some of our men-of-war to act as convoy; and all this naturally took time.

“The preparations were finally completed, however, and four days ago I embarked the troops and left Wei-hai-wei for the port of Asan, where we now are, and which was reported to me as being a centre of disaffection, a hotbed of rebellion. But I most certainly never anticipated, when I left, that I should have the pleasure of rescuing a fellow sailor from a most serious predicament. However, to continue. By the convention of 1884 at Tien-tsin, between China and Japan, it was agreed that, should either country have occasion to send an armed force into Korea, the sender should inform the other country of the circumstance, giving full particulars of the reason, the strength of the force sent, and any other information deemed necessary. This was done by cable, before I left Wei-hai-wei, and the Japanese reply arrived by cable, also before I left. It was curt in tone to a degree, and intimated briefly that Japan intended to send a guard to Seoul for the protection of her ambassador—as though we ourselves could not afford him the necessary protection—and hinted very strongly that she might consider it advisable to send an armed force of her own—to see that we do not run away with the country, presumably.

“Little enough, you will say, to cause misgiving on our part; but the fact remains that relations between China and Japan have been very strained

for some time past, and our Council feels that this action on our part will bring matters to a head, especially in view of the veiled threat that Japan may perhaps find it necessary to land an armed force herself. Matters look very ominous, Mr Frobisher, in the opinion of nearly all our leading men, so we are naturally eager so to order things that, if trouble should arise between the two countries—as I, for one, feel certain it will—we shall not be entirely unprepared. It is most unfortunate, however, that we are at present extremely short of naval officers; indeed, if war were to break out to-morrow it is an absolute certainty that several of our men-of-war would be unable to put to sea, for want of capable officers to man them. Crews sufficient we have, but officers—"

"Surely you are not serious, sir?" exclaimed Frobisher.

"But I am, indeed, sir," replied Wong-lih. "And now you will see whither this long story of mine is leading, and why I asked you if you would be ready to accept employment. Stated very briefly, the situation is this. If you will agree to my proposal, I can secure for you the position of captain on board a very fine new cruiser of ours, which, at present, we cannot send to sea for the reason I have just mentioned. I cannot actually make the appointment myself, but I can give you passage to Wei-hai-wei, whence you can easily reach Tien-tsin, where the Council is now sitting; and on my recommendation there would be no hesitation on its part about giving you the post—quite the reverse, indeed. There would be no unpleasant conditions imposed upon you; you would not be required to become a Chinese subject, or to do anything, in short, that would affect your allegiance to your own glorious Queen—whom may Buddha in his mercy preserve! All that would be required of you would be an oath to serve faithfully and to the best of your ability while in the Chinese service. Now, I have said my say; let me have your opinion and decision, for I have already spent more time in this fortress than I should have."

For some moments Frobisher remained in deep thought. Undoubtedly, this offer of Wong-lih's opened up a most rosy vista of the future. Captain of a fine new cruiser, with the prospect of a naval war in the near future—what more could any Navy man ask for? There would be chances in plenty to win honour, fame, renown; and his name might even go down in history if he had any luck! It was a tempting bait, indeed, that Wong-lih held out; and, being at a loose end, the Englishman would have been

more—or less—than human if he had not jumped at it. Besides, why should not he? His own country had rejected his services; another country, apparently, had need of them: so why should he not sell his sword to that country? There was no reason at all, so far as he could see; and his mind was made up in less than a minute.

Turning to Wong-lih, he held out his hand with the simple words, “I accept”; and by so doing, altered the whole course of his existence, and opened up for himself a vista of such dazzling brilliance that, could he but have glanced into the future, even his steady, somewhat unemotional brain might have been very nearly turned. But before this could be realised he was to pass through scenes and experiences which were to leave their mark indelibly upon him.

The admiral returned Frobisher’s grip with great heartiness.

“I am rejoiced to learn your decision, Mr Frobisher,” he said, bowing courteously; “and I feel sure you will never have cause to regret it. For such a man as yourself, the Chinese Naval service, at the present moment, offers almost unlimited scope; and there is no reason at all why you should not, in the course of a few years, rise to the highest position in it. We urgently need good men just now, for I am sorry to say that bribery, corruption, and treachery are frightfully prevalent in both the Army and the Navy; and my heart sometimes misgives me when I think of the revelations that are bound to be made when we come to hand-grips with Japan—as I feel confident we soon shall.

“But I must not continue in this strain, or you will be refusing the job with thanks. I suppose there is nothing to keep you here? I mean, you will be able to accompany me back to my ship and make the voyage to Wei-hai-wei with me? I return almost immediately, for my duties consisted simply in convoying the transports here, and looking into matters at Asan sufficiently to enable me to make a report on my return; and that I have already done; so that I am prepared to weigh as soon as it is daybreak. I shall be honoured, also, if you will consider yourself my guest while on board the *Hai-yen*, my flagship.”

Frobisher bowed his thanks. “The honour is mine,” he said, “and I shall have great pleasure in accepting your kind invitation. Also, as I have

absolutely nothing but what I stand up in, my preparations are not likely to occupy much time," and he laughed. "But," he continued, as Wong-lih turned toward the door, "there is one thing which I think we have both forgotten, and which may prove an insuperable objection to my joining the Chinese Navy."

"And that is?" enquired the admiral, raising his eyebrows.

"That I have practically no knowledge of the Chinese language," replied Frobisher. "To be of any real use as captain of a cruiser it seems to me that a thorough acquaintance with Chinese is an absolute necessity."

"If that is your only objection," exclaimed Wong-lih in a tone of relief, "you may dismiss it at once. I had not overlooked the fact that you might be ignorant of Chinese; but we shall do for you exactly what we are doing in the case of Captain Foster of the battleship *Chen-yuen*, who is also an Englishman. We shall provide you with an efficient interpreter, whose sole duty it will be to remain constantly at your side and translate your wishes and commands into Chinese; so, you see, there will be no difficulty at all on that score. Now, if you are quite ready, shall we go? I have no time to spare, and, moreover, the atmosphere of this place is anything but agreeable."

As he spoke, the admiral opened the heavy door and, courteously signing to the Englishman to precede him, allowed Frobisher to pass out into the stone-flagged corridor. Thence they followed the route by which the Englishman had been brought on the previous day, until they came to the room in which he had been cross-examined by the commandant of the fort; and there they found the latter, with the Governor and several other officials, all of whom respectfully rose to their feet upon the admiral's entrance.

With a somewhat curt gesture Wong-lih directed them to be seated; and then ensued a rather lengthy conversation in Chinese, the principal part of which was borne by the admiral, who seemed to be asking questions and issuing instructions. Then, rising to his feet, he dismissed the little group and requested Frobisher to follow him.

"Before we leave, sir," exclaimed the Englishman, suddenly

remembering, “I should like to ask a favour. When I was captured by the Korean troops I had in my possession a pair of rather valuable revolvers, which I prize very much, apart from their intrinsic value, from the fact that they were given me by a very dear friend. I feel convinced that the officer who seized them has not allowed them to pass out of his hands; and, if he happens to be in the fort, I shall be very much obliged if you will request him to return them to me. Also, if the jacket that was taken from me has been preserved, I should like to have that as well. I may perhaps be permitted to mention, too, that I have not tasted food for fully twenty-four hours, and am feeling the need of a meal.”

“My dear sir,” exclaimed Wong-lih, in tones of genuine concern, “what can I have been thinking of not to have enquired if you were hungry! My only excuse is that I was so full of the matter we have just been discussing, that the first rules of hospitality escaped me for the moment. If you will remain here for a few minutes I will myself see that food is served to you. I will at the same time make enquiries about all your property; and if it is indeed here it shall most certainly be returned to you. I will be with you again very shortly.”

With these words the kind-hearted admiral left the room, returning presently with Frobisher’s pistols in one hand and the jacket in the other, bringing also the welcome information that a meal was being hastily prepared, and would be served with the utmost expedition.

Half an hour later Frobisher, feeling a new man and quite himself again, followed Wong-lih out of the fort and down to the beach, where the admiral’s own boat was now waiting to take him on board. On the way thither it was necessary to pass over the scene of the day’s battle, and although it was night and the only illumination came from the moon, and the lantern which the admiral’s coxswain was carrying, there was light enough to reveal many of the horrors of the past day’s fight, and Frobisher was more than glad when that blood-stained field was left behind and they came to the margin of the clean, wholesome sea.

Here they found the officer in command of the troops who were to remain in Korea and to assist the Government in stamping out the rebellion. They were, it afterward transpired, first of all to occupy the town of Asan, and operate against the insurgents, with Asan as their base, until further

instructions were received or other developments arose; and the officer was then waiting to hold a short consultation with Wong-lih with reference to his future course of action, so that the admiral would be in a position to report fully to his Government upon his return to China. The transports, which had also been fitted up as store-ships, were to remain behind in Prince Jerome Bay, with one of the gunboats to protect them, while the two cruisers and the other gunboat were to proceed to sea immediately.

The general plan of campaign had evidently been already arranged, for a quarter of an hour later the officer and Wong-lih saluted each other in farewell, and the Army man returned to the fortress, where the troops were quartered for the remainder of the night, while the admiral entered his barge, and, with his latest recruit in the stern-sheets beside him, was pulled swiftly away to the *Hai-yen*.

Once on board, the admiral conducted Frobisher to a handsomely-furnished cabin, of which he was to have the exclusive use during the voyage, and also, with his characteristic kindness, presented him with a complete Chinese Naval captain's suit in perfectly new condition, which by a lucky chance proved to be a very passable fit. Of course Frobisher was not as yet entitled to wear it, but Wong-lih was so certain that the proposed appointment would be promptly confirmed that he had no qualms in donning it.

It was by this time not very far off daylight. Frobisher therefore decided that, tired though he felt, he would not turn in just yet, but would wait for sunrise in order to watch the squadron get under way. Wong-lih also had no intention of retiring during the short time that still remained before they were ready to leave, so he invited the young Englishman into his own spacious and luxuriously-fitted quarters in the stern of the ship, where the two remained smoking, talking, and drinking coffee, until the sound of the morning gun from the fort, followed by the report of one of the twenty-four pounders on deck, announced that it was "official sunrise", and that the hour had arrived for them to take their departure.

With the admiral's permission Frobisher followed him on deck and up on to the bridge, where a yeoman of signals was already waiting to hoist the necessary flags as a signal to the other ships to weigh and proceed to sea. Thick, greasy columns of smoke were rising from the funnels of all

three craft, proving, to the Englishman's experienced eye, that the coal they were using was quite unsuited to Naval requirements; while a white feather of steam rising from their steam-pipes showed that there was already full pressure in their boilers. After a comprehensive look round, the admiral spoke a few words to the signalman, and a moment later a string of parti-coloured flags soared aloft to the cruiser's yard-arm.

Instantly the shrill clamour of boatswains' whistles was heard from each ship, and next followed the measured "clank-clank-clank" of iron cable, as the steam-capstans got to work and began to haul the vessels up to their anchors. For a few seconds the clatter subsided as the strain of "breaking out" the anchors came upon the cables, then it started again with a rush; and presently the dripping, mud-bedaubed anchors made their appearance under the bows, and were catted and promptly stowed.

Then, slowly at first, but with gradually increasing speed, the *Hat-yen's* screws revolved, the decks quivered, and the ship began to slide through the water, her bows turning toward the entrance of the bay as she did so. The other cruiser fell into line astern of the flagship, and, with the gunboat bringing up the rear, the squadron headed for the open sea in line-ahead formation, sped upon its way by the salutes of the fort and the remaining gunboat, to which the *Hai-yen's* guns replied.

Wei-hai-wei is only a matter of some two hundred miles from Asan; and at midnight the squadron found itself entering the Chinese harbour, where a number of twinkling lights betrayed the presence of other ships belonging to the Navy. The anchors were let go just opposite the fort, and both Frobisher and the admiral went below to enjoy a well-earned rest and refresh themselves in readiness for the duties that awaited them on the following day.

Chapter Nine.

On the Rocks.

Bright and early the next morning Frobisher met Wong-lih on the quarter-deck of the *Hai-yen*, and the admiral announced his plans with regard to both his own affairs and those of the Englishman. He mentioned that he would be detained for some days at Wei-hai-wei making arrangements for the repair of the ships—each of which had been more or less damaged by the rebel fire during the fight in Prince Jerome Bay—and getting a new ten-inch gun mounted in the *Mai-yen's* forward turret, to replace the one which had been dismounted on the same occasion. This, he estimated, would occupy about a week; and, when this work had been put in hand, there were several minor duties in the dockyard which he reckoned would occupy him for another week, making about a fortnight before he would be able to get away to Tien-tsin to make his report in person.

It would therefore be necessary for him to send a messenger with dispatches to the Council, giving an outline of what had taken place; and he gave Frobisher the choice of accompanying the flag-lieutenant who was to carry the dispatches to Tien-tsin—with a letter from himself to the Council recommending his appointment—or of remaining in Wei-hai-wei until he, the admiral, was ready to go to Tien-tsin and personally present his protégé to the Council.

To this Frobisher made reply that, if it suited the admiral equally well, he would much prefer to accompany him to Tien-tsin; for he was extremely anxious to secure the appointment as captain of the cruiser, and knew—from what he had already learned of Chinese officialdom—that he would have a far better chance with Wong-lih by his side as sponsor, than he would as the mere bearer of a letter of recommendation from the admiral. It was accordingly so arranged; and he spent the intervening time in looking round the port, arsenal, and dockyard of Wei-hai-wei, picking up all the information he could with regard to Chinese Naval matters, and also managing incidentally to acquire a small—very small—smattering of the Chinese language, which was afterwards of considerable use to him.

On a certain afternoon, Wong-lih drove up to the hotel where Frobisher was staying, and announced that his duties were now completed, and that he was ready to start for Tien-tsin. There was, luckily, a dispatch-boat in the harbour which had just arrived at Wei-hai-wei from Chemulpo, on her way to Tien-tsin; and the admiral had decided to take passages in her for Frobisher and himself. The Englishman therefore had only to pack the few belongings which he had purchased in the town; and five minutes later the curiously-assorted pair were being conveyed in a rickshaw, drawn by a Chinese coolie, down to the dock, where the *San-chau*, dispatch-boat, was lying.

The voyage from Wei-hai-wei to Tien-tsin is only a short one, of some three hundred miles, but the course lies across the Gulf of Chi-lih, notorious for its dangerous fogs at this season of the year and the typhoons which, at all times, are liable to spring up with only the briefest warning; and about two hours after they had left port, and were passing the bold headland beneath which stands the city of Chi-fu, it began to look as though they were in for one of the latter.

Wong-lih and the captain of the dispatch-boat held a short consultation as to the advisability of running into Chi-fu harbour for shelter; but as the roadstead was somewhat open, it was finally agreed to push on, at top speed, and endeavour to get clear of the Shan-tung peninsula and the Miao-tao islands before the storm broke. Otherwise, they might find themselves in rather an awkward situation.

Steam was therefore ordered for full speed—about seventeen knots—and the *San-chau* began to move more rapidly through the water, at the same time altering her course so as to pass outside the islands instead of through the Chang-shan-tao channel, as had at first been intended.

The sun set luridly in the midst of a blaze of wild and threatening cloud, and the light breeze which they had so far carried with them suddenly died away to nothing, leaving the surface of the sea like a sheet of oil, through which the *San-chau* drove her bows as through something solid. The air felt heavy and damp, and so devoid of life that Frobisher found it difficult to supply his lungs with sufficient air; and although the weather was intensely cold, the atmosphere still felt uncomfortably oppressive.

About two hours later, while the ship appeared to be steaming through a sheet of liquid fire, so brilliant was the phosphorescence of the water, there came, without the slightest warning, the most dazzling flash of lightning Frobisher had ever beheld, followed almost on the instant by a deafening peal of thunder, indicating that the centre of disturbance was almost immediately overhead. So dazzlingly bright was the flash that almost every man on deck instinctively covered his eyes with his hands, under the impression that he had been blinded; and several seconds elapsed before any of them were able to see again distinctly.

As though that first flash had been a signal, the air at once became full of vivid darting lightnings, so continuous that an almost uninterrupted view of the sea, from horizon to horizon, was possible, and the man on the look-out in the bows was therefore enabled to give timely warning of the approach of a white-capped wall of water of terrible aspect. So rapid was its rate of travel that the steamer's skipper had barely time to make a few hasty preparations to meet it, and to shout to the men on deck to "hold on for their lives", when, with an unearthly howl and roar, the storm was upon them. The wall of water crashed into and over the *San-chau* with a power that made it appear as though she had struck something solid; and for a few moments Frobisher, clinging to the bridge rail beside the captain and Wong-lih, could see nothing of the deck of the ship, so deeply was she buried in the wave. The wind, too, wrestled with and tore at ventilators, awning stanchions, and the boats slung from the davits, until he momentarily expected to see the latter torn from their lashings and blown overboard.

The canvas dodgers round the navigating bridge, which they had not had time to remove, were ripped from their seizings and blown away to leeward, where in the glare of the lightning they showed for a few moments like white birds swept away on the wings of the wind. The men themselves, thus exposed to the full fury of the blast, were obliged to cling to the bridge rails for their very lives, to avoid being torn from their hold and whirled overboard; and when the first lull came their muscles felt as though they had been stretched on the rack, so severe had been the strain.

Then, as though the wind had taken a breathing space to recover fresh energy, the hurricane burst upon them again, almost more furiously, if

that were possible, than at first; and Frobisher knew instinctively that, so far from making headway, the *San-chau* was being driven back over the course she had just covered, at a rate of probably five knots an hour, in spite of the fact that her engines were going full speed ahead at their utmost capacity. Anxious glances were cast ahead and astern—ahead to ascertain whether there were any signs of the typhoon breaking, and astern in momentary dread of sighting the distant loom of the land toward which, as all knew, they were being slowly but inexorably driven.

Suddenly the skipper, who had been peering eagerly to windward under the broad of his hand, turned to Wong-lih and spoke a few rapid sentences in Chinese, at the same time pointing in the direction towards which he had been looking. The admiral's eyes followed the outstretched finger, and Frobisher also glanced in the same direction. The captain had apparently seen, or believed he had seen, something strange away to the westward.

A moment later Frobisher knew what it was. Far away, on the edge of the horizon, appeared a small spark of light which shot rapidly up into the sky, where it hung for a few seconds and then burst into a mushroom-shaped cluster of red stars that gradually floated downward again, fading from view as it did so.

"That," shouted Frobisher excitedly to Wong-lih, "is a rocket, sir. There's a ship away there which has been less fortunate than ourselves; she's evidently in distress; and, from her position, I should say that she has probably been driven on to the Miao-tao rocks."

"Without doubt," returned Wong-lih, "that is the fact of the matter; and there are probably many poor fellows perishing away there, almost before our eyes, while we are utterly unable to help them. If a vessel has really gone ashore on those rocks I fear that her crew is doomed; for no ship could long survive in this weather. Get my telescope," he added, in Chinese, to a quartermaster who happened to be on the bridge at the moment; and when the man reappeared with the glass, Wong-lih brought it to bear upon the spot where the rocket had appeared, which he was easily able to do with the assistance of the lightning, still blazing almost continuously.

“By Kin-fu-tzi!” exclaimed the admiral, a few seconds later, “that craft is very much nearer than I thought from the appearance of her rocket—not more than seven miles away, at the utmost. She is a two-masted, one-funnelled steamer, and, I’m almost certain, is a man-o’-war. Now, what should she be doing just there? Have the Japanese sent a vessel over here for scouting purposes, or is she one of our ships? She looks very much like—and yet she cannot be, surely,—the ship I intend you to have, Mr Frobisher—the *Chih’ Yuen*, the new cruiser which we have purchased from Great Britain, and which only arrived out here a few weeks ago. But I do not understand what she is doing there, if it is she; for, as I told you, we had no captain in our whole service to whom we cared to entrust her, which was one of my reasons for asking you to take service with us. I cannot understand it at all,” and he began to gnaw his moustache perplexedly. “But perhaps,” he continued, “I may be mistaken. I must be mistaken; it cannot possibly be the *Chih’ Yuen*.”

At this moment another rocket went soaring up into the night sky, followed by another and another; and then the distant boom of a signal-gun came to their ears, borne on the wings of the hurricane.

“May the spirits of their ancestors protect them!” exclaimed Wong-lih piously. “We, alas, can do nothing! She will be lying fathoms deep in the gulf by morning.”

But, as though in answer to the admiral’s prayer—so suddenly did the change take place—there came a lull in the furious wind, and the three men on the bridge were able to spare a hand to dash the spray from their eyes before the gale struck them again. This time, however, the wild outburst lasted only a few minutes, then ceased as suddenly as before; the thunder was less loud, and the lightning was far less vivid and terrifying. Then the black pall of sky above them began to break up into isolated patches, and a few minutes later the moon and stars showed intermittently between the rifts; the storm was dying away almost as quickly as it had sprung up. But, unfortunately, as soon as the wind dropped the sea began to rise, until within a very short time there was quite a heavy swell running.

The captain of the dispatch-boat lost not an instant in heading his ship direct for the spot from which the rockets had been seen to rise. The

vessel's search-light was brought into action, and the skipper told off a man to sweep the sea ahead with its powerful beam, so that the exact position of the wreck might be located at the earliest possible moment; for during the last few minutes no rockets had been sent up, which was a very sinister sign.

With the cessation of the wind the heavy sea did not very greatly interfere with the *San-Chan's* speed, and she raced through the water on her errand of mercy at the rate of fully eighteen knots, the bearings of her engines smoking as the oil from the cups dripped upon their heated surfaces; and it was not more than half an hour before the man at the search-light found his object and kept the beam playing on her. She was then only a few miles ahead, and stood out, a great mass of silver in the rays of the search-light, against the black background of the night, with the sea breaking over her. Through the telescope her people could be seen running about her decks, and steam was still blowing off through her waste-pipes, so, apparently, the water had not yet reached her engine-room. Frobisher noticed that no effort was being made to get the boats out; but this might be because of the heavy sea running.

At all events, the craft was still above water; and there was little doubt that her crew could be saved, even though they might not be able to save the ship.

In another quarter of an hour—speed having been meanwhile reduced so as to lessen the danger of their running aground—the *San-chau* arrived abreast of the other craft, which proved indeed to be a cruiser, and laid off at a distance of about half a cable's length, her screw revolving slowly, so as to keep her from drifting down upon the wreck. Then, seizing a megaphone, Wong-lih hailed, and asked the stranger's name.

A man in a drenched Naval uniform similar to that which Frobisher was wearing leant over the rail of her navigating bridge and gave a lengthy reply, which the Englishman, of course, could not understand; but from the expression on the admiral's face he could see that the news was not at all of a satisfactory character. When the other officer had finished speaking, Wong-lih ground out a few tense words that sounded suspiciously like a Chinese execration, and, turning to Frobisher, exclaimed in tones of the deepest annoyance:—

“This is most unfortunate indeed, Mr Frobisher. As I almost suspected the moment I discovered that yonder craft was a cruiser, she is the *Chih’ Yuen*, the ship to which I intended you to be appointed. And now look where your future command lies! So surely as either Admiral Ting or I are out of the way, something of this sort inevitably happens. It’s those mandarins again, of course, who are at the bottom of the whole trouble. That fool aboard there who calls himself the captain tells me that, shortly after I sailed, Prince Hsi, who considers himself an authority on Naval matters, decided that the guns in the fore barbette of the *Chi’ Yuen* were of too small a calibre, and in my absence he managed to prevail upon the Council to send her to Wei-hai-wei to be docked and have her 9.4’s replaced by 12-inch guns. Twelve-inch guns in a ship of her size! The man is mad! But I know his game. His intention was to have sold the 9.4’s, replacing them with a couple of old, out-of-date 12’s which I happen to know are lying in the yard, and pocketing the difference.

“That is the sort of thing that goes on in my unhappy country all the time, Mr Frobisher—theft, bribery, corruption, all manner of petty chicanery, especially in matters connected with the Army and Navy; and then they expect us unfortunate officers to do our work with any old material that the high officials have not thought it worth while to pilfer! It is heart-breaking. There, in order to replenish the pockets of Prince Hsi, lies one of the finest cruisers in our Navy, wrecked, and likely to be lost entirely if it comes on to blow again. But,” he went on, still more excitedly, “she shall not be lost. I will get her off, and she shall go to Wei-hai-wei to be repaired in dock—but not to have her guns exchanged. Those in her shall remain there; and his Highness can look elsewhere for something to fill his coffers.”

Again seizing the megaphone, Wong-lih entered into a long conversation with the temporary skipper of the *Chih’ Yuen*, during which he ascertained that the vessel had fortunately struck only very lightly; and, as she had been considerably sheltered from the seas by the part of the reef through which she had somehow managed to blunder before striking, she had not bumped to any extent, and was making but little water. It was therefore to be hoped that her bottom was not so badly injured as Wong-lih had at first anticipated, and that, at the rising of the tide, it might be possible, with the assistance of the *San-chau*, to get her safely off again. The admiral intimated to her captain that he would stand

by all night, and would commence salvage operations as soon after daylight as the state of the tide would permit. Meanwhile steam was to be kept in the boilers, and the pumps were to be kept going continuously, so as to free the ship from water by the time that morning dawned.

High tide, Admiral Prince Wong-lih ascertained from his almanack, was at about seven-thirty on the following morning; so before daybreak all hands were mustered and preparations put in hand for running a hawser across to the *Chih' Yuen*. The sea had gone down during the night until, when the first streaks of daylight came stealing up out of the east, it was almost as calm as on the previous afternoon before the storm.

Frobisher was one of the first among the officers to turn out and go up on deck, and he occupied the time until breakfast very pleasantly in watching the cruiser's boats running out kedge-anchors. Everything being then in readiness, and both ships being under a full pressure of steam, the crews went to breakfast; and directly that was disposed of, the *San-chau's* boats were sent across to the cruiser with a light steel hawser, Wong-lih accompanying them in person, to see that "that fool of a captain" did not make any mistakes this time. The light hawser having been taken aboard the *Chih' Yuen*, the towing hawser, also of steel, was bent on to the end still on board the dispatch-vessel, and was hauled from her through the water on board the cruiser.

As soon as this was done, the ends of the steel hawser on board both craft were backed by several thicknesses of best Manila hemp, in order to procure the necessary elasticity and guard against the wire-rope parting when the terrific strain should be put upon it. After this the hemp portion of the tow-rope was secured to bollards on the quarter-decks of both craft, the slack of the hawsers attached to the kedge-anchors was taken up, the skippers stood by their respective engine-room telegraphs, and, at a signal from Wong-lih, the *San-chau* went slowly ahead until the towing hawser was taut. Steam was then given to the after-winches aboard the cruiser, to which the kedge-hawsers were led, the screws of the *Chih' Yuen* were sent astern at full speed, while the *San-chau* went ahead with every ounce of steam her boilers could supply to the engines.

The great steel cable vibrated until it fairly hummed with the strain, the *Chih' Yuen's* winches bucked and kicked until Wong-lih, on the cruiser's

bridge, momentarily expected them to break away altogether, and the white water foamed and roared under both vessels' quarters as the screws whirred round. For several minutes it seemed as though the attempt was doomed to failure, and that all the cables would part without the cruiser budging an inch; but quite suddenly, as Frobisher watched, keeping the cruiser's mast in line with a pinnacle of rock about a quarter of a mile behind her, he detected a slight movement. The vessel's mast appeared to vibrate, as though the cruiser herself were pulsing with life, and then it slowly, very slowly, moved backward, until mast and pinnacle were a little out of line.

"She moves! she moves!" he shouted, waving his cap in his excitement; and then, like a vessel gradually sliding off the stocks when being launched, the *Chih' Yuen* gathered way, and a few moments later she slid bodily off the rock with a plunge that caused the *San-chau* to roll as though in a heavy sea, overrunning her kedge-anchors before her *momentum* could be checked.

She was afloat again, however, and Frobisher breathed a sigh of thanksgiving. He had set his heart on commanding her, and he would have been bitterly disappointed if so fine a ship had been lost to him and the Navy through the despicable cupidity of a mandarin and the incompetence of a Chinese so-called sailor.

Wong-lih remained aboard the cruiser for another hour or more, until he had satisfied himself that the leaks resulting from her strained and buckled plates were not so serious but that they could easily be kept under by the pumps; and then, having signalled for the first lieutenant of the *San-chau* to come aboard and take charge of the cruiser, in place of the incompetent captain, he ordered the latter to accompany him back to the dispatch-boat under arrest, as a preliminary to his appearance before a court martial at Tien-tsin on the charge of stranding his ship.

Wong-lih and the captain having boarded the *San-chau*, steam was rung for, and presently the two ships proceeded on their respective voyages, dipping their flags to each other as they parted company.

"It was most fortunate that we saw those rockets last night," observed Wong-lih, when he and Frobisher were again standing together on the

San-chau's bridge. "Had we not happened to be on the spot at the moment, the Navy would have lost the *Chih' Yuen*, without a doubt. As it is, I fear she is rather badly damaged, and it will probably mean a few months in dock for her before she is fit for service again—which is all the more deplorable, because we may need her at any moment. At a crisis like this every vessel counts, especially in such a small navy as we possess. I am afraid you will not be joining your ship just yet, Mr Frobisher; but I have not the least doubt that, when we reach Tien-tsin, some congenial service will be found for you which will keep you occupied until the *Chih' Yuen* is repaired. There is plenty of work, and very few officers to do it; so you need have no apprehension whatever on the score of non-employment."

"I thank your Highness," answered Frobisher. "I am rejoiced to hear you say that, for I confess I felt very sore when I saw my ship, or what was intended to be my ship, cast away on the Miao-tao reef."

Twenty-four hours later the *San-chau* steamed past the Taku forts, flying the admiral's flag to announce that Wong-lih was on board, and received and answered a salute from the batteries; and shortly afterward the anchor was dropped in the middle of the river, opposite the handsome city of Tien-tsin, upon which Frobisher now looked for the first time.

Chapter Ten.

The Pirates' Lair.

It was about midday when the *San-chau* anchored off the port of Tien-tsin; and Wong-lih suggested to his young protégé that they should lunch aboard before going ashore to the Navy Buildings, which were at that time situated in the "Street of many Sorrows"—an ill-omened name, indeed, as after-events were to prove.

They were nearing the completion of the meal when there came a knock upon the cabin door, and the sentry announced that a messenger had arrived with a letter for "his Highness, the most honourable Admiral Prince Wong-lih". The admiral opened and read it, wrote a brief reply, and

then explained to Frobisher that, the arrival of the *San-chau* having been observed, and his own presence on board disclosed by the fact of his flag flying from the fore-topmast head, the Council, then sitting in debate at the Navy Buildings, had sent to say that they would be glad to see him on a matter of importance as soon as he could make it convenient to come ashore.

“Further developments in Korea, I suspect,” observed the admiral, frowning. “I pray that no open rupture between ourselves and Japan may occur just yet; for we are utterly unprepared. We must put off the evil day as long as possible, even if we have to humble ourselves before them for a month or two; for it would be absolutely suicidal for us to engage in a war with Japan at the present moment. Our ships are good; our men are excellent fighters; and to the outsider it would naturally appear that all the advantages are on our side: but alas! men, however brave they may be, cannot fight to win under the command of inefficient officers, and with arms, ammunition, and stores that may fail them at any moment. Ah me! ah me!”

“You feel, then,” said Frobisher, “that war is inevitable?”

“I am sure of it,” replied the admiral. “Perhaps not to-day, or to-morrow; but war there certainly will be before many months are past. I only wish I could bring the realisation of this fact home to some of those officials who are content to wait and wait, spending the country’s money, if not on themselves personally, at any rate upon things on which it ought not to be spent; until the time comes, all too suddenly, when they will awake to the fact that they have procrastinated too long, and that their country is at the mercy of the enemy.”

“Let us hope, sir,” replied Frobisher, cheerfully—for he had begun to have quite a strong liking for the cultured and patriotic Chinese gentleman and sailor, and was sorry to find him taking so pessimistic a view of the situation—“that matters are not so bad as you imagine, and that China will issue from the coming struggle more powerful than before.”

“We will, indeed, hope so,” said Wong-lih, rising. “But I greatly fear that our hope will be unfulfilled. However, an end to these dismal forebodings of mine, Mr Frobisher! I am growing old, and am on that account more

liable, perhaps, to look on the dark side of things. Let us go ashore now, and see what it is that the Council wishes to talk about. I will seize the opportunity to introduce you to the officials composing it, and we will get your commission made out and signed, so that you may be ready for service whenever called upon."

With these words Wong-lih went up on deck, followed by Frobisher, and the two men, entering the *San-chau's* gig, were pulled ashore.

Frobisher was very favourably impressed by the handsome appearance of the various public buildings, and was quite astonished at the size and magnificence of those devoted to the Navy Department, when he and his companion finally halted before the wrought-iron gates which gave admittance to the grounds surrounding them.

Wong-lih, exhilarated at the near prospect of a discussion upon his favourite subject, the Navy, ran up the steps leading into the building with the activity of a boy; and in a few minutes the two men found themselves in a beautifully-furnished antechamber, whither they had been conducted to wait for the summons to present themselves before the all-powerful Council. Frobisher himself felt just a trifle nervous at the prospect, but Wong-lih's countenance was transformed by a happy smile, while he actually sniffed the air from time to time, like an old warhorse scenting battle.

Presently a door, opposite that by which the two had entered, opened, and a gorgeously-dressed attendant stepped up to Wong-lih and saluted, saying something at the same time in Chinese.

"Come along, my young friend," smilingly exclaimed the admiral, as he rose to his feet; "the moment of your ordeal has arrived. Present a bold front, my boy; there is nothing to be nervous about, I assure you."

He led the way, through the door which the attendant respectfully held open, into another chamber—or rather hall, so large and lofty was it—where Frobisher saw a group of Chinamen, nine in number, seated round an oval table on which a quantity of official-looking documents were lying. So far as it is possible to tell any Chinaman's age from mere observation, they were all elderly men, with the exception of one individual, who was

obviously quite young, and who was seated at the right hand of the one who was clearly the chief official present.

He was a man of perhaps thirty, or possibly younger still, with a very yellow skin, a long, very thin, drooping moustache, and brilliant, coal-black eyes, deeply sunken in their sockets, out of which they glared with an emotionless, steely glitter that reminded Frobisher most unpleasantly of a snake. There was also in them something of the deadly malevolence that all snakes' eyes seem to possess, and the Englishman could barely repress a shudder of disgust as he found those eyes fixed on his, for he felt as though he had suddenly come in contact with some noxious reptile.

As they entered, the Council, with the exception of the man just referred to, rose and bowed solemnly to Wong-lih, who returned the bow ceremoniously. He and Frobisher were then signed to seat themselves, after which the Councillors resumed their seats.

Commencing with the old man at the head of the table, each of the members of the Council in turn questioned Wong-lih, and a long conversation in Chinese ensued, which Frobisher was of course unable to understand. He occupied himself with looking round the room and admiring the wonderful carving and the priceless tapestries on the walls, and was quite taken by surprise when he suddenly heard Wong-lih's voice calling his name.

He was then introduced to the Council collectively, and a number of questions were put to him in English, with which tongue he was beginning to think every Chinaman must be familiar, so many had he already encountered who were able to speak it almost as fluently as himself. Like many of his fellow countrymen, he had up to now imagined that the Chinese were a barbarous race, knowing nothing of anything that happened outside their own country.

Apparently he soon satisfied his examiners as to his nautical attainments; and presently he found himself in possession of a parchment which set forth the fact that Murray Frobisher was appointed to the Chinese Navy with the rank of captain; and he was informed that he was to take command of the *Chih' Yuen* as soon as she was ready for service again.

Until that time he was to consider himself on the staff of Admiral Wong-lih, who would find employment for him in the interim. After this little ceremony a further lengthy discussion took place in Chinese, and it was not until late in the evening that he and his sponsor were able to get away and return to the ship.

Arrived there, they proceeded to the cabin where Wong-lih had taken up his quarters, and here Frobisher received an account of what had occurred at the meeting.

“It seems,” announced the admiral, “that a dispatch has been received from our Minister in Tokio, informing us that the Japanese, although they have sent an escort for their Minister at Seoul, have decided to delay for a time the dispatch of a large armed force to Korea, and to await further developments. This is grand news, for it gives us a little longer in which to make our preparations; but our Minister also advises us to be on our guard, for Japan means to force a quarrel, sooner or later. Now, as regards yourself, news has recently been brought that the river merchants of the Hoang-ho have been greatly troubled lately by the excesses of a band of pirates, who are believed to have their head-quarters somewhere near the place where the old bed of the river leaves the present channel—that is, not far from the village of Tchen-voun-hien, three hundred miles from here. I wish you to take command of the gunboat *Su-chen*, and proceed in her to this place. You will investigate the matter thoroughly; and, if the stories are anything approaching truth, you will hunt down that band of pirates, and destroy them and their head-quarters. No quarter must be shown, Mr Frobisher; those criminals must be dealt with severely.

“The interpreter I mentioned to you shall be attached at once to your person, and I shall be glad if you will enter upon your new duties immediately. Oh, by the way, I have also had news of your friend, Captain Drake. He was told of what had happened by a survivor from your party; and he came round here in the *Quernmore* to demand that we send an expedition to rescue you. He appears to be very much attached to you.

“Of course he was told that such a course was not to be thought of, besides being quite useless; and he appeared to be very much cut up at the news, so I am told. He accepted a contract from the Navy

Department for the supply of a cargo of arms, ammunition, and guns, and left in his ship for England only a week before our own arrival here. When he returns, should you not be here yourself, I shall of course inform him of your rescue, and so ease his mind.

“Now, Captain Frobisher, I have little more to say. Get away as soon as you can. Your crew is already aboard; and, if you need any stores or ammunition, indent for them in the usual way; they will be duly supplied. But there, I need not tell a British Navy man how to do his business. Good-bye, my boy, and Heaven grant you a safe return!” he concluded, affectionately.

The two men clasped hands, Wong-lih buried himself in a mass of papers, and Frobisher departed to bed to refresh himself in readiness to commence his duties early on the following morning. His last thought, as he dropped off to sleep, was that he was now Captain Frobisher, of the *Chih’ Yuen*; and that it would not be his fault if he did not make her name famous in Chinese Naval history.

He awoke in the morning, however, utterly unrefreshed, for he had slept badly. A vague feeling of foreboding and a strong presentiment of disaster had oppressed him throughout the night, and his dreams had been haunted by a thin, yellow face, with long, attenuated, drooping moustache—a face out of which peered a pair of eyes, glowing like flame and with hideous possibilities of evil shining in their black depths. The face was the face of Prince Hsi, the youngest member of the Council.

The splendid, keen, invigorating air of a Chinese morning soon blew the cobwebs away from Frobisher’s brain, and half an hour after leaving his bed he was smiling to himself at his own folly in allowing Prince Hsi’s evil countenance to affect him to such an extent as to spoil his rest. The man couldn’t help being born with a face like that; and perhaps an ugly exterior might in reality hide a very kind and gentle soul. By the time that Frobisher had arrived at the wharf where the *Su-chen* was lying, he had completely forgotten the existence of “the man with the snake’s eyes”, as he afterwards came to call him.

The interpreter promised by Wong-lih had duly presented himself to Frobisher on board the *San-chan* that morning, and the Englishman very

soon began to find the man's services invaluable. With his assistance, the *Su-chen* was easily located, and Frobisher at once boarded her and made himself known, and read his commission to her officers and crew through the medium of Quen-lung, the interpreter. A very quiet, decent set of men they seemed to be, to all appearance. They gave him such information as he asked for, quickly and without hesitation; and, so far as he could learn on such brief acquaintance, seemed thoroughly conversant with their duties. He made enquiries about the amount of water and provisions that was aboard, satisfied himself that there was a sufficiency to serve them for the expedition, and then went into the question of the quantity of ammunition remaining on board.

This did not at all satisfy his requirements; for he found that, although there appeared to be plenty of small-arm ammunition, there was very little belonging to the machine-guns and the guns in the batteries; so, taking Quen-lung with him, he made his way to the magazines, taking his requisition book with him in his pocket.

It was then that he obtained his first insight into the subtle ways of Chinese Naval officialdom. He knew perfectly well what kind of ammunition he required, and how much of it, but he seemed utterly unable to find anybody who possessed the necessary authority to issue it. He was sent from one official to another, all of them gorgeously dressed and very eager to give every assistance; yet when the moment arrived for the stores to be actually given into his hands—well, they were heart-broken to give the honourable captain so much trouble, but would he be pleased to obtain the approval of his Excellency the honourable Somebody Else, whose signature was also needed before the ammunition could be removed.

At last, so disgusted did Frobisher become at all this delay and prevarication that he went back to the *Su-chen*, selected some twenty of the strongest members of his crew, and himself took them up to the magazine with a number of hand-wagons which he had collected, under much voluble protest, *en route*. Then, having found the required pattern of cartridge, he ordered his men to load the cases on to the wagons, and, amid the intensely-shocked expostulations of the outraged officials of the Ordnance Department, who were quite unaccustomed to fill a requisition in less than a month, the several indents were wheeled down to the

gunboat by the Chinese sailors, who already began to show the respect they felt for a man who knew what he wanted, and got it.

The task was finished at last, and that afternoon the *Su-chen* dipped her ensign to the *San-chau*, on board of which Admiral Wong-lih had his quarters, steamed down the river Pei-ho, past the Taku forts at its mouth, and out into the open sea on her way to the mouth of the Hoang-ho, some three hundred miles up which lay the village of Tchen-voun-hien, at or near which the pirates' lair was said to be situated. During the hundred-mile run across the gulf of Chi-lih, Frobisher set his men to clean ship thoroughly, overhaul and polish the guns, and make things in general a little more shipshape than they had been since the time when the *Su-chen* left her builders' hands on the Thames.

Frobisher was fortunate in the moment when the gunboat arrived off the mouth of the Hoang-ho, for the sea was smooth, and the usually dangerous bar at the mouth of the river was passed with ease. But there were many reminders, in the shape of broken spars, and in some cases fragments of hulls, projecting out of the water, to show that the sea was not always in so gentle a mood, and that many other captains had been less fortunate. The bar at the mouth of the Hoang-ho is indeed one vast graveyard, both of men and ships.

Frobisher anchored a few miles up the river, and spent a whole day exercising his men at cutlass and small-arm drill, to smarten them up a little and prepare them as far as possible for the cut-and-thrust work which, he felt sure, the task of exterminating the pirates would ultimately involve. Early on the following morning the voyage upstream was continued, the *Su-chen* making not more than about six knots an hour against the strong current, the result, evidently, of heavy rains up-country, for the river—well named the "Yellow River"—was thick and turbid with mud, which had been washed off the surface of the land by the floods.

Mile after mile the *Su-chen* crept along, and the low, flat, uninteresting banks slipped gradually astern. A few junks were passed, but they were all too far away for Frobisher to communicate with them, as they were well in under the land, while the gunboat was obliged, on account of her draught, to keep more or less in the centre of the river.

One afternoon, however, there came from the man whom Frobisher had posted in the foretop, to give warning of rocks or shoals, a shout that there was a dismasted junk about a mile ahead which appeared to be trying to intercept the gunboat. She seemed, the look-out reported, to have been on fire, as well as having lost her mast, for he could plainly make out through his telescope the black patches where her deck and bulwarks had been charred. There were only two men on deck, he added, and these men were doing all they could to attract attention, waving something—he could not quite make out what—above their heads, and leaping about excitedly. There were other dark-coloured patches about the deck, but at that distance it was not possible to say whether they were the result of fire, or of something else. Frobisher, however, who had carefully listened to a report of the details from the interpreter, had the conviction that there had been some happening on board that junk other than that of mere fire, and that he was shortly to receive evidence with his own eyes of the activities of the pirates whom he was going to exterminate; for he felt certain that the dark stains were not those of fire, but of blood.

As soon as the unwieldy craft, which was progressing solely by the force of the current, approached to within a quarter of a mile of the *Sit-chen*, Frobisher rang his engines to half-speed, so that the gunboat barely made headway against the current, and thus awaited the junk's arrival. The gunboat was skilfully manoeuvred alongside her, and the crew, with ropes and grapnels, soon secured her, and assisted the two men who formed her sole complement up on deck. Here Frobisher, after giving them some refreshment, of which they were plainly in great need, questioned them through the interpreter as to the cause of their present condition.

It was precisely as he had expected. The junk had, it seemed, sailed a few days previously from Tchen-tcheou, a town about six hundred miles from the mouth of the river, with a valuable cargo of sandalwood intended for Tien-tsin; but on passing the spot where the old bed of the river used to lie before the channel was diverted, she had been attacked by no fewer than five large and heavily-armed junks, crowded with men. Before the crew could even place themselves in a position for defence, the junk had been seized and the men cut to pieces by the ruthless pirates. The two men standing on the *Su-chen's* deck had escaped as by a miracle,

for, after taking all her cargo out of the junk and throwing dead and wounded overboard, the leader of the pirates had indulged his humour by binding the two survivors and laying them on the deck, afterwards firing the junk and setting her adrift. The men had secured their freedom by one of them gnawing the other's bonds loose, and they had then managed to extinguish the fire.

But—would not the honourable captain take his ship up the river, and wipe the pirates out, lock, stock, and barrel? Frobisher informed them that such was his intention; and, after asking the two men whether they would accompany him as guides, and receiving their assurance that they desired nothing better, he set the junk adrift again, since she was absolutely useless, and continued his journey.

At nine o'clock the next morning one of the two new men, who had been looking keenly ahead for a few moments, came up to Frobisher and pointed out what appeared to be a large, square, stone-built castle, or fort, standing some distance back from the river bank, upon the top of a knoll of rising ground.

"That," he announced, "is the pirates' head-quarters. There is a little bight just at the junction of the old and the new channels, and it is there that they lie in ambush with their junks. Now, sir, you can perhaps see their masts standing up behind that low bank yonder?"

Frobisher looked, and counted, indeed, five masts. They were, then, evidently those belonging to the pirate junks which had attacked the Chinese merchantman on the preceding day; and the fort on the hill, yonder, was the pirates' lair which he had been specially dispatched from Tien-tsin to destroy. He rubbed his hands gleefully and gave orders to clear for action; then, with his telescope fixed unwaveringly on the fort, he leant over the bridge rail, watching, while the *Su-chen*, her engines working at full pressure, stemmed the muddy tide on her errand of retribution.

Chapter Eleven.

Tchen-voun-hien.

The *Su-chen* was about five miles away when the fort first came into view, and for about a quarter of an hour she steamed ahead without any sign of life or of alarm becoming perceptible in the vicinity of the pirates' head-quarters. Frobisher was beginning to hope that fortune was so far favouring him that perhaps the freebooters might have set out on some buccaneering expedition inland upon this particular morning, and that he might thus be able to land, seize and destroy the junks, and occupy the fort during their absence; at the same time preparing an unpleasant little surprise for the pirates when they returned.

But his hope was doomed to disappointment. Still keeping his eye glued to the telescope, he suddenly observed a flash and a puff of white smoke leap out from a corner tower of the fort, and a few moments later the dull "boom" of a fairly-heavy gun made itself heard. At the same moment a tiny ball soared aloft to the head of the flagstaff on the battlements, which ball presently broke abroad and revealed itself as a large yellow flag of triangular shape, the apex of the triangle, or fly, being circular instead of ending in a point. There was also a design of some description embroidered on the flag in the favourite Chinese blue, but what the design represented Frobisher could not imagine. He had never beheld anything like it in his life, so he turned to Quen-lung, who was, as usual, standing alongside him, and, handing him the telescope, told him to take a look at the piece of bunting and say what the decoration on the flag was intended to represent.

Quen-lung obediently placed the eyepiece to his eye, and a few seconds later Frobisher observed the man turn pale and stagger backward, almost dropping the telescope as he did so. The man's eyes were dilated, his face turned the colour of putty; his lower lip had dropped, and his hands were trembling as though palsied. He presently recovered himself, however, and the colour gradually returned to his face. Frobisher asked what ailed him.

"Oh, sir," he answered, "turn back; turn back before it is too late. I have read the design on that flag, and know we can never hope to succeed against those who fight under its folds. I may not say—no man who knows may tell what those characters signify; but the men who belong to the Society that flies that ensign have never been conquered, and not a single one among them has ever been captured, although troops have

been sent against them time after time. No one has ever returned alive to tell what happened; and we can only guess. They have sworn enmity against the whole human race, and their numbers are always being increased by the addition of men who have wrongs to redress, or believe themselves to have been injured by their fellows; and it is said that they always put their captives to death in an unspeakably horrible manner, although no witness has ever returned to tell the tale. I am sure that, if the admiral had known who the people were whom he wants to destroy, he would never have sent the expedition at all."

Frobisher looked the man up and down for a few seconds, as though he thought that the fellow's mind had given way. Then he said, sternly:

"What child's talk is this, Quen-lung? Do I hear a man speaking, or is it a boy, frightened by a bogy? What are you dreaming about, that you tell me I had better return without attacking these pirates? I am most certainly going to attack them, and my orders are to exterminate the whole crew of them; so you will very soon be able to disabuse your mind of the belief that they are invulnerable, as you seem to suppose. You say that no man has ever escaped them; but there are two men on board now to contradict that statement—the men we rescued from the junk. No, no, my good man; you've been listening to some old woman's tale and allowed it to frighten you. You'll see that you will be quite all right as soon as the fighting begins; you will do your part as well as the best of us."

This he said in the hope of infusing a little backbone into the man, who was shaking like a leaf; but his words had no effect. Quen-lung was terrified, there was no doubt of that, and it seemed to Frobisher that his terror arose not so much, from fear of the pirates themselves as from some supernatural power which he appeared to attribute to them.

"Well, master," he said resignedly, "if you insist on attacking them, you must; but you will not win. I know it; I can see it!" And without another word he walked to the other side of the deck and leant over the bulwarks, his chin resting on the palms of his hands, staring moodily down into the muddy water.

By this time the *Su-chen* had approached to within a distance of about a mile from the fort and the small bight in the river, inside which lay the five

junks, and Frobisher determined to try a sighting shot at the building, to accustom the men to a changing range. He therefore ordered the men to load the four-inch gun forward, bring it to bear on the square tower from which the pirates' signal-gun-had been fired, and discharge it when ready.

The gun was loaded and trained, and the gunner laid his finger on the firing key; there was a deafening report, the boat quivered from truck to keelson, and Frobisher, watching, saw the shell strike and burst full on the centre of the tower, in which a ragged hole immediately afterwards appeared.

"Good shot!" he ejaculated, laying down his telescope. "Let us try a few more of the same kind, men. That will soon show those fellows that we mean business. Where's their invulnerability now, Quen-lung—eh?"

His words were drowned by a terrific discharge from the fort, the whole eastern front of which seemed to break out into flame and smoke, while a perfect storm of shot, shell, and small-arm missiles swept the ship, striking down men, ripping up planking and bulwarks, cutting rigging, and generally doing a tremendous amount of damage.

From all over the decks came the cries and groans of wounded men, mingled with execrations from the unwounded who had seen their friends shot down. Frobisher himself, when he had wiped the blood out of his eyes which had flowed into them from a small wound on his forehead caused by a flying splinter, was astounded to observe the amount of damage and the number of casualties that had resulted from that one discharge. The pirates had somehow managed to get the range to a nicety, and every shot had come aboard. There were no less than nine men killed and wounded, and the crew of the four-inch gun were all down. Unconquerable or not, the pirates were certainly marvellously clever gunners, and their weapons must be both heavy and modern.

At the same moment Frobisher observed a movement among the masts of the junks; and presently, to his amazement, he saw that they were coming out from behind their shelter, evidently with the intention of fighting him from the river as well as from the shore. Well, he would make short work of them, anyway. They were only made of wood, and a few

well-directed shots between wind and water should send the whole fleet to the bottom in short order. With this end in view, he ordered every gun that could be brought to bear to be fired at the junks, meaning to clear them out of the way before turning his attention entirely to the fort; for he could see that they were crowded with men, and it might be rather awkward for his ship's crew if they managed to get alongside. The gunboat's sides were low, and it would be an easy matter to board her from craft standing as high out of the water as those junks.

The men sprang to their posts with alacrity, and soon the duel was in full swing. The junks were, like the fort, very heavily armed—much more heavily than Frobisher had in the least anticipated—and their accurately-aimed shot came ripping and tearing through the *Su-chen's* wooden bulwarks and sides with terrible effect. In addition to solid shot the pirates were using shell, and the air was soon full of flying pieces of metal, which struck men down in every direction. Only inside the iron casemates did there seem to be any protection from that deadly storm, and there the Chinese sailors were serving their guns coolly and with excellent aim. Shot after shot struck one or other of the junks, and Frobisher could see them actually reel under the impact; but so far no shot had been lucky enough to strike below or on the water line, and so sink any of them.

The *Su-chen* was now, he considered, quite close enough to both fort and junks; he therefore rang for half-speed, at which the vessel just held her own against the current, the junks themselves having anchored in order to avoid being swept down under the *Su-chen's* guns.

So the battle went grimly forward. Frobisher soon discovered that his big body was being made a target for small-arm fire, and was shortly obliged to leave the bridge, in order to avoid being shot. He therefore took up his post in the forward starboard casemate, from which position he could observe the enemy and at the same time encourage his crew to greater efforts. This he was obliged to do by signs, for at the beginning of the battle Quen-lung had vanished, and Frobisher was unable to catch a glimpse of him anywhere. He had doubtless sought the seclusion of his cabin, in the hope that there he might find safety, oblivious of the fact that the enemy were using such large and powerful guns that the wooden sides of the gunboat offered little more protection than he would have obtained out on deck. Frobisher determined to go and find him, when he

could spare a moment or two from the matter in hand, bring him up on deck, and thus teach him, by the most practical of methods, how to stand fire without flinching.

At present, however, he had more than enough to occupy him, without thinking of Quen-lung. The fort had brought all its guns to bear on the *Su-chen* directly the gunboat became practically stationary, and it, as well as the junks, was making such excellent practice that Frobisher at length began to realise that he was in a very warm corner indeed, out of which it would tax his skill to the utmost to extricate himself, to say nothing of carrying out his expressed intention of destroying the pirate stronghold. There was, of course, still time to retire, to return to Tien-tsin and bring reinforcements, explaining to the admiral that one small gunboat was utterly inadequate to undertake so important an enterprise as this was proving to be; and this would doubtless have been his wisest plan. But this particular Englishman happened to be one of those who do not know when they are beaten, and the mere idea of retreat never so much as entered his mind.

He therefore went about from gun to gun, cheering and encouraging the men, sometimes training one of the weapons himself, and all the while impressing upon the crew—as well as he could by signs—the necessity for holing and sinking the junks as speedily as possible, and so reducing to some extent the severe gruelling to which the *Su-chen* was being subjected.

At last his constant exhortations began to have their effect. A well-directed shell from the four-inch gun—laid, as it happened, by Frobisher's own hands—struck the junk at the end of the line nearest to the gunboat full upon the water line, and exploding, blew a hole in her nearly a yard square; while from the interior of the smitten junk arose a chorus of screams, groans, and yells, proving that the flying splinters of the shell had done other work as well. Those on board the *Su-chen* saw the water pouring into the pirate vessel in a very cataract; she heeled farther and farther over, and in less than a minute after the shell had struck, righted herself for a second, and then plunged below the surface, carrying with her the greater portion of her crew.

"Hurrah, boys!" shouted Frobisher, "that's one gone. Repeat the dose

with the next fellow, and we'll soon put the whole crowd of them out of business!"

The rousing cheer with which his men responded to words which they could not possibly understand, but the meaning of which was sufficiently clear, was answered by a yell of rage and defiance from the pirates, accompanied by another furious bombardment from their guns and small-arms; and Frobisher, gazing at the havoc caused by the discharge, and the bodies with which his decks were strewn, realised that the destruction of that one junk had but animated the pirates to fresh exertions, and that the victory was not yet even half-won.

Realising that it was imperative to silence the fire from the junks if success was to be obtained at all, he signed to the gunners to load and direct all their pieces upon the next junk, firing together, in the hope that the combined discharge might effect the desired result. And so it did. The missiles all struck the craft almost on the same spot, and a few minutes later she, too, took herself and her crew to the bottom, leaving only three junks to deal with—and the fort, which was blazing away merrily and doing a good deal of damage, though not so much as the junks, the gunners on board which appeared to be specially-trained marksmen.

The enthusiasm of the Chinese sailors at this second stroke of luck was immense, and they threw themselves into their work with unabated energy, despite the fact that fully a quarter of their comrades were lying dead or wounded around them.

The cries of the wounded for water were dreadful, despite all that could be done to help them. Frobisher had already told off as many men as he could spare to carry water, but it seemed impossible to quench the poor wretches' thirst; their cry was always for more, even though they had drunk but a moment previously. The unwounded men appeared to be quite indifferent, however, both to their own comrades' sufferings and their own chances of death or mutilation, and went on serving the guns as calmly as though they were at target practice. Frobisher realised then, as numbers of white men have realised since, that the Chinese soldier and sailor, properly trained and properly led, constitutes some of the finest fighting material in the world; and that, if a leader ever arises, capable of drilling and controlling the vast mass of material which China

contains, it will be a very bad thing indeed for the white races. A properly-drilled, well-trained, well-armed, and capably-led army of perhaps fifty million fighting men would be invincible; an invasion of Europe by such a force could not possibly be withstood. That dreadful day is, however, far in the future, let us hope.

Frobisher now turned his attention to the third junk, still carrying out his plan of sinking them one at a time, and determined to lay and fire the four-inch gun again himself, in the hope of repeating his former successful shot. The shell and cartridge were rammed home and the breech closed and screwed up, and having trained the gun, he pressed his finger to the firing key, springing back directly afterward to avoid the recoil. But to his astonishment there was no report: the weapon did not discharge. He therefore set and pressed the key again, but once more there was no result. It was evidently a miss-fire. The young man knew, of course, that sometimes a cartridge will “hang fire”, and that many a gun’s crew have been blown to pieces by prematurely opening the breech, but he forgot all about that now in his anxiety, and unscrewed and opened the breech-piece immediately. Nothing happened. There were the marks of the percussion-pin upon the primer of the cartridge, but the ammunition had failed to explode.

Hastily calling for another cartridge, he withdrew the faulty one and thrust in a fresh one, closing the breech and repeating his first operation; but again the cartridge failed to explode. Something was seriously wrong somewhere—but what? Was it the powder that was faulty or damp, or the primer that was ineffective? It was impossible to say without examination. Another cartridge and still another were tried, and every time the result was the same, until Frobisher began to feel seriously alarmed.

Encouraged by the cessation of fire from the *Su-chen*, the junks had redoubled their own, and the gunboat was rapidly becoming as riddled as a sieve, while men were falling fast in every direction. The ship’s funnel was as full of holes as a cullender, the shrouds of the foremast were cut to pieces on both sides, the mainmast had long since been shot away, and the wooden deck-houses were mere heaps of splintered wood, while the bulwarks were in a perfectly ruinous condition. Clearly something must be done, and done quickly, or the *Su-chen* would be sunk beneath their feet.

Ordering his men to leave the four-inch for the time being, and to blaze away with the smaller pieces and machine-guns, Frobisher ran below to the magazine to try to discover what was wrong. He found the men there passing out shell and cartridge quite calmly, unaware that there was anything wrong on deck, and of course taking no precaution to examine the stuff before sending it up the hoist.

Frobisher's first action when he got to the magazine was to examine the outside of the brass cases, and he soon saw—or thought he saw—what was the matter. When the *Su-chen's* ammunition had been overhauled at Tien-tsin, cartridge for the four-inch was one of the sizes of which there was a shortage, and Frobisher had had a fresh supply put on board. That fresh supply, he had observed at the time, was stencilled with Chinese characters in red paint, while the old stock had been stencilled in black; and he now observed that all the cartridge being passed up carried the black stencil, and was therefore old stuff—how old he did not care to think. He at once told the men by signs not to send up any more black-marked cartridge, but to use only the red-marked; and then, for the second time that day, he received a shock.

The four-inch gun had been fired more frequently than any other gun, and the whole of the fresh supply of cartridge of that size had been exhausted. There was not a single charge left! How bitterly he blamed himself for not having hove every scrap of the ship's old ammunition overboard, and filled up entirely with new! But it was no time for regrets now; the only thing to do was to rectify matters, if possible; and if not, to make the best of them. Perhaps it might be the primers that were faulty, he thought, and if so, the situation might yet be saved, for there was a supply of new primers on board.

Seizing one of the cases in his arms, he rushed on deck with his load, and there, under cover of one of the casemates, drew the load, exercising the utmost care, that the powder might not be exposed to any flying sparks. Then, springing to the gun, he thrust in the empty case, slammed the breech shut, and pressed the key.

There was a loud, smacking report, and a little thread of smoke curled up from the muzzle of the gun. The primers, then, were in good order, so—good heavens!—it must be the powder that was wrong, and Frobisher felt

the beads of sweat gather on his forehead. He would make quite sure, though.

Running back to the casemate, he snatched a handful of powder, spread it thinly on deck, well away from the load, and placed a lighted match to it. There was no flame or puff of smoke, no explosion—nothing! The match simply burnt up and went out. Then the *Su-chen's* captain took a pinch of the stuff between his fingers and put it in his mouth, tasting it. A moment later he spat it out on deck with a cry of horror and amazement, for what had passed for powder in all those old cartridges was nothing but granulated charcoal! Then Frobisher recollected Wong-lih's accusation of peculation on the part of mandarins and other high officials who filled their pockets at the expense of their country, and how the admiral had said that it would be a bad thing for China if she had to go to war under conditions such as then obtained.

This, then, was one of the results of such peculation. Some contractor or official had been paid to provide powder, and he had provided charcoal, pocketing the difference.

Frobisher ground his teeth and muttered several very bitter things. Here he was, engaged with a vastly superior force, handicapped most horribly for want of ammunition—for possibly the rest of the supply, intended for the smaller guns, was in the same condition. What would have happened if he had not had the forethought to examine superficially the contents of the magazine at Tien-tsin, and order a fresh supply on his own responsibility, he hardly dared to think. There would undoubtedly have been not a single cartridge capable of being discharged, and the *Su-chen* and her crew would by this time undoubtedly have been the prize of the pirates. And all this that some pampered mandarin or contractor might have a supply of unearned money wherewith to buy luxuries that he neither deserved nor needed. It was disgraceful!

But there was nothing to be gained by repining, he reminded himself. Fortunately the cartridge for the smaller guns seemed to be holding out satisfactorily; and while Frobisher had been investigating the matter of the larger cartridge his men had made so good practice with them and their rifles that the third junk was already in a sinking condition. Even as he looked she disappeared like her consorts to the bottom, in a swirl of

broken water, dotted with the forms of struggling pirates.

The one big gun being now useless, and the *Su-chen* herself in a very parlous condition, it was obviously out of the question to think of attempting to conclude the fight by means of the light guns and small-arms alone; the ship would not float long enough for that. Some other plan of action must therefore be adopted, and Frobisher gave his attention to the idea for a few minutes. Then he resolved upon a scheme which, though extremely hazardous, seemed to offer the best, if not the only, hope of success. It was a case of either destroying the pirates or being destroyed himself together with his crew; and of the two he naturally preferred that the sufferers should be the pirates. To explain his intentions it would be necessary, however, to call in the assistance of the interpreter, otherwise he could never hope to make the men comprehend exactly what was required—and his every hope of success hinged upon this.

He therefore went in search of Quen-lung, whom he eventually found, after a prolonged hunt, hiding, in an almost fainting condition, underneath the bunk in the first lieutenant's cabin, and dragged him forcibly on deck. He was obliged to give the terrified man a stiff dose of raki to bring him to a condition to understand what was being said to him; then, the fellow finally coming in some degree to his senses, Frobisher explained to him the plan of campaign, and ordered him to translate it to the men.

There being now but two junks left, it was the Englishman's intention to run the *Su-chen* up stream and in between them, firing as she went. Then boarding parties, headed respectively by himself and the first lieutenant, were to leap on to the decks of the junks, drive the crews overboard—not below—cut the cables, fire the vessels, and send them adrift down stream with the current. The *Su-chen* would then be free to turn her entire attention to the fort. She would anchor in the berth vacated by the junks, and endeavour to silence the fire of the fort with her remaining guns. If this could be done, a landing-party was to be thrown ashore who would carry with them a number of powder-bags for blowing in the gates; after which the idea was to enter the fort and carry it by storm. If the guns could not be entirely silenced, then as much damage as possible was to be done, and the assault was to be attempted in any case.

The men signified their comprehension of the plan with a cheer; then rifles were loaded, bayonets fixed, cartridge-pouches refilled, and cutlasses brought up from below and belted on. Frobisher gave the word, and the *Su-chen* went ahead at full speed for the junks. The men on the latter at once understood the move, and did their utmost to prevent it coming off, but all to no purpose. The gunboat crashed in between them, grapnels were hove aboard each junk, and the two parties of boarders, with Frobisher and the lieutenant at their head, scrambled up on the decks of the junks, where a desperate hand-to-hand struggle at once commenced.

The pirates, knowing that they could expect no mercy, showed none, and no quarter was given on either side. Frobisher, at the head of his men, strove to cut his way forward, driving the pirates ahead of him and overboard; but he soon realised that this was going to be an exceedingly difficult task. The desperadoes were splendidly armed, and seemed not to know the meaning of the word fear. Men found revolvers flashing in their very faces, and spoke no more in this world; the air scintillated with the gleam of whirling steel and vibrated with the hoarse shouts of the combatants and the cries of wounded men; while, to add to the horror and confusion of the scene, the guns of the fort opened fire murderously upon friend and foe alike.

Twice the pirates had given way slightly, but each time they had recovered their ground, and however many of them were killed, others seemed to appear from nowhere to take their places; and so the fight raged with unabated fury. Frobisher picked out a man who appeared to be one of the chiefs, and made herculean efforts to reach him; but time and again a whirlwind of men swept in between him and his prey, so that the fellow seemed unapproachable.

Then, suddenly, there arose a roar of exultation from the pirates, and, turning, Frobisher saw the other boarding party give way, and, seemingly struck with panic, go tumbling back on board the *Su-chen*, defeated. Frobisher, forgetting that he would not be understood, shouted to his men to redouble their efforts, and to those on the gunboat to go back and try again.

But there was worse to come. The Englishman was at the head of his

men, plying his cutlass with terrible effect, when he felt a slight jar, and looked round just in time to see a man on board the *Su-chen* throw off the last grapnel, and the gunboat begin to gather sternway down the stream. He uttered a shout of rage, and strove to hew his way to the side of the junk; but even as he did so, he realised that he was too late. There were already fathoms of water between junk and steamer, and the bitter conclusion was forced home upon him that he had been deserted by his crew, and left alone with a mere handful of men in the midst of a crowd of howling, murderous pirates. The end of all things for him seemed very close at that moment.

Chapter Twelve.

The Pathway of Glass.

Desperate as the situation undoubtedly was, Captain Frobisher was not the man to yield without a struggle. He was cornered, and he knew it. Nothing short of a miracle could extricate him from the position in which the momentary panic of the other boarding party had placed him by the withdrawal of the *Su-chen*; but he determined that, if he was to die, he would not die alone.

With this resolution, he renewed the fight with even greater desperation than before, if that were possible; and so formidable a foe did he become that, for a few seconds, the pirates in front of him wavered and all but broke. His tall, strong figure, as he advanced bareheaded, with set teeth and gleaming eyes, and that long ruddily-gleaming strip of steel which played here, there, and everywhere with the swiftness of light, made up a spectacle sufficiently awe-inspiring to terrify any man, one would have thought; but many of the pirates were themselves almost as big and strong as Frobisher, and were thoroughly accustomed to desperate, hand-to-hand fighting. Their hesitation was therefore but momentary, and the next instant they had closed round him like a pack of hungry wolves, snarling and spitting curses at him, and even striving to pull him down with their hands.

Gaining the opportunity of an instant's breathing space, Frobisher glanced quickly behind him to discover how many of his men were left to him, and was horrified to find that, out of the forty men who had followed him on to the deck of the junk, but ten remained on their feet, while of those ten, fully half were bleeding from more or less severe wounds which would quickly put them *hors de combat*. There was therefore not the smallest possibility of cutting a way through the dense throng that surrounded them and leaping over the side into the water, as he had at first thought of doing; and there seemed nothing to be done but to sell his life and the lives of his followers as dearly as possible—for he was quite resolved to die rather than fall alive into the hands of the pirates, having already heard something of the tender mercies of the Chinese to their

prisoners.

Unhappily for Frobisher, however, he was unable to control circumstance, and, not having eyes in the back of his head, he was unaware of what was happening behind him. He did not know that a few seconds later his followers were all cut down and slain, and that he remained fighting alone, without a single protector at his back, and with his enemies swarming all round him. Neither did he observe the chief, whom he had been trying to reach unsuccessfully ever since the beginning of the fight, made a brief signal to his men not to strike.

Consequently he was not a little astonished when he suddenly felt himself seized round the neck and body by half a dozen pairs of arms, which pinioned his own and left him helpless. In an instant his cutlass was wrenched from his grasp and he was hurled to the deck, where more men immediately flung themselves upon him, holding him firmly down, so that he found it utterly impossible to move a limb.

Thereafter the business of binding him was comparatively easy, and he presently found himself swathed from head to foot in coils of rope, until he resembled a mummy rather than a living man.

His captors then rolled him contemptuously out of the way against the shot-riddled bulwarks, and proceeded to take account of their casualties. Where Frobisher had made his final stand the dead lay thickest, and he noticed with grim satisfaction that there were very few wounded men to be seen. His men and he had fought well, and he had nothing with which to reproach himself. The pirate chief scowled heavily as he scanned the result of the fight; but although he had unquestionably paid dearly in men for his victory, he had no compunction in ordering the more severely wounded to be hove over the side. Probably there were no facilities for doctoring them, and the chief perhaps thought they might as well die now as later on, and so save him a good deal of trouble in transporting them to the shore.

Just then the other junk bumped heavily alongside, and her men came aboard, reporting that their craft had been so badly damaged that she was in a sinking condition. Indeed her crew had hardly transferred themselves before she disappeared beneath the muddy waters.

The fourth junk safely accounted for, Frobisher comforted himself with the assurance that, with any sort of luck at all, the *Su-chen* ought to be able to make her way back to Tien-tsin, short-handed though she must undoubtedly be; and, once there, he knew a report of the failure of the expedition would be speedily carried to Wong-lih, provided the admiral happened to be still there. The latter would then be quite certain to send a rescue expedition up the Hoang-ho to recover any prisoners the pirates might have taken, or to avenge them if slain. Happily for the Englishman's peace of mind, he did not know that, although the *Su-chen* did eventually reach Tien-tsin in safety, she arrived too late to catch the admiral, who had left to visit some of the Southern Chinese ports and inspect the men-of-war on that station, and was not expected back, unless specially sent for, for at least a couple of months. And it was certain that none of the Chinese officials at Tien-tsin would consider the fact of Frobisher's capture and probable murder at the hands of the pirates as sufficient to justify the exertion of dispatching a messenger to recall Wong-lih, or even to give him news of the result of the expedition. So, although he did not know it, there was little prospect of rescue for Murray Frobisher, for some time, at all events.

The business of disposing of the dead and badly wounded men having been completed, the pirate chief, whose name—from the number of times the word was used when he was being addressed—Frobisher guessed to be Ah-fu, issued a few brief orders in barbarous-sounding, up-country Chinese; and the survivors of the fight got up the anchor, and slowly poled the junk back to her berth behind the small headland where the fleet had been lying on the arrival of the *Su-chen*. Observing that, in his bound condition, nobody seemed to consider it necessary to stand on guard over him, and being anxious to learn as much as possible respecting his present surroundings—with a view to future escape if he were left alive long enough—Frobisher contrived to bring himself into a kneeling position, after which he had not much difficulty in struggling to his feet, and was thus able to look over the side and see what was going on.

By the time that he had executed this manoeuvre the junk had left the main stream of the river and had entered the bight where the pirate fleet was accustomed to be concealed; and, at the far end of this, about a quarter of a mile from their present position, Frobisher distinguished a

small wharf, some two hundred feet in length by about thirty wide, and standing about eight feet out of the water, toward which the junk was being steered. This was no doubt the jetty where the pirates unloaded the loot stolen from captured prizes, and whence they took aboard their own stores of ammunition, provisions, and water. There was quite a number of bamboo and thatch huts scattered about at the shore end of the jetty—evidently store-houses—while a stream of flashing, sparkling, crystal-clear water, tumbling down a narrow gully and cutting a tiny channel for itself across the sand to the river, was without doubt the source of the pirates' water supply.

Frobisher noticed that at the end of the jetty a number of the men from the fort had collected, apparently awaiting the arrival of their comrades of the maritime department; and as the junk came alongside, these individuals clambered aboard, and a vociferous conversation ensued, during which fierce glances and threatening gestures were directed toward the Englishman, who knew instinctively that the new arrivals were strongly urging that he should be put to death, as some sort of a sacrifice to the memory of the dead pirates, in whose destruction he had played so large a part. Indeed, it seemed at one moment as though he were to be slaughtered as he stood there, bound and helpless; for the new-comers surged forward, knives and swords gleaming in their hands, pushing the junk's crew backward until the whole crowd had gathered in a circle, with Frobisher in the centre. Frobisher expected death at any moment, and he was at a loss to understand why the junk's men seemed reluctant to let the others have their way, seeing that they themselves had been eager enough to put an end to him but a short time previously. Presently he noticed that Ah-fu had disappeared from the deck, and guessed that the men were merely waiting for him to return before allowing the people from the fort to have their way.

Presently the pirate chief reappeared, and was immediately surrounded by an eager, gesticulating crowd, who pointed to Frobisher and handled their blades in sanguinary anticipation. But, holding up his hand for silence, Ah-fu said a few words to his followers which produced an immediate and remarkable effect. Sheathing their weapons, they broke out into shouts of laughter, and began to discuss with one another the details of what they evidently considered an excellent joke; and Frobisher, knowing something of the Chinese pirates' idea of

amusement, felt that he would infinitely have preferred being killed on the spot to being kept alive to provide sport for these barbarians. Quen-lung had certainly been right when he had prophesied disaster as the result of attacking the “Unconquerable”—as Frobisher afterwards found was indeed the name of the sect to which the pirates belonged—although what reason the man had had for being so sure, the young Englishman was utterly unable to guess.

The matter having evidently been settled entirely to the pirates’ satisfaction, Frobisher’s legs were unbound, so that he could walk, and, closely guarded by two men carrying long, broad-bladed knives, he was led down the sloping gangway to the wharf, followed by the rest of the crowd talking and laughing hilariously. Thence he was taken up the hill, a distance of a quarter of a mile, to the fort.

On reaching his destination he was amazed to note the enormous strength of the building, and the consequently small amount of damage that had been done by the fire of the gunboat. With the exception of the hole in the tower, and a few splintered and starred “splashings” where the missiles had struck, very little actual injury seemed to have been inflicted, notwithstanding the excellent practice of the *Su-chen’s* gunners. The walls, he decided, must be enormously thick, thicker even than those of the fortress of Asan, which were stout enough to withstand anything less than heavy gun fire.

He was not permitted to examine the appearance of the building very closely, for, observing his hesitation, the two guards prodded him vindictively with the points of their knives, and pushed him before them through the massive stone gateway, which was protected by a strong portcullis at either end, as well as an iron double door between, strong enough to turn rifle bullets. Frobisher now realised that even if he had succeeded in sinking all the junks and reaching the gate of the fort his difficulties would only have begun, and that his plan of blowing in the gates with powder would have been completely frustrated by the existence of the outer portcullis. These men certainly knew how to protect themselves, and were determined not to be captured if human ingenuity could prevent it.

Once inside, Frobisher found himself in a spacious courtyard, round

which the fort was built. The windows of the different chambers looked inward, thus allowing the outer walls to be entirely used for gun embrasures, rifle loopholes, and even arrow-slits, so varied were the weapons to be found in this robber stronghold.

Still in charge of the two guards, at a command from Ah-fu the prisoner was marched through a doorway in the wall exactly opposite the main gateway, and was hurried through corridor after corridor—all of them only dimly lighted by small openings in the outer wall—until he became utterly confused and lost even the remotest idea of his bearings. After a walk of about five minutes the guards halted before an iron-bound door, which, upon being opened, disclosed a flight of steps. Down these steps he was hurried, finding himself, when at the bottom, at the entrance to another long passage, which looked as though it had been hewn out of the solid sandstone, for there were no joints visible in its walls.

Removing a lantern from a hook, one of the men lighted it, and the journey was continued for quite ten minutes in a perfectly straight line, thus confirming Frobisher’s impression that he was in an underground passage leading from the fort to some other structure at a considerable distance, probably constructed to afford a means of escape in the extremely unlikely event of the fort ever being captured. At the far end of this passage there were several iron-bound doors—a circumstance which Frobisher noted for future reference; and it was through one of the middle ones that he was conducted, arriving at once at the foot of another flight of stairs, similar to those at the other end, and finally at a large, square, stone cell, lighted on three sides by very small windows, high up in the walls—a most dismal-looking prison. There was a low plank bench covered with straw and presumably intended for a bed, two stools, and a bucket, these few articles constituting the entire contents of the chamber.

Frobisher’s arms were now unbound, and he was thrust inside, the guards holding themselves in readiness to frustrate any attempt at escape. But the prisoner was by this time far too stiff and numb after the constriction of the ropes to make any such attempt; it was as much as he could achieve to stagger to the apology for a bed, upon which he flung himself at full length. He was utterly exhausted, and his body had scarcely touched the straw before he was fast asleep, in which condition he remained for nearly twenty-four hours.

When he awoke he found that a coarse meal had been left for him, while the bucket had been filled with water; so he made a hearty meal, and then proceeded to examine his cell by the light of the declining sun. His search, however, was fruitless: there was nothing out of which he might construct a key, as he had done at Asan; the windows were scarcely six inches square; in short, escape appeared an impossibility.

And now many days dragged out their slow length in dreary monotony; day after day his custodians brought him a supply of food; but, strangely enough, the time passed without his being subjected to indignity and torment for the amusement of the pirates, as he had fully expected might be the case. Possibly they were absent on some foray, and had postponed their entertainment until their return. Whatever might be the reason, however, the days slid past, without molestation to him, and lengthened into weeks, until, by the notches which he scored every morning on the edge of his bed, Frobisher found that he had been just thirteen weeks in confinement. Thirteen weeks!—And, so far as he could tell, no attempt had been made by the Chinese authorities to rescue him or obtain his release; at any rate, there had been no sounds of fighting, no report of guns from the river; and he was being slowly forced to the conclusion that his very existence had been forgotten, or else that it was thought not worth while to throw away any more valuable Chinese lives in order to effect the rescue of so unimportant a personage as an English mercenary.

Then, one morning, when Frobisher awoke and commenced to dress—for he had made a practice of undressing at night, that he might feel the cleaner and more refreshed next day—he discovered, to his astonishment, that his boots had mysteriously disappeared during the night. He searched everywhere for them, but they were nowhere to be found. For whatever reason—and he puzzled himself to think of a satisfactory one—his foot-gear was undoubtedly missing, and there was an end of the matter. The curious happening vexed him considerably. It seemed such an idiotic trick to play; and the more he thought about the matter the more convinced he became that this joke, or whatever it was intended to be, had a deeper significance than he had at first imagined.

Since his arrival in China he had contrived to acquire a fragmentary knowledge of the language, and by its means he endeavoured to

ascertain from the man who nightly brought him food the reason for the apparently senseless prank; but the fellow either could not or would not understand, and Frobisher was obliged to give up the attempt.

The jailer had hitherto been in the habit of closing the iron-bound door behind him with a slam, rattling the lock after him to make sure that it was fastened, when he brought the prisoner's food; and this circumstance had come to be so expected by Frobisher that when, on the evening of the day on which his boots had disappeared, the man simply pulled the door to gently behind him and went off about his business without even trying the lock, the omission immediately attracted the Englishman's attention.

The man had never before been so careless, and Frobisher could not decide whether he had been thinking of something else at the moment, and had succumbed to an attack of absent-mindedness, or whether he had suddenly recollected something that he had forgotten, and intended to pay another visit to the cell. Whichever it might be, Frobisher believed he saw in the circumstance a possibility of escape of which he instantly determined to avail himself.

With stealthy footsteps he crept across the stone-flagged floor, scarcely daring to breathe lest his movements should attract some inconvenient person's attention. He had, it is true, heard the jailer walk away down the corridor; but perhaps, playing some stupid joke, the man had crept back noiselessly, and was even now outside the door, listening and chuckling to himself at the prisoner's foolishness in imagining that he would be careless enough to go away leaving the door unfastened. The mere idea caused the beads of sweat to start out on Frobisher's forehead; disappointment would be too terrible!

But he swiftly pulled himself together, and, with fingers that trembled in spite of himself, he touched the old-fashioned latch and slowly, very slowly, raised it, pulling the door gently toward him as he did so.

The door opened, and, scarcely daring to credit his senses, Frobisher pulled it still wider open, and a moment later was able to look out into the corridor. There was an antiquated oil lantern hanging at the foot of the stone stairway, placed there for the jailer's convenience, and by its light

the prisoner was able to see that the corridor was empty. Then the incident of the door was no trick, after all, and the man had really suffered a lapse of memory. Twenty-four hours would elapse before he returned, and Frobisher's absence was discovered, and the latter hoped by that time to be far away, if he could but find some mode of escaping undetected from the building. The first and most serious obstacle in the way, the cell door, was overcome; now to find whether his luck would still hold, and if he could find another unguarded gate leading to freedom.

First of all, however, he must have some covering for his feet. He knew that he could not walk far barefooted over rough ground; and, if pursued under such circumstances, capture would be certain and speedy. He therefore removed his shirt and undervest, and tearing them into strips, he swathed the wrappings round his feet somewhat after the manner followed by the Spanish mountaineers. This done, he next had to ascertain whether the remaining doors between himself and freedom were locked or unlocked.

The first door he came to was the one at the foot of the stairs, and, as might have been expected, this was closed; but it was not locked. The pirates had clearly pinned their faith on the stanchness of the cell door. Close to this, in the opposite wall of the passage, were the other doors which Frobisher had observed when being conducted to his prison; and it was through one of these that he must pass if he was to escape at all. The passage itself, he remembered, simply communicated with the main building of the fort, and to travel by that path was tantamount to running into the arms of his captors.

With infinite care he tried the latch of the door on the left. It was locked.

Then he turned the handle of the door on the right. That also was locked; and his heart sank at the thought of the tremendous amount of labour that would be needed to overcome this obstacle—if it were possible to overcome it at all, of which he was more than doubtful.

While he was considering what to do first, his eye caught a faint glimmer of light shining on something on the wall, and he eagerly stretched out his hand to it. As he touched it his heart leaped, for the object was a key—obviously the key of one, or both, of the doors.

He fitted it cautiously into the lock of the right-hand door and turned it gently, and with a soft click the wards fell back and the door jarred slightly open.

Without wasting a moment, Frobisher pulled it wide and stepped outside, exulting in his new-found liberty. But, alas! his exultation was only momentary. An instant later he realised the cruel hoax that had been played on him, for extending over a distance of many yards in every direction was a sort of pavement of broken glass, pointed and keen-edged as a forest of razors. The glass had been so firmly fixed in the ground that it was impossible to remove it; and Frobisher instantly realised that his escape that way was most effectually barred. Even with strong boots on, it would have been a difficult enough matter to traverse that glass-strewn patch without cutting one's feet to pieces; and with feet merely protected by thin wrappings of wool and linen, the thing was an impossibility.

This, then, was the meaning of the removal of his boots; and, as he realised the sardonic cruelty of the men who could invent such a device for tormenting a prisoner, his heart almost failed him. It seemed as though he were doomed to remain for ever immured in this horrible place.

Chapter Thirteen.

Pursued by Bloodhounds.

With a smothered ejaculation of bitter disappointment Frobisher recoiled a few steps in sheer despair, bringing up rather sharply against the iron-plated door through which he had just emerged; and the next instant he realised that he was doubly trapped. Escape was cut off in front of him by that broken glass, and he had been in such haste to *get away* from his prison that he had never thought of removing the key from the inside of the door, or of taking precautions to prevent the door from closing behind him and cutting off his retreat, as it had done.

Retreat, after he was once clear of the walls, had naturally never entered his mind. But now he would have been glad enough to have been able to

return to his cell unobserved. It would be intensely humiliating to be obliged to wait there, in the small space between the door and the glass-sown path, until his jailer arrived, some twenty-four hours later, to release him. Yet there seemed to be no alternative.

How careless, how criminally foolish he had been to allow himself to be trapped by so transparent a device! thought Frobisher. He ought to have suspected a trap directly he discovered that his boots had been removed, and he might have known that such jailers as he was dealing with do not leave cell doors unlatched by accident, or leave keys to open other doors hanging on walls in conspicuous places, just where an escaping prisoner would be most likely to see them. How those pirates would laugh and jeer at him on the morrow, when they arrived and found him there, shivering with the bitter cold of night in that climate, at that time of year! The mere thought of such humiliation caused Frobisher to grit his teeth with anger, and he had almost made up his mind to chance a quick dash across that cruel barrier, trusting that he would not injure himself so severely as to make escape absolutely impossible, when something occurred which caused him quickly to change his mind, and made him shrink back into the shadow of the door, pressing himself up into one of the corners, to avoid observation and consequent discovery, if possible.

He had caught sight of the figure of a Chinaman emerging from the shadow of the jungle which surrounded the fort on its landward side. The man's figure stood out plain and clear-cut in the moonlight, which was so bright that Frobisher could easily distinguish his every movement, could even see how the man was dressed; and he wondered what the fellow could be doing there at that time of night.

In that part of northern China, especially at that season, men do not wander about in the jungle at night, or indeed at any other time, if they can help it, having a very natural objection to being caught and eaten by prowling, hungry tigers; and it was therefore not a little strange that this man should arrive at the fort by that way, particularly as it could be reached much more easily by the road which the pirates had constructed for their own convenience. It would almost appear as though the man bad come by this route in order to avoid the pirates' observation; and the longer Frobisher considered the matter, the more certain did he become that this was actually the case, and the more he wondered what the

reason might be.

The man had only stood in full view for a few brief seconds, just long enough to convince the Englishman that he was real, and not a figment of his own heated imagination. Then he had stepped back quickly into the shadow of the jungle, crouching down beside a clump of bamboo, where he was so well concealed from observation that Frobisher could just distinguish the outline of his stooping body. Indeed, had he not kept his eyes on the man the whole time, it would have been impossible to detect his hiding-place, so well did the colour of his clothing blend with the vegetation which formed his background.

The Englishman's heart began to beat with excitement and hope, for a thousand possibilities at once presented themselves to him. It was morally certain that the hiding man could have no connection with the pirates, or he would have come forward boldly and demanded admittance; and if not a friend of, or connected with the outlaws, he must necessarily be opposed to them. Ah! if it were only possible to attract the man's attention without also attracting that of the pirates, escape should be a simple matter, thought Frobisher. He was already practically as good as outside the walls, and all that was necessary was that something should be laid down on the top of the glass over which he could walk without cutting his feet, and the thing was done; he could be miles beyond the possibility of pursuit before morning broke, if only the preliminaries could be put in hand immediately.

It did not take him long to decide that he would make the attempt to attract the man's attention. If the latter were a friend, and the attempt were crowned with success, all would be well, and he would be free within an hour; while if the man should after all prove to be an enemy—well, he might as well be discovered and taken back to prison now, as wait all night in the cold. One thing was quite certain—without outside assistance escape was impossible; so he decided to put his fortune to the test and risk his freedom, if not his life, upon the turn of the die.

With this idea, he drew his handkerchief from his pocket and was about to step forward and wave it, when he saw a movement among the clump of bamboo, and the next instant the Chinaman rose to his feet and ran like a deer toward the very part of the fort in which Frobisher's cell was

situated. He ran noiselessly, on his toes, and bent almost double in the effort to make himself as small as possible. And he did not slacken speed until he had reached the walls of the fort, where he again crouched down in the shadow, almost directly under the window of Frobisher's cell, about twenty yards away from the spot where the Englishman himself was concealed.

The latter, in the face of this new move, determined to watch a few minutes longer before revealing himself, and kept his eyes on the crouching figure with the greatest interest. Was the man going to prove friend or foe, rescuer or would-be assassin? Scarcely the latter, the Englishman thought, for there seemed something strangely familiar in the man's movements and in his whole appearance; and Frobisher experienced the sensation of having met, or seen, this man somewhere before, though under what circumstances he could not for the life of him recall. He was something of the same build as Ling; but Ling, he knew, was dead, for he had seen the man's body. Then, again, he might pass at a distance for Quen-lung, the interpreter; but from what Frobisher had already seen of that person, he did not for a moment believe that Quen-lung was at all the kind of man to risk his skin on a midnight excursion to a pirate stronghold.

Suddenly Frobisher's attention was disturbed by the sound of a very low whistle, undoubtedly proceeding from the Chinaman. That whistle was beyond question a signal of some sort, and was just as certainly intended for himself. To hesitate longer would have been the height of folly, for the longer the delay now, the greater would be the danger of discovery; so, putting his fingers in his mouth, Frobisher replied with another whistle in exactly the same key and tone as the Chinaman's. The latter leapt to his feet, took a few steps backward, and looked up at the window; but seeing nothing there, he proceeded to glance round him anxiously.

Frobisher gave another low whistle, and, as the man now turned his head in his direction, fluttered the white handkerchief. The Chinaman instantly caught sight of the movement, and commenced to run toward the prisoner, coming to a sudden standstill as he encountered the outer edge of the carpet of broken glass. A low exclamation of "Phew!" escaped him as he understood the meaning of the obstacle, followed by a subdued execration in English; and on hearing this, Frobisher at once knew who it

was that was risking his life in an endeavour to save him. The man was none other than Captain Drake!

How the little skipper had come to hear of his friend's predicament, and how he had contrived to travel some three hundred miles in disguise undetected, Frobisher could not guess. All he knew was that at last he had again a stanch comrade by his side—one who would not forsake him, even in the last extremity; and in his relief he could scarcely help shouting aloud for very joy. But fortunately he remembered in time the absolute necessity for strict silence, and contented himself with calling in a low voice:

"That's you, Drake, surely?"

"It is that same," responded the little man, in a tone as subdued as Frobisher's own; "but where the dickens are you? I saw something move just now, but I'm hanged if I can see a thing now."

"I'm here, just beside this door," replied Frobisher. "I should have been away an hour ago, if it had not been for this confounded glass."

"But couldn't you manage to get across, if you take it coolly and walk slowly?" whispered Drake. "If you plant your feet carefully and balance yourself well before each step, you ought to be able to do it. But watch you don't slip; that's where the danger comes in."

"D'ye think I should not have done that long ago, skipper, if it had been possible?" Frobisher whispered. "The thing is impossible, because they have taken away my boots, and the thin wrappings I have round my feet would be cut to ribbons in half a dozen steps."

"I might have known," replied Drake. "That's an old game of theirs. Well, you must be got across somehow, that's clear, and quickly. There's nobody on guard up above us as yet, but there's no knowing when they may take it into their heads to post a sentry. H'm!" pulling at one of the pieces of glass, "the stuff's stuck in too securely to move, so it's no use thinking of trying to get over the difficulty that way. And there's neither time nor opportunity to collect anything to lay down on top of it. There's only one way that I can see, and so let's try it."

Without waiting for Frobisher to ask his plan, the little man commenced the dangerous voyage across the pavement of glass. He had a thick stick in his hand, and Frobisher saw that he was wearing thick, wooden-soled Chinese boots. Thus provided, Drake succeeded in making the journey in safety, and in a few minutes stood unharmed by his friend's side, shaking his hand as though he meant to pull his arm from its socket.

"I'm glad, glad indeed to see you again, laddie," he murmured heartily; "and more than glad to see that those yellow-skinned pirates have not deprived you of any of your limbs. That is quite a common trick among the Chinks."

"And," returned Frobisher heartily, "I don't think I need tell you how glad I am to see you again. But how did you get to know I was here? I understood from the admiral at Tien-tsin that you had gone to England for a cargo of arms and ammunition for the Chinese Government."

"So I did," replied Drake; "and I carried out my contract, too. I've only been back in China a couple of weeks. But we must not stay here yarning; this is much too dangerous a place to be swapping experiences in. These will keep until later, when we are out of this mess."

"That's so," agreed Frobisher. "But the question is, how are we to get away? You saw for yourself what a ticklish matter it is to cross that glass, even with stout boots on your feet and with the assistance of a thick stick to help you to keep your balance; and upon my word I fail to see how I am going to manage the business. You don't propose to carry me, I take it?" he concluded, chuckling, and giving the little man a sly dig in the ribs.

"I would even try that, and succeed too, perhaps," was Drake's reply, "if there was no other way out. But we can do better than that. I thought of a scheme directly I came to the edge of the glass-sown patch and understood the game that the Chinks had been playing off upon you, but I wasn't such a born fool as to stand there and shout it across to you, with the chance that some yellow-skin might be up aloft there and hear me. Besides, I wanted to see for myself whether or not the scheme would work. And it has, for here I am, safe and sound, and not a penny the worse for the passage.

“Now, here it is, just as simple as ABC. You are a thundering big chap, I know, while I’m a little ’un; but I noticed long ago that your boots and mine are pretty much of a size, while these that I’m wearing now are a bit big for me, though they’re the best I could get hold of. I just slip these boots off, and you slip ’em on; then, with the help of this stick, you make the passage of the glass, same as I’ve done, while I stand here to watch you do it, and at the same time keep a look-out. Then, as soon as you’re across, you chuck me back the boots and the stick, one at a time, and I’ll catch ’em—I haven’t been a cricketer all these years for nothing. The rest’ll be all plain sailing, and I’ll be alongside you on the right side of the glass in two shakes of a lamb’s tail. Savez?”

“Excellent!” returned Frobisher in a whisper; “and, as you say, perfectly simple. Only, you must go first. You surely do not suppose that I am going to make good my escape, leaving you here to run the risk of being taken in my stead—”

Drake kicked off his shoes, with a muttered sailor’s blessing on Frobisher’s head at what he termed the latter’s “tomfoolery”, and, going down upon one knee, seized first one and then the other of Frobisher’s feet, removed the bandages from them, and then thrust on the boots.

“Capital fit!” he murmured, as he rose to his feet and put the stick into his companion’s hand. “Now, off you go, my buck, and look sharp about it, or the pirates will have two prisoners to amuse themselves with instead of one.”

Recognising that the little skipper was determined to have his own way, Frobisher forbore to protest further. He stepped carefully out upon the broad area of broken glass, and, creeping along close under the wall, was able so effectually to steady himself by it and with the help of the stick that in a few minutes he had safely negotiated the passage which a short time before had appeared practically impassable. Then, running far enough round the outer margin of the glass-sown ground to secure a clear shot in through the doorway, he threw back to Drake first one boot, then the other, and finally the stick, and had the satisfaction of seeing his friend deftly catch each of them. Five minutes later the little skipper was safely beside him.

“Thank God we are both out of that hole!” piously ejaculated Frobisher under his breath, as the pair crept along in the deep shadow of the rear wall of the fort. “Where away to now?”

“Into the jungle first, where we can’t be seen by any chance look-out up aloft,” answered Drake. “Then, as soon as we are safely hidden, I’ll explain.”

They made the passage across the open and reached the cover of the jungle in safety, whereupon Drake replaced his boots, while Frobisher swathed his feet again in the strips of underclothing which he had brought away with him. These were serviceable enough as foot-gear, and Frobisher found that they protected his feet much better than he had anticipated, lasting quite a long time before needing to be replaced by other strips.

Having readjusted their clothing, the two men were ready to begin their long and perilous journey back to civilisation, which Drake gave his companion to understand would have to be made overland. But before starting, Frobisher requested Drake to cut him a heavy cudgel, similar to the one he himself was using, so that, in the event of their encountering an enemy, they might have something, at least, to defend themselves with. Drake did so, and, as he handed it to his friend, plunged his hand into one of his pockets and brought out something which he also passed over to Frobisher.

“Why,” exclaimed the latter in astonishment, “that’s one of my own brace of revolvers! How in the name of fortune did you get hold of it?”

“And here’s the other,” said Drake, showing the butt. “I got them out of your cabin aboard the *Su-chen*—she got back safely to Tien-tsin, I may tell you; but how I came to be aboard her, or to get up here, is too long a yarn to spin now. Let it wait until we are in less danger than we are in at present.”

“Right you are, skipper!” answered Frobisher; “the yarn will be interesting enough, I’ll be bound. I’m glad you found these revolvers and brought them along, for they are good barkers, and a man feels a certain sense of security with one of them in his hand. Now, lead the way, since you

probably know it best."

Drake took a comprehensive glance at the stars, and then plunged along a narrow and apparently seldom-trodden path through the jungle, seeming to find his way by instinct, for the forest was so dense that the moon's rays seldom succeeded in penetrating it.

They had been jogging along at a steady four miles an hour for about an hour and a half, when the fugitives were startled by hearing the distant boom of a heavy gun, proceeding apparently from the spot which they had recently left. They at once guessed what it meant, and realised the danger in which they still stood. Evidently Frobisher's escape had somehow been prematurely discovered, and that gun had been fired as an alarm. Instead of having, as they had confidently anticipated, about eighteen or twenty hours in which to make a good start, they had gained but an hour and a half; and the pirates would be already on their track. True, it might take them some time to discover in which direction the fugitives had headed; but they would assuredly make the discovery sooner or later, and then it would be purely a question of speed.

"By Jove, Drake!" exclaimed Frobisher, "we must hurry now. Those fellows have discovered my absence; and they will lose no time in taking up the pursuit, you may depend. Do you know of any hiding-place that we can make for?"

"I thought of just this thing on my way here," answered Drake, breaking into a run, "and picked out a spot which will suit us to a T, if we can but reach it in time. It's an old ruined town, goodness knows how ancient; nobody lives there now, and there are thousands of ruined houses and plenty of underground passages where we can hide, if we can only get there unseen."

Breath being precious, the pair wasted no more in talk, but saved it all for the long run before them. Side by side they dashed along at top speed, sometimes colliding with trees, or stumbling over stones and creepers, until they were bruised from head to foot, but never once halting.

When they were beginning to hope that they might be out-distancing the pursuit, a deep, bell-like note floating down the wind warned them that

the pirates possessed bloodhounds, and that the dogs were hard upon their trail. Frobisher took out his revolver and spun the cylinder to satisfy himself that it was loaded, and then thrust it back into his pocket. If those dogs came within shot, he would take care that they hunted no more prisoners.

“How far ahead now?” he panted, when they had been running for another half-hour at top speed.

“About five miles,” grunted Drake, who was feeling the strain even more than Frobisher. “We should be there in about half an hour at this pace—if we can keep it up. Hope I shall be able to hold out. I’m not in such good form as I once was. Getting old, too. If I can’t keep up, you push on, lad; and I’ll try to keep ’em back with my pistol.”

“Likely, isn’t it?” replied Frobisher ironically. “If you can’t hold out, of course I shall stay and face it out with you: but do all you can; we must not give in at the last moment.”

On and on they plunged, and at last they began to find the jungle thinning out, so that the going was a little easier, and their pace consequently increased; but they could tell by the frequent, deep-throated baying that the dogs were gaining on them steadily. They dashed out of the forest altogether at last; and away in front of them, on the right bank of the mighty Hoang-ho, its houses gleaming spectrally in the moonlight, stood the ruined city that Drake had referred to, not more than two miles distant—a very haven of refuge, as Frobisher could easily imagine, if they could but reach it; for it was of considerable extent, and, once lost in its labyrinthine streets or underground passages, the pirates might search for them in vain.

They had not heard the dogs for some minutes, and, hoping that the pursuit had perhaps been abandoned, Frobisher glanced round. It was well that he did so. The dogs had also left the forest, and, seeing their prey in front of them, were running in silence. They were not more than fifty yards distant, and, grasping his revolver, Frobisher called to Drake, and together the two men turned to face the beasts.

Chapter Fourteen.

Genghiz Khan’s Hoard.

Hideous brutes the dogs were, quite unlike the usual breed of bloodhound, for they were fully as large as young leopards and every whit as powerful and ferocious. They certainly possessed the drooping ears and heavy loose jowl of the bloodhound, but their hides were not smooth-haired, like the Cuban dog’s, but rough and shaggy like a wolf’s, with which animal it is quite possible their forebears had been crossed. Their legs were extremely long, but very massive and powerful, giving them the power of covering great distances at high speed; and altogether the appearance of the beasts was sufficient to inspire a very wholesome terror in any unfortunate person on whose track they were placed. There were, fortunately, only three of them, and as their masters had not yet appeared in sight Frobisher and Drake hoped to be able to settle them with their clubs and revolvers, and reach the shelter of the ruined city before the pirates could overtake and recapture them.

No time was to be lost, however, for they were still at a considerable distance from the nearest buildings on the outskirts of the city, while the dogs’ owners would probably be not very far behind, since they would be certain to have come on horseback, so as to keep in reasonably close touch with the hounds.

Drake drew his revolver from a fold of his voluminous Chinese jacket, ranged himself alongside his friend, and, without a word, fired his weapon at the first of the dogs, which by this time was almost upon them. In his excitement, however, or perhaps because of the strain upon his muscles from the long and fatiguing flight, he missed; and before he could fire again the animal had sprung full at his throat, knocking him down and sending the revolver flying out of his hand. In another second Drake’s throat would have been torn open by the savage, slavering beast, but Frobisher was either cooler or more fortunate. Whirling himself round right on top of the dog, he thrust his revolver’s muzzle into its ear and fired, at the moment when the terrible jaws were in the very act of closing on his companion’s throat.

He had no time to assist Drake to his feet, for the other two brutes were in the very act of springing as he turned away from the dead dog and cocked his weapon for a second shot. Strangely enough, this couple entirely ignored Drake, and confined their attentions to Frobisher, who only saved himself by making a rapid leap backward, and so avoiding their first charge. Baulked in their spring, they seemed, like almost all other savage animals, dazed for a moment, as though they could not understand why they had missed their prey; and that momentary hesitation gave Frobisher an opportunity to pull the trigger of his revolver, while Drake, who had caught sight of his own weapon, half-buried in the sand a few yards away, executed a quick roll in that direction, and in a second had the revolver in his hand. Frobisher's bullet struck the creature he aimed at in the upper part of the near fore leg, and, the heavy missile shattering the bone like a pipe stem, the brute collapsed upon the ground with a deep, raucous howl of pain.

At the same moment Drake raised his revolver and fired as he sat; and this time his aim was excellent, the bullet striking the hound Frobisher had just lamed full in the spine, severing the backbone and killing the creature instantly. The other dog, apparently cowed by the death of its mates, stood motionless, in a crouching attitude, glaring at each man in turn, and seemingly undecided which to attack first; and its hesitation or cowardice was fatal. The two men fired almost together, one bullet drilling a hole in its skull, and the other smashing in at one side of its body and out at the other. It did not live long enough to raise even a whimper, but dropped dead where it stood, a pool of blood immediately welling out from beneath the carcass.

"By Jove, Drake!" exclaimed Frobisher, "that shot of yours finished him off in fine style. But what in the world are you using in that pistol?" he went on, as he turned the body over and curiously examined a great hole in the brute's side. "I've seen wounds like this in a man who has been hit with a piece of 'pot-leg' or a handful of nails, but never with an ordinary bullet."

Drake winked. "That", he remarked, "is a little device of my own. I have often noticed that it is a very difficult matter to bring down a man, especially a fanatical savage, with an ordinary bullet; it goes in at one side and out at the other so cleanly that the man whom it hits does not

know that he is hit until he is dead, and he frequently manages to do a lot of damage before he dies. So I invented a little dodge which I call the ‘man-stopper’. It consists in simply ‘rymering’ a hole in the nose of the bullet, with a file tang or anything else that comes handy; then, when the bullet strikes, the edges of the hole expand and become ‘mushroomed’, and the man who is hit knows all about it, I assure you. Of course that sort of thing is not permitted in civilised warfare, but when fighting savages the trick is used quite frequently. Indeed, this is the only kind of missile that will effectually stop a rushing savage. I would advise you to treat your bullets in the same way as soon as you have time. But these dogs’ masters may appear in sight at any moment; and if they do, before we leave this spot, and happen to be mounted—as I feel sure they are—they will catch us easily before we can possibly reach shelter, yonder. And we’re scarcely prepared to fight a crowd.”

“You’re right, skipper,” agreed Frobisher; “let’s get along as fast as we can.” And the two men, thrusting their revolvers into their pockets, set off at top speed toward the ruined city, not a little refreshed by their brief halt while fighting the dogs.

“I wonder,” Drake jerked out as they ran, “how the pirates managed to set those dogs after us? They hadn’t any garments of yours, had they? And I’m sure they had none of mine by which they could lay them on the scent.”

“They had my boots, confound them!” returned Frobisher, “as I am beginning to realise to my cost. These wrappings are about worn through, and my feet are almost as sore as though they had been skinned.”

“By Jove, yes! I had forgotten them,” said the little skipper.

The two men pounded along over the sand in silence once more, the walls and buildings of the ruined town standing out more and more clearly every moment. Only another half-mile or so, and they would be safely hidden from view among the maze-like streets of the place. But could they do it in time? Would their pursuers sight them before they could get under cover? These were the questions which haunted them both.

“See,” Drake presently panted, pointing in front of him, “we are pretty nearly there now. That opening in the walls is the site of one of the city gates; and once inside that, we are safe.”

Frobisher took a hasty glance behind him, but the pursuers had not yet put in an appearance. There was nothing in sight but the three black dots on the sand, where the fight with the dogs had taken place.

“Nothing in sight as yet,” he gasped encouragingly to Drake, on whom the pace was again beginning to tell. “Keep it up a little longer; we are nearly there now.”

A couple of minutes more of hard running placed them almost in the shadow of the walls, and Frobisher was congratulating himself on their escape, when suddenly something whizzed past his ear with a shrill, whining sound, and starred itself out in a splash of metal on the stones of the gateway, plainly visible in the moonlight. A moment later the crack of a modern rifle made itself heard.

“Confound it!” growled Frobisher, looking round, “half a minute too late, by all that’s annoying! Buck up, Drake! Those fellows are in sight and have spotted us,” he shouted. “It will be touch-and-go now, and no mistake.”

Drake nobly responded to the call, and a few seconds later the two men plunged through the gateway and were under cover. But, unfortunately, their pursuers had seen where they had gone, and would not now be at all likely to give up the chase until they had examined every possible hiding-place inside the walls.

Along the first street that the fugitives came to they dashed, then down a turning to the left, and along another street leading out of it, only to find that this was a blind alley, and that their way was stopped.

“Quick—back again!” gasped Drake. “We cannot get out this way. Hurry, or they’ll catch us at the other end.”

“No time,” replied Frobisher, breathing heavily. “We must of necessity go forward now. Here, into this open doorway! This will give us shelter for the moment, and if they do not sight us they may not try this street at all.”

Accordingly they dashed into the house indicated by Frobisher, and vanished from view just as a chorus of yells at the mouth of the street indicated the arrival of their pursuers, while the clatter of horses' hoofs told only too plainly that the pirates, even if they had not actually sighted their quarry, had decided to search that particular street, at all events.

"Here they come," whispered the skipper. "We mustn't stay here, or we shall be caught like rats in a trap. Up this staircase for your life! We'll get out on the roof, and make a stand there if they decide to search the house."

Taking the stone steps two at a time, the fugitives dashed upward, presently coming to a kind of landing from which several stone-flagged passages radiated; thence they climbed up another narrow staircase which led to the flat roof. They went up this last so quickly that Drake, who was leading, had popped his head up above the level of the parapet before he realised what he was doing. Luckily, none of the pirates happened to be looking upward at that particular moment; they were all riding helter-skelter down the street, evidently determined to see what lay at the end. Drake counted them before getting under cover again, and found that there were thirty of them; and that there might possibly be others searching elsewhere, was a contingency to be kept in mind.

Frobisher had now also crept out on to the roof through the small opening, or trap-door, at the top of the stairs, and both men cautiously peeped over the low parapet. And as they watched, they saw the horsemen come to a halt opposite the identical house they were in, evidently discussing matters. Some appeared to think that the men they wanted had not come that way at all, while others—these the majority—believed differently, and seemed to want to search every house in the street. At any rate they had certainly made up their minds to search this particular dwelling, for they began to dismount outside the doorway.

"We're bottled at last, I'm afraid," said Frobisher. "What do you say to our opening fire on 'em now?"

"Not yet," whispered Drake. "Let's see first if there isn't another way down. If once they discover our presence here, they will get us for certain; for we have only six shots left between us. I couldn't bring any

spare cartridge for reloads."

"Phew!" whistled Frobisher under his breath. "That's bad. We are in a tight place indeed, then. Come, let's see if there's any other way down."

They crept silently away from the parapet toward the back of the house, and, to their intense gratification, discovered a flight of ruined stone steps leading down the outside of the wall to a narrow alley in the rear. Down these steps they at once made their way, then ran at top speed up the alley and out of the end of it into one of the broader streets of the city. They had now got a good start, for it would take some little time for the pirates to ride round, even if they should chance to catch sight of the fugitives. But no shouts were raised behind them to indicate that they had been seen, and they sprinted along over the rough cobbles for all they were worth. There was a large and very handsome building at the end of this road, and they determined to make for it, since a structure of that size would surely afford greater facilities for concealment than a smaller house.

From its extent, which became more apparent as they drew nearer, Frobisher conjectured that it was probably the ruins of some ancient mandarin's palace, or possibly the summer palace of one of the petty kings of China who ruled in the far-off days when the place was built; for he could see at a glance that the city had been abandoned for centuries, and that the buildings themselves were doubtless fairly ancient at the time of the abandonment.

So absorbed were both men on the goal they had set themselves that they dashed past the ends of sundry streets without even glancing down them, and so failed to realise that they were still in considerable danger until they heard a series of yells proceeding from one of them. The enemy had divided forces, and one of these had passed ahead and, searching the side streets, had seen the Englishmen run past. The clatter of horses' hoofs told Drake and Frobisher that their pursuers were close behind, and it did not seem possible now to get clear away. Without consultation, they at once determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible, and looked round them for some favourable place where they might make a last stand. Then, with a muttered exclamation, Frobisher seized Drake's arm and dragged him into a narrow passage between two

houses, just as the pirates swept into the street. The passage was in deep shadow, and with one accord both men threw themselves down at full length, hoping that they would not be seen, and that the pirates would pass on, imagining their quarry still in front of them.

And, luckily, this was just what happened. The pirates never thought of examining the narrow passage—perhaps they never even saw it. At any rate they dashed past and turned down another street, which they evidently considered to be the road the fugitives had taken. The instant they were out of sight Drake and his companion rose to their feet and continued their run toward the palace, only a few hundred yards away now. But they were not yet at the end of their troubles.

The horsemen, as soon as they had turned down the side street alluded to, had seen that the fugitives were certainly not in it, or they would have been in full view, unless indeed they had taken refuge in one of the ruined houses thereabouts. Some of the pirates suggested searching these before looking elsewhere, while others insisted that they had overrun the pursuit, and advised going back at once. The whole band were noisily discussing the pros and cons when Drake and Frobisher darted past the end of the street; and, seeing the fugitives, the pirates wheeled their horses and, with a savage whoop, started in pursuit again.

One circumstance, however, gave the Englishmen a little advantage—sufficient, indeed, as a matter of fact, to save their lives. While talking, the horsemen were all bunched together in a little crowd, and as it happened to be one of the men on the far side of the group who had been the first to catch sight of the fugitives, he galloped his horse right through the knot of his companions without a moment’s hesitation or warning, thus throwing the whole company into momentary confusion, one man being unhorsed, while in another instance horse and rider went down together. Before the remainder could extricate themselves from the melde and make a fair start, Drake and Frobisher had obtained a full fifty yards’ lead; and by the time their pursuers had reached the main street, the fugitives were more than half-way to the palace.

Once on the straight, however, the horsemen had the advantage, and overhauled them so rapidly that when the Englishmen were still twenty yards from the palace steps the foremost of the pirates were so close

behind that Frobisher knew they would be cut off unless something could be done. He therefore gave a warning cry to Drake, and instantly darted to one side; and as the first man dashed past, unable to rein up his horse, the Navy man fired point-blank into the animal, bringing it and its rider to the earth with a tremendous thud. Drake accounted for the next two men in quick succession, while Frobisher dropped a fourth; then, the others having reined up, the better to use their rifles, the two men took to their heels again and reached the long and broad flight of steps leading up to the palace entrance in the midst of a hail of bullets, none of which, fortunately, took effect.

The pirates wasted no time in reloading, but came on again to the foot of the steps. Here they were of course obliged to dismount, and some handed over their horses to others of their number to hold, so that they were only beginning to mount the steps as Drake and Frobisher reached the top and darted in through the great doorway. Drake was by this time dreadfully out of breath, and gaspingly protested that he had come to the end of his tether; nevertheless he managed to muster sufficient strength to jog along close behind his friend. At their last hiding-place they had sought concealment aloft, but Frobisher decided now to take refuge below, since the palace appeared to be the kind of structure that would afford a better prospect of escape from the vaults or cellars.

Accordingly the younger man kept his eyes open for a flight of steps leading downward, and, as the pirates were close behind, darted down the first that met his eyes. This was a narrow, winding, stone staircase that led downward so far that they appeared to be reaching to the very bowels of the earth; but the pair eventually came to the bottom, finding themselves in a long, stone-flagged corridor, extending a considerable distance, and very dimly lighted by small gratings which evidently communicated with some chamber above.

They seemed to have come to the end of their tether at last, however, for nowhere could they find an opening leading out of the corridor. And already they could hear the pirates descending the stairs.

“Come, Drake!” whispered Frobisher; “we dare not remain here. Let’s try to the left; there may be a door concealed somewhere among the shadows. I wish we had a little more light.”

The other end of the passage was reached without a single exit being discovered, and there was no time to run back and try farther in the other direction.

“This is the end, I guess,” said Drake, as the approaching footsteps sounded nearer. “It’s ‘backs against the wall and fight to the death’ for us now, my friend.”

Suiting the action to the word, the little skipper grasped his cudgel by the thinner end, took his revolver—with only one shot remaining—in his other, and flung himself backward against the wall.

Then a curious thing happened. The solid wall at the end of the passage yielded to the pressure of the skipper’s body, and Drake, still leaning against it, fell farther and farther backward, until at last he found himself in a reclining position on the now sloping wall. Then, to Frobisher’s unbounded amazement, the little man disappeared from view, a dull thud from below announcing the fact that he had dropped a distance of several feet. In an instant the younger man realised what had happened. The corridor had a purpose, after all; and the door at the end was probably secured by a concealed spring of some sort which Drake must have unwittingly pressed when he flung himself back against the wall.

Without losing an instant Frobisher knelt down at the edge of the dark opening, then turning, allowed himself to slip downward gradually, for it was obvious that there were no steps; and as his feet touched bottom he was barely in time to remove his fingers from the sill when the door swung to above him with a muffled “click.”

The pirates had not reached the foot of the stairs when the door closed, so that, unless they knew or guessed at and found the secret of opening it, the fugitives were safe from them, at any rate. But the thought occurred to Frobisher when the door closed behind him: now that they were in, how were they to get out again?

He called softly to Drake, and soon found that that worthy was much more startled than hurt, although even yet hardly able to realise what had happened to him. As soon as the little skipper had recovered his faculties a little he listened, and hearing nothing of their pursuers, struck a match,

a box of which he had fortunately concealed in his robe, and looked to see whether there was a spring inside the door. He failed to find one, however, and he and Frobisher exchanged glances full of apprehension. They seemed to have escaped a swift death for one of lingering starvation.

But they had no time to spend in dismal forebodings. They could now faintly hear the uproar above them in the passage as the pirates hunted for the door by which their quarry had escaped, and crouched down together, wondering whether their pursuers would hit upon the spring. Minute after minute passed, however, and the door still remained closed; and after about a quarter of an hour the pirates were heard to take their departure, probably convinced that the fugitives had not gone down the stairs, after all.

With a sigh of relief Frobisher turned to Drake and asked him to strike another light, so that they might get some sort of notion where they were. Drake did so; and the first thing the light revealed was a great bundle of torches, evidently placed there in the bygone days for the use of people whose business took them into this underground chamber. The two men eagerly lighted one each, and then, taking a few more as a stand-by, proceeded to explore.

The enormous chamber which the light revealed appeared to contain nothing whatever; but there were several passages leading from it—seven in all, as the explorers counted—and they tried the first they came to, to ascertain where it led.

It extended for a distance of about a hundred feet, and then terminated; nor did there appear to be any door, concealed or otherwise, at the end of it. Two more passages were explored with the same result; but the fourth, or middle passage of the seven, was different, in that, at the end, they came to a massive iron door. Drake stretched out his hand and made an attempt to twist the iron handle, but it would not budge. Again he tried, and this time it seemed to move a little; and as it did so Frobisher thought he caught a slight grinding, whirring sound, like rusty machinery reluctantly moving.

What it was that prompted him to act he did not know, but suddenly

becoming possessed with a suspicion of that door and a sense of danger in its vicinity, he dragged Drake quickly away from the handle, and himself retreated a few steps.

It was well that he did so, for at that moment the grinding sounds became quite perceptible, waxed louder, and then—like lightning from a cloud, a row of curved swordblades shot out of slots in the stone-work which the men had not previously noticed, and swept together for all the world like a pair of calliper legs. Any person standing by the door must have infallibly been stabbed through and through by that deadly device. Then, just as suddenly, the blades sprang back into the wall and the door swung back on its hinges, revealing another and smaller chamber beyond.

“By all the Powers,” gasped Drake, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, “what a fiendish invention! Mr Frobisher, that’s the second time this night that you’ve saved my life. I shall not forget.”

“Pshaw!” answered Frobisher; “what about the times you’ve saved mine? But, Drake,” he continued excitedly, “I’ve got an idea that we are on the point of discovering something. The man who owned this palace must have had something very well worth guarding, or he would never have taken the trouble to instal such an elaborate arrangement as that to destroy possible thieves, for that’s what it was intended to do, without a doubt. Let’s get along and see what there is to see; but be careful, for goodness’ sake. There may be more of these man-traps about, and we don’t want to be left dead in this hole.”

So saying, Frobisher stepped slowly and cautiously through the door-way, holding his torch high above his head, and at once found himself in a small, circular chamber, which was almost completely filled with ironbound cases and chests of every description.

“Great Caesar’s ghost!” almost shouted Frobisher to Drake, who was standing just inside the door, with mouth wide open and torch almost dropping out of his hand; “we have dropped right into somebody’s treasure-house, and no mistake. If those chests do not contain valuables, my name is not Murray Frobisher. Bring your stick, and let us see whether we can wrench off one of the locks. It should not be very difficult,

for the wood looks so rotten as almost to be crumbling to powder."

No sooner said than done. Drake eagerly placed the end of his stout cudgel under the hasp of the nearest of the boxes and, using it as a lever, soon sent the iron flying, the nails drawing out of the soft, "punky" wood as easily as though they had been set in putty. Next they swung the lid back; and then—what a sight met their astounded eyes!

The box contained neither gold nor silver, but was full to the brim with jewels of the most magnificent description, unset, every one of them, and all flashing and scintillating in the glare of the torches like a boxful of the most exquisitely coloured liquid fire. The sight was so extraordinarily beautiful that it fairly took the beholders' breath away, and for quite a minute neither of them could speak a word; they simply stood still, gasping with wonder and delight.

Another chest, and then another was opened, both of

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Chapter Fifteen.

Mutterings of War.

The single, and scarcely original, exclamation of “Oh!” was all that Captain Drake appeared to be capable of uttering for the moment. His eyes continued to bulge from their sockets, and he looked like a suddenly-awakened somnambulist. He was trying to realise the meaning of what Frobisher had just told him, and was finding it altogether too much for him.

At last Frobisher said, with a laugh: “Well, skipper, the money’s here, sure enough; but so are we, and it remains to be seen whether or not we can get out.”

“We’ll get out all right, don’t you trouble,” returned Drake confidently; “but”—unable as yet to detach his mind from the subject of his suddenly-acquired fortune—“just now you mentioned the name of the gentleman who collected all this stuff—Jenkins Can, I think you said he was called. Who was he, and how did he come to pouch such a pile of loot? Was he one of those old buccaneers, like Morgan and Kidd, that we read about?”

“Well,” replied Frobisher, “he was not exactly a buccaneer, for he was not a sailor, but a landsman; and he operated in a much larger way than either Morgan or Kidd. As a matter of fact he was a Tartar chief in his young days, many centuries ago, who gradually drilled and armed his own tribe, then other tribes, and still others, until he came, in course of time, to have an enormous army under him. The idea then occurred to him to make use of this vast army; and he determined upon no less a task than that of conquering Asia. He did it, too; there’s hardly a square mile of this continent that has not echoed to the tread of his troops. Everywhere he went he was victorious. He took and sacked cities, destroyed them, and sowed the ruins with salt; and it is said that, to this day, no grass will grow where Genghiz Khan’s armies trod. Naturally, in the course of time, he accumulated a vast booty from the cities he captured, and it finally became too large and cumbersome for him to carry about with him, so he determined to alter his tactics for once, and, instead of destroying, to build a city for himself where he could bury his

hoard, and which he could make his head-quarters.

“It is well known that he actually did this—various records state it, but those records do not say exactly where. The city, it is said, was founded somewhere in northern China—on the banks of a mighty river, is the wording, I believe; but there are several rivers in China answering that description, so the place might be almost anywhere. Then, years afterward, this man determined to conquer Japan. He fitted out a great armada and sailed for Nippon; but, as in the case of the famous Spanish Armada, a storm arose, and the entire fleet was wrecked. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese lost their lives, and Japan was saved. From that time onward, Genghiz Khan and the records relating to his treasure disappeared; and the city he founded, as well as the treasure, gradually passed into legend, the story being handed down from father to son by word of mouth. The man himself is supposed to have been cast ashore in Japan, where he adopted the dress and customs of the Japanese, in course of time becoming one of themselves, and winning great renown under another name—which I forget for the moment. But antiquarians insist that the name he assumed was but the Japanese rendering of his own former one of Genghiz Khan.

“At any rate, he never returned to China to recover his treasure; and legend has it that it still remained where it had been originally hidden. From time to time, expeditions have been formed for the purpose of searching for this legendary deserted city; but it has remained for us, Drake, to discover it, and to secure Genghiz Khan’s millions. This must be the town, this must be the treasure; for not otherwise can such an enormous hoard be accounted for. Nobody but the conqueror of Asia could ever have amassed so much.”

“That’s very interesting, Mr Frobisher,” said Drake, who had been listening intently; “and it’s a very comforting thought that all this belongs to us, if we can only get out. I suppose, in any case, we had better fill our pockets, lest we should not be able to get back here?”

“It would not be at all a bad idea, skipper,” returned Frobisher; and the two men slipped a few handfuls of the jewels into their pockets, as coolly as though they had been so many pebbles instead of gems worth several thousands of pounds.

“And now,” said Frobisher, “we had better turn our attention to getting out of this. I shall not feel comfortable until I have satisfied myself that this place is not going to prove a living tomb for us.”

They closed the lids of all the chests, and passed through what Frobisher called “the door-way of swords”, carefully closing the door behind them by means of a stick, lest the closing should again set the swords in motion. But it did not; the mechanism was evidently so arranged as only to operate upon the opening of the door.

“I do not think we need fear burglars here,” said Drake with a smile, as the door clanged shut.

The two men then decided to explore the remainder of the corridors, for unless an exit from one of them could be found there was little doubt that the treasure would prove as useless to them as it had been to Genghiz Khan himself.

The first passage they explored ended in a blank wall, as the three others had done; but in the next, to their great relief, they found another passage branching away to the left. This they followed for some distance, until they reached a spot where it branched into two. As there was no knowing which, if either, was the right one, they took the one on the left, as the previous opening had been on the left of the corridor, and followed it for a considerable distance. But they were doomed to disappointment; the corridor led nowhere. It simply came to what seemed to be a dead end, like the others. Frobisher felt the drops of sweat forming on his forehead, for it was beginning to look remarkably as though there was but one entrance to the vault—that through which they had come—and that all these other passages were either natural, or had been cut simply with the idea of mystifying and misleading possible intruders.

“Never say die” was, however, Frobisher’s motto, and Drake’s too, for that matter, so they tried back and entered the right-hand branch. But no better success attended them here, this ending in a blank wall also. There was now only one corridor untried, and with sinking hearts they proceeded to explore it.

No exit of any sort rewarded them here either, and hardly daring to look

each other in the face, from fear of what they might see there, they returned to the main chamber, into which Drake had fallen headlong in the first instance. Here they could still hear the distant shouts and trampling of the pirates, who were evidently moving about in the chamber directly overhead, continuing the search for their prey; but even the thought that they were safe from those barbarous savages was now hardly sufficient to cheer them. It would have been almost better to have met death in the open, fighting, than to be compelled to watch his slow approach in this dismal place, far below the level of the ground.

Unable to remain still, Frobisher again most carefully examined the inside of the secret door in search of a hidden spring, but no sign of it could he discover. It seemed evident that, unless the door were actually propped open by the person entering the vault, there was no getting back by that way; and Frobisher could not help thinking that surely some other exit must have been provided. The people accustomed to using the vault could not be expected always to remember to prop the door open when they entered; and it did not seem reasonable to suppose that the place had been so constructed that a mere lapse of memory would be tantamount to a person signing his own death-warrant. An emergency exit must have been made for use in case the main door became closed accidentally or otherwise; but the question was, where was it situated?

Drake suggested that there must undoubtedly be an opening somewhere, because the air in the vault was comparatively pure and fresh; at least it had not the dead, stale, stuffy smell of air confined in a hermetically-sealed chamber. But Frobisher pointed out that the door by which they had entered, although an excellent fit, did not butt up against the jambs so closely as to exclude the air altogether; yet he acknowledged that the air in the vault certainly seemed sweeter than might have been expected, had the main door been the only channel through which it could filter in.

Under the stimulus of the new glimmer of hope thus caught, every corridor was once more explored, even more closely than before, but with no other result than that Frobisher completely satisfied himself that there was most certainly no exit from any of the passages. Even a concealed door, opened by a spring, could hardly have evaded the close scrutiny of the two men; and it became more and more apparent that they had been

caught in a trap from which there was no escape. Both were feeling famished for want of food, and were parched with thirst; and Frobisher could not help wondering how long the agony of death from starvation and thirst would be prolonged before blessed unconsciousness came to their relief.

Suddenly—they had both been sitting dejectedly on the floor—Frobisher jumped to his feet.

“Look here, Drake,” he exclaimed, “there is just one place that we never thought of searching, and that’s the treasure chamber itself. We were too deeply interested in the valuables we found to think of looking for an exit in there. Who knows?—the very thing we are hunting for may be in there all the time.”

The two men fairly raced down the passage leading to the chamber, opened the latch, with all due caution, and re-entered the vault. At first sight there appeared to be no semblance of a second door, and their hopes dropped to zero once more. Then Drake proposed that, as a last chance, they should remove the chests to the centre of the room and see whether, possibly, there might be a door concealed behind any of them. They set to work feverishly, and in doing so spilled the jewels and coins in heaps on the floor. But what did that matter? Unless they found a way of escape from their prison, jewels and coin would be of far less value to them than a loaf of bread and a jar of water.

Then, at the very end, when their hopes were practically extinguished, the last chests removed disclosed a little oaken door set into the wall, not more than four feet high by three feet broad. Drake was about to open it impulsively when Frobisher restrained him. He did not want either of them to be killed on the very threshold of success by some other hidden and fiendishly ingenious piece of mechanism. But when cautiously opened with the aid of one of the sticks, nothing happened in this instance, and they crawled safely through into another passage, being careful to close the door behind them.

This passage looked a good deal more promising, there being no less than four other corridors branching off it at right angles, each, curiously enough, leading away to the left. But they determined to go straight

ahead in the first instance, exploring the corridors afterwards, if not successful in their present direction. They traversed so long a distance in a perfectly straight line, the ground rising gently all the way, that they soon became convinced that they were at last on the right track, as the passage must, some distance back, have passed from under the foundations of the palace itself, and be leading, undoubtedly, to some exit at a considerable distance from the building. It seemed probable that it might have been constructed with a view to providing a means of escape, should the palace ever be attacked and stormed.

That they were correct in their surmise was proved shortly afterward when, a little distance ahead, Frobisher caught sight of a pin-hole of light. This presently resolved itself into sunlight shining through the keyhole of another door; and they realised that, since it was now broad daylight, they must have spent several hours in Genghiz Khan's treasure-house. The door did not open with a handle, as the others had done, and there was no key hanging handily on the wall, as there had been when Frobisher escaped out of the pirate fortress; so that, after all, there was still a rather formidable obstacle to be overcome before they could actually stand in the blessed light of day again.

"We must not let this stop us, Drake," exclaimed Frobisher; "though I don't yet quite see what we are to do. If we had a big stone we could burst the lock off, or out; but there isn't so much as a pebble to be seen anywhere about."

"How far are we away from the palace, do you think?" asked Drake. "If we are out of earshot of the pirates, I can easily manage it."

"A good quarter of a mile, I should say," replied Frobisher. "You could fire a rifle in here and they would never hear it."

"I mean to do something like that," returned the other. He produced his revolver, the muzzle of which he thrust against the keyhole, and pulled the trigger, turning his face aside at the same time.

The explosion in that confined space sounded like the roar of a twelve-inch gun, and dust and splinters flew in clouds; but when the air cleared the lock was gone, and in its place a ragged hole appeared, through

which a clenched fist could easily be thrust. One or two strong pulls, both together, while gripping the edges of the hole, sufficed to loosen the whole affair, and presently, with a rattle of falling pieces of broken iron and springs, the door grated open, and they once more beheld the blessed light of day.

On stepping outside, they found themselves in the midst of a thick clump of bushes and vegetation which completely concealed the door from outside, and which had evidently not been disturbed for centuries, so thick and matted was the growth. Through this they pushed and broke their way, coming out a few moments later into what was evidently the remains of a once-spacious and magnificent garden. There were still traceable the outlines of old walks and lawns; ruined fountains and marble basins for gold-fish were scattered about; and there were even the remains of marble seats and couches whereon the warriors of Genghiz Khan's retinue had been wont to take their ease during their all-too-brief respites from fighting. Sundials, beautifully modelled in bronze, and statues, in bronze, copper, marble, and in some cases even solid silver, were to be found in many of the corners. A few were still on their pedestals, but most of them lay broken on the ground, though all gave evidence of the high level to which Chinese art had advanced, even in those far-off days.

A quarter of a mile away was to be seen the palace the pair had recently vacated, and, peering cautiously from behind a screen of brushwood, they were able to make out the figures of some of the pirates, still apparently searching industriously; while the smoke of a fire, a little distance away, showed that they had by no means given up the pursuit, but were cooking a meal preparatory to instituting a fresh search of the palace precincts. They had not yet, apparently, thought of looking in the gardens.

"Think we dare risk it?" enquired Drake, voicing the idea uppermost in both their minds, and pointing toward the groups of unconscious pirates.

"Yes," replied Frobisher. "They seem to be pretty fully occupied with their own concerns just now, and are evidently under the impression that we are still hiding somewhere in the building, so I think we could not hope for a better opportunity. They must, without fail, eventually discover that we

are nowhere in the building, so we had better get away before they take it into their heads to start searching in this direction. I expect both groups have joined forces by this time, to participate in that meal they are preparing, so we should be able to get clear of the town without being seen."

This point settled, the pair made their way cautiously out of the gardens, and soon gained the streets, which they traversed slowly, to save themselves as much as possible in case the pursuit should again be taken up. And in about half an hour, during which they had perceived no cause for alarm, they realised, by the gradual thinning of the houses, that they were approaching the outskirts of the city on its eastern side.

They were proceeding carefully, conversing, and noting the interesting relics of a bygone civilisation, when, without a word, Drake suddenly seized his companion's arm and hastily dragged him behind a convenient wall. Frobisher, too much astonished for words, could only look round, wonderingly, imagining that the pirates were after them again; and as he did so, he perceived the cause of the skipper's alarm.

The danger was not behind, but in front. The pirates had proved to be wider awake than either of the Englishmen had anticipated, and had posted a sentry at the eastern gate. Fortunately for them, the man happened to be looking in another direction at the moment when they turned the corner, or discovery would have been inevitable. As it was, the question arose—how was this fresh obstacle to be overcome? They might possibly avoid the man by making a long détour to some other gate, but this plan appealed to neither of them, for even should they succeed in escaping by some other outlet, the ground outside the walls was so bare that the man must inevitably see them. The alarm would be raised, when of course the pursuit would at once be resumed, and their capture become certain.

A few words between the two Englishmen sufficed to show that the same plan—the only practicable one—had occurred to both; and, avoiding the main street, they made their way through side lanes and back alleys until they emerged at a spot only a few yards distant from the unsuspecting sentinel. Then, watching through a convenient cranny until his back was turned, they ran swiftly forward and concealed themselves behind a low

stone wall which the man was passing and repassing on his beat.

The next time he passed that wall the sentry experienced the unpleasant sensation of being jumped on from behind by two men, one small and the other very large and heavy; the latter kneeling on his chest and squeezing his windpipe, while the other securely lashed his wrists and ankles together with strips torn from his own robe, their operations being completed by thrusting a gag made of the same material into his mouth and securing it there firmly. The Englishmen then carried him between them into one of the adjacent ruined houses, took him to an upper room, and left him there for his companions to find, if fate should so decree.

As a matter of fact, fate evidently decreed against the unhappy man, for several months afterwards the remains of a gagged and bound Chinaman were found in that very house by a party of travelling nomads; but it was a case of the pirate's life or those of the Englishmen, and it did not take them long to decide which the world could best spare.

The sentry having been thus disposed of, Drake and Frobisher struck off across the desert, by the margin of the river, at a good round pace; for since the pirates had posted a guard, it was probable that they would visit him sooner or later, and the Englishmen wanted to be well out of sight before anything of that sort should occur.

A little later on they were fortunate enough to come to a village, most of the inhabitants of which were away, as it happened, probably hunting, or fishing, or otherwise engaged upon their usual occupations. Here they secured a hearty meal of rice, bread, cheese, and goats' milk; after which they found themselves marvellously refreshed, and thought the meal cheap at the price of one of Genghiz Khan's gold pieces, specially cleaned up for the purpose of payment.

It is unnecessary to relate in detail the incidents of the journey of the fugitives back to Tien-tsin, for nothing in the way of real adventure occurred after they had once left the ruined city behind. On the way Drake explained to Frobisher how he had come to attempt his friend's rescue; and, in a few words, this is how it came about.

Drake had returned in the *Quernmore* from England with his cargo, which

he duly delivered. Then, as China was purchasing steamers for use as transports, and he was offered about twice his ship's actual value, he sold her, and so found himself at a loose end, without employment. He regarded this as a favourable opportunity to commence enquiries respecting Frobisher, whom he believed to be still a prisoner in Korea; and, happening to encounter Wong-lih—who had by that time returned from his visit to southern China—he heard the whole of Frobisher's history, from the moment when the admiral found and rescued him at Asan, to that of his expedition up the river after the pirates. He was also informed that the expedition had failed, and that his friend was either dead or a prisoner. Wong-lih, said Drake, was greatly cut up at losing so promising an officer, a man, too, of whom he had made a friend; but he could not be induced to send a rescue party. He was altogether too busily occupied with matters of moment to his country, and war was so imminent, that, as a matter of fact, the admiral found himself absolutely unable to spare a ship or a crew for such a purpose. Drake therefore determined to ascertain for himself if Frobisher were still alive, and, if so, to attempt his rescue. And as he happened to be a good Chinese linguist, and possessed in a high degree the art of disguising himself, the attempt proved, as has been seen, completely successful.

It was exactly two months after Frobisher's escape from the pirates' fortress when two very weary, very ragged Englishmen arrived in Tien-tsin; and so bronzed and disreputable did they appear that they could obtain accommodation nowhere until they had proved, by the exhibition of some of their gold, that they were not up-country robbers, but solvent citizens, of merely a temporarily unattractive exterior.

This condition was soon altered, with the assistance of a few baths, a shave, and new drill suits; and, having made their toilets, Frobisher proposed starting immediately to report himself to Wong-lih, or whatever admiral happened to be on the spot at the moment. Drake insisted on accompanying him; and accordingly the two men sauntered off toward the Navy Buildings, where they were told that Admiral Wong-lih might be found at the dockyard, busily superintending the fitting out for sea of several repaired and re-boilered cruisers.

Upon enquiring the reason for all the bustle and confusion that were

everywhere apparent, and the quite unaccustomed businesslike air of the port, Frobisher was informed by the officer to whom he applied for information that Japan had, a few days previously, perpetrated an act which could hardly be interpreted otherwise than as meaning war; and that consequently all possible preparations were being hurriedly made to meet the contingency. Guns were being mounted, ships were being dry-docked, scraped, and painted, nucleus crews were being brought up to fighting strength, and, in short, everything that could be done was being done to place China in a position to send her Navy to sea to encounter the Japanese squadrons; for it was plainly to be seen, said the officer, that, since the first acts of hostility had taken place, a formal declaration of war was merely a matter of a few days, and there was a great deal to be done in the time. Frobisher thanked the man for his information, and then he and Drake hurried on their way toward the dockyard. Truly, the air was full of mutterings and rumours of war.

Chapter Sixteen.

The Dragon Awakes.

On their way to the dockyard, while passing along the “Street of Many Waters”, they heard in the distance the sound of a military band, playing very barbaric music—to English ears, that is to say—but in what was undoubtedly “march” time. Presently they found themselves compelled to halt for about five minutes at a cross street, named “The Lotus”, while several companies of a Chinese Line regiment went swinging past on their way to the barracks; and Drake and his companion could not refrain from commenting favourably upon the smart and businesslike appearance of the men.

They were, it appeared, part of a crack corps; and every officer and private seemed fully to realise the fact, and to be proud of it. There was not a single soldier among them standing less than six feet in height, and the majority were broad in proportion. The Navy men whom Frobisher had so far encountered were usually uniformed somewhat after the fashion of European officers and seamen. The officers wore the flat, peaked cap, with a gold dragon in front instead of the crown and anchor,

while their jackets and trousers of dark-blue cloth were almost exactly similar to those of our own men, except that the facings, instead of being gold, were of that peculiar shade of blue so much in favour among the Chinese. The ordinary tars wore the conventional dark—blue, baggy trousers, and a blouse of the same colour, cut to a “V” shape at the neck in front, but minus the collar at the back which European seamen have adopted, while the skirt of the blouse was allowed to hang loose outside the trousers, instead of being tucked in. The only essential difference between the Celestial seamen’s uniform and our own lay in the cap, which, instead of being flat and dark-blue in colour, was of the conventional Chinese shape and white in colour, with a knob of some soft material on the top. Their pigtails were rolled up and tucked into the crown of these caps—or, more correctly, hats. Their arms consisted of rifles—which, Frobisher noted, were of widely-different patterns, most of them obsolete, although all were breech-loaders—and a kind of cutlass, somewhat similar to the British naval weapon, but with a two-handed hilt, and only a small, circular piece of polished brass for a guard.

The soldiery, however, smart though they were, in no way resembled those of European armies. Their uniforms, all similar of course, consisted of identically the same hat as that worn in the Navy; a white jacket, very long and very loose, with baggy sleeves, the collar, front, and skirt, and the edges of the cuffs all edged with broad Chinese-blue braid; and short and baggy trousers, gathered just below the knee, and tucked into a kind of “puttee” legging, consisting of a long wrapping of white canvas. The trousers were also white, with a Chinese-blue stripe of broad braid down the outside—and, strangely enough, the inside also—of the leg. The boots were eminently sensible and serviceable, and were something like the Red Indian’s moccasin, the uppers being made of two thicknesses of deer hide, which were kept on the foot by means of a narrow tape run through eyelets, while the soles were built up of several thicknesses of felt, amounting in all to about an inch and a half. They had an appearance of great clumsiness, but were, as a matter of fact, extremely light, springy, and comfortable. The thickness of the soles, the springiness of the felt, and the absence of heels made the boots particularly easy to march in, and the soldiers were thus able to cover great distances without feeling fatigue. These men, instead of hiding their pigtails under their head-gear, allowed them to hang down; and some of them, Frobisher observed, were of great length, in some cases falling as

low as the back of the knee.

For arms the men carried rifles, of a more modern pattern than those in use in the sister service; in fact, they seemed, so far as Frobisher could see without close inspection, to be Martini weapons of the 1879 pattern—a most serviceable and reliable fire-arm, far superior to the modern small-bore rifle in the opinion of soldiers themselves, as a man-stopper and rush-checker. A long, wicked-looking bayonet with a basket hilt, the back of the blade serrated for three-quarters of its length, like the edge of a large saw, swung from the left hip; and the armoury was completed by a long-hilted, long-bladed knife, or short sword, stuck through the belt which supported the bayonet. They would certainly be a “tough crowd to meet at close quarters”, as Drake murmured to his companion while the men swung past.

The soldiers appeared to be extremely partial to flags, for there seemed to be one to every twenty or thirty men. These were all identical in shape and colour, being triangular and yellow, with the device of a crimson dragon, open-jawed, in the centre.

As soon as the men had passed, Frobisher and Drake continued their walk, and shortly afterward reached the entrance to the dockyard, where they were sharply challenged in Chinese by a sentry. Fortunately, as has been before noted, Drake was an excellent Chinese scholar; and, in answer to his explanation that they were in search of Admiral Wong-lih, the man allowed them to pass, and very civilly directed them where to go, having seen the officer in question pass but a short time previously.

While Drake was obtaining this information Frobisher amused himself by looking around him; and as he did so, he caught sight of a very gorgeously dressed official approaching, attended by several servants, one of whom was holding a large umbrella over his master’s head, while another timidly supported the heavy silken train of the mandarin’s cloak. There was something familiar about this man’s appearance, but the Englishman could not remember whether or not he had really met him before, or whether it was only a resemblance to some other that had attracted his notice. He was a man of very high standing—there could be no doubt about that; for, while he was yet some ten yards away, the sentry abruptly ceased his conversation with Drake, pushed the little

skipper aside, and presented arms, his face assuming the fixed expression of a wooden image, touched, Frobisher imagined, with more than a trace of fear. And indeed, upon closer inspection, the official's countenance itself was seen to be anything but pleasant in expression.

He did not deign to return the sentry's salute, but stared in a particularly offensive manner at the two Englishmen, finally coming to a halt and putting several questions to the sentry, who replied in tones that positively quavered with apprehension. During this time the personage never took his eyes off the two friends, and Frobisher was on the point of losing his temper when the unknown, with a distinctly perceptible sneer, turned his back rudely and, with a curt command to his waiting attendants, stalked majestically away.

"Who the—?"

"What a—" began Drake and Frobisher simultaneously, then stopped. Frobisher, simmering with rage, continued:

"Drake, ask this sentry, here, who in thunder that insolent bounder is. By Jingo! I have half a mind to go after him and tweak his pigtail soundly. Why, he looked at us as though we were dirt beneath his feet—as though we had no business to be alive. Confound his impudence!"

Drake, fully as indignant, sharply put the desired question, and in reply received a long explanation from the sentry, who constantly sent glances after the mandarin, as though fearful that the latter might overhear what he was saying, even at that distance. Presently he concluded, and Drake translated whilst the two continued their search for Wong-lih.

"The fellow says," explained Drake, "that the individual who treated us to such a close scrutiny is a very important official indeed. He is one of the members—the chief, in fact—of the Naval Council, also a four-button mandarin, entitled to wear the insignia of the golden peacock. And he is also the captain of the battleship *Ting-yuen*, the flagship of the Chinese northern fleet, which flies the flag of the celebrated Admiral Ting himself. Last, but by no means least, he holds an important post in the dockyard (though how he manages to carry out the duties of that and those of captain at one and the same time I do not know); while, to cap

everything, he is a member of the Chinese Royal Family, a Prince, no less, I assure you. What do you think of that for a tally, eh, Mr Frobisher?"

"Well, I am rather inclined to be sorry for the people who come under the scope of his Naval jurisdiction," returned Frobisher. "I should hate to serve in any ship of which he was captain. Of course I don't know the fellow from Adam, but there is something about him that aroused in me a very strong sense of repulsion; he looked to me like an arch-criminal. By the way, did the man tell you what his name was? I feel sure I've seen him somewhere before; I remember that repellent, snaky look in his eyes, which gives one the shivers up and down one's spine."

"Oh ay," replied the skipper; "I'd forgotten that. He did mention his tally, as a matter of fact. Let's see—um—what was it again? Ah, I remember. He called him Prince See—at least, that's what it sounded like."

"By Jove! then I remember when I met him last, Drake," exclaimed Frobisher. "It was when I went with my friend the admiral to the Council meeting at the Navy Building, when I received my commission in the Chinese Navy. Wong-lih mentioned then, that his name was Prince Hsi; and I recollect how very unpleasantly he impressed me then. It appears also that he is a bit of a scoundrel; for in Wong-lih's absence in Korea the fellow had the audacity to send the *Chih' Yuen*, the ship I was to be appointed to, to Wei-hai-wei to have her 9.4's replaced by 12-inch guns, intending to sell the smaller weapons, substitute old, out-of-date twelves, and pocket the difference. But, luckily, Wong-lih met her on the way there, screwed the information out of her captain, and stopped Hsi's little game. He hates Wong-lih, therefore; and, as I am a friend of the admiral's, he has honoured me also with a share of his dislike."

"The low-down, ruffianly swab!" Drake burst out. "But there! that's just the sort of beast he looks. Well, Mr Frobisher, if, as you say, he dislikes you—and from the way he looked at you I should say that 'hate' was the more correct word—I would advise you to keep your weather eye lifting. That sort of man hesitates at very little, and he seems to have the power, as well as the will, to do you a bad turn; so watch out!"

"I will, Drake," replied Frobisher; "you can rely on that. But here we are at last, I think; this is the place where the sentry said we should find Wong-

lih, isn't it?"

"Ordnance Wharf, third shed along, first door on the far side of the sheer-legs before you come to the fifty-ton crane, he said," replied Drake; "so I reckon that this is the door. And, by Jiminy! there is the admiral himself, walking beside the other officer in gold lace—a flag-captain, I should say, by his aiguillettes."

"That's him, right enough," agreed Frobisher, and together the two men set off in pursuit, keeping a little in the rear until the two officers should have finished their conversation.

Presently the captain saluted and went off about his own business, and Wong-lih, turning, caught sight of Drake and Frobisher. As his eyes fell upon the latter, he stood stock-still, his jaw dropped, his eyebrows went up, and he looked as though he had seen a ghost.

"Why, Captain Frobisher," he exclaimed at last, coming forward and holding out his hand, "is it then really you? My dear boy, I am glad to see you again, safe and sound, too, by all appearances. I have been mourning you as dead these three months and more, ever since I got back from the south and learnt of the disaster to the *Su-chen* on the Hoang-ho. I never expected to see you alive again when I heard that you had fallen into the clutches of the pirates; and I was more grieved than I can tell you—as Captain Drake here can testify—not to be able to send a rescue party after you to try to save, or at least avenge, you. But it was absolutely impossible; I had neither ships nor men to spare. The imminence of our war with Japan, which has been threatening daily for months past, and which is now an all-but-acknowledged fact, would not allow of it. Much as I regretted you, my country naturally was my first consideration."

"Of course, sir," agreed Frobisher heartily; "I quite understand. I, too, am delighted to see you once more; indeed, I came down here to the yard on purpose to find you and report myself ready for duty. I hope, sir, that you can still employ me."

"Employ you?" ejaculated the admiral. "I should rather say we can! Why, I could use hundreds of men like you, if only they existed in China. But

come along to my office; we can talk more comfortably there. And you too, Captain Drake, if you will so far honour my poor quarters."

"With pleasure, with pleasure, my lord—your maj——er—Sir, I mean," Drake almost shouted, in his confusion, quite "flabbergasted", as he himself would have called it, at the Chinaman's stately, old-world courtesy. And a few minutes later they found themselves in Wong-lih's comfortably-furnished office, in the ordnance department of the dockyard. Arrived there, and having seated themselves, the admiral ordered refreshments, and immediately plunged into the matter always nearest his heart, now more so than ever.

"Since you have reported, Captain Frobisher," he commenced, "I take it that you are ready for service at any moment."

"This instant, if you wish it, sir," answered Frobisher.

"Thank you, Captain!" said Wong-lih. "That is practically what it amounts to. Your ship, the *Chih' Yuen*, is here now; and I would like you to take command of her at the earliest possible moment. She is in readiness to go to sea, with stores, ammunition, and men aboard—would be at sea now, as a matter of fact, had we had an officer to whom we dared trust her. And you, sir," turning to Drake, "are you willing to accept service under my Emperor? If so, I can offer you a berth."

"Certainly I am, your Highness," replied Drake heartily. "Only, if I may be so bold as to say so, I should like to be on the same ship as my fr— as Captain Frobisher here."

"Say 'friend', Drake," broke in Frobisher. "It was on the tip of your tongue, and it is the truth. If a man who saves another's life is not a friend, I do not know what else you would call him."

"Quite right, Captain Frobisher," said Wong-lih. "I like to hear you say that. And as for you, Mr Drake, I can satisfy your wish very easily, as it happens. The acting first lieutenant of Mr Frobisher's ship is not fitted for the post, but he was the best we had at the time. Now, if you choose, you shall replace him as first lieutenant of the *Chih' Yuen*, and I will have your commission made out immediately."

“Nothing would please me better, my lord,” replied Drake, with the utmost enthusiasm; “and I assure you that you—”

“Very well, then,” interrupted the admiral, who was plainly hard pressed for time; “that’s agreed. You shall receive your commission to-night. And now, gentlemen both, although I am so busy that I scarcely know what to do first, I must spare the time to give you a short account of the state of affairs as it stands at present, since it is necessary that you should have the fullest information to enable you—you in particular, Captain Frobisher—to understand exactly how things are with China, and how extremely critical the situation is. When you have heard what I am about to tell you, you will be able to form your own ideas and plans, and so be in a position to work intelligently with your brother captains, and under the admiral who is going to command the northern fleet, to which you will be attached. I may mention that I am to be in command of the southern division, while Admiral Ting will be your chief.

“You remember, of course, Captain Frobisher, that when the rebellion in Korea became so serious that the Government could not deal with it, the Korean Minister asked our assistance, and we gave it, as you saw, at Asan. I also informed you then that Japan had thereupon thought fit to manifest a somewhat unfriendly attitude by sending an unnecessarily strong guard to her Minister at Seoul, coupled with an intimation that she would feel obliged to send a much larger force if the rebellion was not immediately crushed. That, in itself, as we fully realised, amounted very nearly to a threat of war against China, and showed us that Japan was only awaiting her opportunity. We therefore sent a very strongly worded protest against such action to Tokio; and the Japanese thereupon agreed to defer action until it could be seen what turn events in Korea were going to take.

“That was the situation when you were sent in the *Su-chen* up the Hoang-ho; and those of us who had eyes to see and ears to hear were fully awake to the fact that this concession on the part of Japan was merely a postponement of the evil day. Perhaps she found she was not as fully prepared for war as she had imagined. I know we were not. My colleagues and I, and those of us who had our country’s interests at heart, took warning, therefore, and hurried forward our preparations for war as rapidly as we could.

“Then things remained fairly quiescent until a few days ago. We had practically quelled the Korean rebellion, and matters were resuming their normal status in Korea, the only thing that remained being to institute the reforms which were undoubtedly necessary in that country. The proposals for these were offered to, and accepted by, the Korean Government; and the proposed modifications of policy began to take shape at once. One would therefore have thought that our little campaign in Korea might be said to have terminated satisfactorily, and that Korea might be left to carry out the course of action to which she had pledged herself. In fact, we actually commenced the withdrawal of our troops.

“Then, suddenly, Japan sprang her mine. Our Minister at Seoul was informed by the Japanese representative that Japan did not consider Korea competent to carry out her promises, and that therefore Japan would unite with China to carry out the reforms between them. This, of course, was tantamount to Japan claiming the right to share China’s suzerainty over Korea, a most audacious and—I may almost call it—infamous proposition. It was one to which Japan, of course, knew we would never agree, and we told her so in very plain terms.

“The next thing we heard was that Japan had landed no fewer that five thousand men in Korea, and that they were marching on Seoul; and on the same day the Japanese Minister there forced the situation by tendering two ultimatums—one to Korea, and one to us. The Korean ultimatum required that, within twenty-four hours, Korea should disclaim Chinese suzerainty and pledge herself to allow Japan alone to carry out the reforms in question. The alternative was that, if Korea would not agree, she was to be treated as an enemy to Japan. The ultimatum addressed to us was to the effect that we should, also within the same time, surrender our suzerainty to Japan and relinquish all claims over Korea—the alternative in our case being war!

“Of course we could not possibly send a reply within the time stipulated; and even if we could, we should have refused the proposal with scorn. Our Minister at Seoul did all that man could do to gain time, and sent the news to us immediately. As soon as we heard of Japan’s action we knew that the anticipated moment had come, and that war had become inevitable; we therefore hurried eight thousand men on board transports, and dispatched them at once to Asan. And now comes a circumstance it

almost breaks my heart to tell.

“War had not yet been actually declared, you understand, and Japan was still officially awaiting our decision; yet the Japanese fleet, in its full strength, lay in wait for our transports and the convoying men-of-war, and attacked them, sinking the transport *Kowshing*, with over a thousand men on board, and one of our cruisers. The other transports and cruisers escaped and got safely to Asan, where the troops were landed, the ships sheltering under the guns of the fortress. The messenger who brought the news of this treacherous attack informed us that the five thousand Japanese troops which I mentioned just now, having reached Seoul, had been dispatched again immediately, under General Oshima, to Asan to attack the garrison there. They met a small force of our soldiers four days later, at Song-hwan, and, I am sorry to say, defeated them; and the only silver lining to our cloud lies in the surprise those Japanese will receive when they find themselves met at Asan by seven thousand of our men, instead of only the small garrison of the place; for it is not very likely that Oshima’s force, being on the march, will have heard either of the naval battle, or of our successful landing of the majority of our men at Asan.

“The sea fight occurred a week ago, but we only received news of the land battle to-day; and although we have been taken unawares by Japan’s treachery in striking before the declaration of war, we have managed to prepare ourselves pretty well, thanks to the warnings we had that this was coming. Mark me!—Japan shall find to her cost that she cannot insult and ride rough-shod over my country without being called to very strict account. War, Mr Frobisher, will be declared by China against Japan tomorrow, the 1st of August; and I rely upon you, as well as upon all the rest of my officers, to do your utmost to keep command of the sea. The country which secures that will have the other at her mercy; and we ought to be able to secure it, as our Navy is, if anything, a little more powerful than that of Japan, seeing that we have two battleships, as well as cruisers, whereas Japan has only cruisers. That is the situation, gentlemen; and you are now as fully posted as I am with regard to the state of affairs; so strike hard and often for China, when you get the opportunity.”

“We will, sir,” replied both men enthusiastically.

“But,” continued Frobisher, “I trust that our ammunition will prove very different from that supplied me on the *Su-chen*. You probably heard that the expedition failed for no other reason than that more than half our shells were filled with charcoal instead of gunpowder?”

“Alas! alas! I did,” replied Wong-lih; “and I wish I could promise you that such monstrous iniquities should never occur again. But I cannot. I am doing, and have always done, my best to prevent this shameful tampering with Government property; but what can one man do, amongst so many? You will remember that I told you the mandarins were filling their pockets at the expense of their country; and there is no telling how far their peculations may have extended. I have examined as much ammunition as I have had time for, and I am bound to say that it looks all right; but beyond that I cannot go, for it is impossible to know for certain without opening every cartridge, and at a crisis like this, that would be an impossibility. You must do as I do, and trust that your powder will prove what it pretends to be.”

“Very well, sir,” returned Frobisher, bowing. “It does not seem a very satisfactory state of affairs; but I shall do my best, I assure you.”

“I am certain of it,” returned Wong-lih. “And now, one last word. Sorry as I am to have to acknowledge it, there are traitors everywhere about us, so trust no one but yourself and your admiral. News must have been conveyed to Japan by one of my countrymen to have enabled her fleet to know when the transports sailed, and where to meet them. That man, whoever he is, has Japanese gold in his pocket, and the blood of a thousand of his countrymen on his head.”

Drake and Frobisher exchanged glances involuntarily. The same suspicion had evidently crossed the mind of each simultaneously.

“Do you suspect anyone in particular, sir?” enquired Frobisher. “If so, perhaps you will kindly warn me in which direction to exercise the most care.”

“I am sorry to say that I do suspect someone most strongly,” was Wong-lih’s reply, after a somewhat lengthy pause. “But, unfortunately, he is so highly placed that even I dare not mention his name. If the man so much

as guessed that I suspected his treachery, I should be assassinated within twenty-four hours; so, for my country's sake, I must refrain from telling you something I would give a good deal to be able to do."

"Someone very highly placed?" repeated Frobisher, drawing his chair a little closer to Wong-lih's, and lowering his voice. "Should I be very wide of the mark in guessing him to be a prince of the blood royal?"

Wong-lih turned pale, and glanced uneasily round him. "You would be, on the contrary, very near the truth, if my suspicions are correct," he replied. "That man has played many a scurvy trick in his time; but his other delinquencies are light compared with treachery to his country; and I fear to breathe his name in connection with so horrible a crime. But tell me, how came you to suspect also? Have you any grounds?"

"None," replied Frobisher. "But I have met the man twice, and on each occasion he has impressed me most unfavourably. I suppose one should take no notice of intuitions; but he certainly looks a thorough scoundrel, to my mind. I shall watch him as carefully as I can."

"Do," said the admiral. "You say you have met him twice; I recollect the first time, but do not recall a second. When was it?"

"Not an hour ago, sir," returned Frobisher. "I met him, with his retinue, just leaving the dockyard. He honoured me so far as to treat me to a very impertinent scrutiny as he passed."

"Leaving the dockyard!" echoed Wong-lih. "I did not see him about here. He ought to be on board his ship, the *Ting Yuen*, by rights, for she is quite ready for sea; and I know Admiral Ting is only too eager to take his fleet out to look for the enemy. Indeed, as soon as you are aboard the *Chih' Yuen* and have hoisted your flag, he is likely to make the signal to proceed to sea. No; that man had no business here. I wonder what he was doing."

Acting upon Wong-lih's hint that the interview had better terminate, Frobisher and Drake took their leave of the kindly admiral, and went back into the city to transact some necessary business before going on board. This included securing uniforms, and suits of mufti, toilet articles, and, in fact, personal requisites of every kind, of which both men had been

destitute for several months past. This business having been transacted, their new possessions were packed and sent to the ship, and Frobisher and Drake followed immediately afterward. Arrived on board, the former had his commission read by the interpreter (for it was, of course, written in Chinese script), and at last, after many strange vicissitudes, found himself standing on his own quarterdeck, captain of the Chinese cruiser *Chih' Yuen*.

Chapter Seventeen.

Prince—and Traitor?

Once fairly settled on board the *Chih' Yuen*, although there turned out to be an enormous amount of work to be done, and numerous little matters to be attended to before the cruiser could be said to be thoroughly "shipshape", Frobisher found time to look round him a little, and to cast his eyes over the remainder of the northern fleet lying off the city of Tien-tsin. Accustomed as he was to the sight of Great Britain's noble squadrons, and the enormous size of her battleships and cruisers, the Chinese fleet at first glance seemed utterly insignificant as a fighting machine. In the first place, the ships were few in number, and there were but two battleships among them; and both they and the cruisers would nearly all have been considered obsolete in England.

About a quarter of a mile from his own ship, and anchored in mid-stream, lay the two battleships which formed the backbone of the Chinese Navy at that time—the *Ting Yuen*, the flagship of Admiral Ting, with Frobisher's pet abomination, Prince Hsi, as captain; and the *Chen Yuen*, commanded, like his own ship, by an Englishman.

Both these craft were old and out of date, having been built as long ago as the year 1879; but their armour was enormously thick, and both of them carried two eighty-ton monster guns, placed in turrets and set in *echelon*, so that the immense weight of the weapons should be evenly distributed. The ships themselves were a little over seven thousand tons displacement, and were fitted with particularly long and strongly reinforced rams, upon the effective use of which the Chinese admiral was building largely—not without justification, as events proved.

These two battleships completely dwarfed the fleet of cruisers lying above and below them in the river, none of these being of more than three thousand five hundred tons—less than half the size of the flagship, and of course not nearly so heavily armed. In fact, none of the cruisers carried anything more powerful in the way of guns than the five-inch weapons which Frobisher's own ship, the latest addition to the Navy, mounted; and of these the *Chih' Yuen* possessed only two, one in a

barbette forward, and one similarly mounted aft.

Then came two sister ships, cruisers of three thousand tons, the *Yen-fu* and the *Kau-ling*, armoured vessels, and one of two thousand seven hundred tons, also armoured, named the *Shan-si*; while close up under the walls of the city lay a couple of protected cruisers, of two thousand five hundred tons each, the *Yung-chau* and the *Tung-yen*. Frobisher's old acquaintance, the *Hat-yen*, which had been Admiral Wong-lih's flagship at the battle of Asan, was also to be seen busily preparing for sea; and the dispatch vessel *San-chau*, which he likewise recognised, had also been pressed into service. The *Su-chen*, in which Frobisher had made his ill-fated attack on the pirates, was still in the hands of the repairers, who had managed to spin out the job of putting her to rights again after the fight ever since the time of her return from the Hoang-ho. Lastly, there was the old cruiser *Kwei-lin*, which had been in the Navy for over twenty years, and which had not moved from her anchorage for the last decade. She was absolutely useless as a fighting machine; and, short as the Chinese were of ships, the futility of taking her to sea was at once recognised, and she was to be left behind to carry on her former duty as guardship to the port.

In addition to the above-mentioned ships, there were seven torpedo-boats, which were to accompany the fleet, ranging in size from seventy to a hundred and twenty tons; but, unlike Japan, China possessed none of the type of craft known as torpedo-boat destroyers—T.B.D.'s for short. Japan had quite a number of these, all over a hundred tons, one or two being even over two hundred; and they were, of course, much faster and more heavily armed than the Chinese torpedo-boats. Japan also possessed an advantage in that her cruisers were not only larger than those of China, they were also newer, faster, and more heavily armed; and there were more of them. One ship in particular, the *Yoshino*, was larger than the Chinese battleships; while the armoured cruisers *Matsushima, Hiroshima*, and *Hakodate* were all well over four thousand tons, and much more heavily armed than any of the Chinese ships, with the exception of the *Chen Yuen* and *Ting Yuen*. These were superior only in the possession of the two big guns each: their secondary armament was not so powerful as that of the enemy's cruisers.

Frobisher, who, of course, knew pretty accurately the composition of the

Japanese naval strength, shook his head as he contemplated the collection of vessels in the river. There was a sad lack of homogeneity in the squadron, which would render quick and effective manoeuvring extremely difficult. Some of the newer ships—his own, for instance—were capable of steaming fifteen or sixteen knots, but the battleships were not good for more than thirteen, while some of the older cruisers could not be relied upon for more than ten or eleven; and as the speed of a fleet is necessarily that of its slowest ship, this meant that the whole squadron could not steam at more than ten knots or thereabout. The speed of the slowest Japanese ships he knew to be not less than thirteen knots; so, in the event of a naval engagement, the enemy's fleet would be able to outmanoeuvre the Chinese, and choose their own locality for fighting, as well as the range and position. It was a most important advantage to possess; and, as Frobisher considered the likelihood—nay, the practical certainty—of the Chinese ammunition proving faulty, he did not feel at all certain that China would come out on top, notwithstanding her possession of the two powerful battleships.

He was aroused from his somewhat gloomy reverie by observing a signal fluttering up to the signal-yard of the flagship. Running below to his cabin, he seized his telescope, and, hurrying up on deck again, read off the communication, which he was enabled to do by means of his Chinese secret naval code book, a few copies of which had been prepared with English translations for the use of the British naval officers in the fleet, of whom there were several.

The signal read: "Captains to repair on board the flagship immediately", and Frobisher then knew that the time for action was close at hand. A council would be held in the admiral's cabin on the *Ting Yuen*, and the admiral would inform his captains of his intended plans, and be willing at the same time to receive suggestions. It was to be, in fact, a Council of War, and Frobisher looked forward to it eagerly, as being the first actual war debate he would ever have attended. This would be his first introduction to war as a reality. Hitherto he had only taken part in sham naval battles; he was now face to face with the stern reality, and he rejoiced exceedingly.

Calling his interpreter to him, he had his gig ordered, got himself quickly into his full-dress uniform, handed over the ship to Drake's charge during

his absence, and in a few minutes was being pulled across the quarter-mile stretch of water that lay between the *Chih' Yuen* and the flagship.

On his arrival there, owing to his ship lying farthest away, he found the remainder of the captains assembled, only awaiting his presence to commence business. He was greeted very cordially in English by Admiral Ting, with whom Wong-lih had already been in communication, and received a few very courteous words of condolence upon the disaster on the Hoang-ho. Then followed his introduction to his fellow captains, among whom was Prince Hsi. With this one exception, he was very warmly welcomed by them all, especially by his compatriots, Captain Foster, of the *Chen Yuen*, who, as a matter of strict fact, was a Scotsman, and Captain James, of the cruiser *Shan-si*. These were the only other Britishers present being captains; but there were several others in the fleet in the capacity of first and second lieutenants, and especially in the engineering department. In fact, with one exception, the chief engineers of the ships were all either Englishmen or Scotsmen.

The council was not a very lengthy one, for it was impossible to make plans very far ahead, since little information was so far available as to the enemy's movements. The first duty of the fleet, explained Admiral Ting, was therefore to proceed to Wei-hai-wei, where a fleet of transports was already taking aboard several Chinese regiments destined for service in Korea. These were to be convoyed by the entire squadron to the mouth of the River Yalu, forming the boundary between China and Korea, and landed there; after which the fleet's future movements would be guided by circumstances.

The probability was that enough information would be obtained meanwhile to enable Admiral Ting to locate the position of the Japanese fleet. In this event, the Chinese squadron would sail for the spot indicated, and endeavour to force a general action; for it was vitally important to China that she should obtain command of the sea at the earliest possible moment, and keep it; otherwise she would be seriously handicapped in transporting her troops to the seat of war, if not entirely prevented from doing so. Similarly, it was necessary to prevent the Japanese, if possible, from transporting their troops and supplies to Korea; and this could only be accomplished by first destroying or seriously crippling the Japanese Navy. In conclusion, Admiral Ting stated

that he intended to put to sea that same afternoon, and desired his captains to make their preparations accordingly.

This decision was received with every symptom of delight by everybody except Prince Hsi, who argued long and forcibly for a delay of a day at least, giving as his reason that the flagship was not, in his opinion, quite ready for sea.

On hearing this statement the admiral looked very keenly at his subordinate, and asked him to explain his ship's unreadiness, while the rest of the captains looked the astonishment they were too polite to put into words. The ensuing explanation was somewhat unintelligible to Frobisher, notwithstanding the valiant efforts of his interpreter. But he gathered that the admiral considered Prince Hsi's reasons as quite inadequate, and concluded by informing the Prince, without any circumlocution, that he, as admiral, was quite as capable as her captain of judging whether the ship was fit for sea or not, that as in his opinion she was perfectly ready, to sea she should go, and the rest of the squadron with her, as he had already decided.

There was therefore nothing left for his Highness but to obey; but the spoilt scion of royalty showed very plainly by his bearing that he was considerably upset by the admiral's adherence to his decision.

Admiral Ting then signified in his courteous fashion that the deliberations were at an end, and dismissed each of his captains with a word or two of hope and encouragement; being particularly gracious to the three Britons. He added for the benefit of all that it was his intention to *hoist the signal to* proceed to sea as soon as *possible after the skippers had regained their own ships*.

Frobisher noticed that no sooner were these words out of Ting's mouth than Prince Hsi murmured a low-voiced excuse, and disappeared hastily from the cabin, as though he had suddenly recollected something of importance. He paid little attention to the fact at the moment, being too fully occupied with his own thoughts; but the circumstance was recalled to his memory during the short journey between the *Ting Yuen* and his own ship.

His gig had just passed under the stern gallery of the flagship, at a few yards' distance, when one of the Chinese seamen who were pulling the boat uttered an exclamation and covered his eyes for a few seconds with his hand, as though something had blown into them. Frobisher instructed the interpreter to enquire what was the matter, and was told that "there must be an evil spirit in the boat", for while he had been keeping his eyes on the *Ting Yuen* a blaze of light, "brighter than the sun", had flashed into them, nearly blinding him. The Englishman could see for himself, when the fellow removed his hand, that he was still dazzled.

Puzzled to know what had happened, for the sky was absolutely clear, with no possibility of the light being attributable to a flash of lightning, Frobisher handed the yoke-lines to the interpreter and turned round in the sternsheets, looking to see where it could have originated. A few seconds later he saw what it was. From one of the cabin ports in the flagship's stern, situated just below the gallery and in the position where the captain's quarters would almost certainly be placed, there came another quick flash of brilliant light, lasting but an instant, but extraordinarily dazzling in its intensity; and the Englishman at once recognised what was happening. Somebody—and he was able to form a pretty accurate guess who—was using a hand-glass or shaving-mirror as a heliograph, evidently either trying to attract the attention of someone on shore, or sending a message: it did not much signify which, for Frobisher was easily able to pick out the spot on shore where the light impinged. This was a window in a small, whitewashed house standing by itself in a large garden, situated about half-way up the hill; and that the message or signal was expected was soon proved to Frobisher when he saw, through his telescope, a man hurriedly dash out of the house and make his way through the garden toward the beach, where several boats could be made out, drawn up on the sand.

By this time, however, the gig had reached the *Chih' Yuen*, and Frobisher was unable to spend any more time watching the strange game that seemed to be going on, being fully occupied as soon as he got on board in giving orders to his officers to prepare the ship for proceeding to sea, the signal for which, as Ting had said, was now flying from the signal-yard of the *Ting Yuen*.

Just as the anchor was in process of being catted, however, he chanced

to glance again in the direction of the flagship, and saw, lying right under her stern, and concealed from the view of those on deck by the stern gallery, a small boat; and in that small boat was the man to whom the signal had been heliographed. He was evidently talking to somebody through the open port of the captain's cabin; and a few seconds later Frobisher saw a hand appear through the same port holding something white that looked suspiciously like a letter or packet. The man in the boat at once seized it and thrust it into his bosom; then, after a hasty glance round, he seated himself, and pulled slowly back again toward the shore with an exaggerated air of nonchalance.

Frobisher could not avoid wondering who was the man that had been so anxious to send a message ashore, and also what the nature of the message might be that the sender was so intensely eager to dispatch at the very last moment. It must certainly be an important one to render it advisable to send for a special bearer to take it, instead of letting it go ashore in the usual way by the boat in which the admiral would send off his last official dispatches, notifying his departure to the Navy Council.

But, as a matter of fact, Frobisher could hardly be said to wonder very much about these points; for if he had been put to it he felt almost certain that he could have named both the sender and the contents of the message. Also, he thought that, without a very great effort, he might be able to name the man for whom that message was intended. What he did wonder at was the audacity of the man who dared to undertake so dangerous a business in full view of the fleet, and also whether anybody besides himself had witnessed the transaction. Perhaps the mysterious sender had reckoned on everyone else being too busy to notice the occurrence.

A voice just beside Frobisher at that moment testified to the fact that at least one other person in the fleet had eyes wherewith to see. The voice was Drake's, and all he said was: "I suppose you saw that, sir?" But from the tone in which the words were spoken Frobisher knew that his own suspicions were shared.

Frobisher glanced round him. "Ay, I saw," he replied, with set teeth. "There is a noose waiting for a certain acquaintance of ours, Drake; and the sooner it is placed round his neck and hauled taut, the better will it be

for China.”

Further conversation was out of the question, for at this moment there came the boom of a gun, followed by a string of flags fluttering up to the signal-yard of the *Ting Yuen*, which, interpreted, signified that the flagship’s anchor was up and that she was under way. Then came another signal, ordering the ships to proceed to sea in double column of line ahead, the starboard line being led by the flagship, and the port line by the other battleship, the *Chen Yuen*.

Gradually the two battleships gathered way and proceeded to head down the river abreast of each other. Then came Frobisher’s own ship, the *Chih’ Yuen*, in the starboard division, with the *Shan-si* as her companion; the *Yen-fu* and *Khu-ling* came next, then the *Yung-chau* and *Tung-yen*; while the old *Hai-yen* and *San-chau* ended the lines, the fleet thus being composed often vessels, two of which—the two last named—were practically useless for the fighting line, but were to be employed as tenders or dispatch vessels as occasion might require. The seven torpedo-boats had taken their departure from the anchorage while the War Council on the flagship was in progress, and had been sent on ahead to the mouth of the river as scouts. They were to run a distance of twenty miles out to sea, to ascertain whether there were any of the enemy’s ships in the offing, and then to return with their report to the entrance of the Pei-ho, where the battle fleet would await their arrival under the guns of the Taku forts.

The torpedo-boats, on their return from the scouting expedition, reported the sea clear of the enemy’s war-ships, and the fleet immediately proceeded on its way to Wei-hai-wei, which was reached the following afternoon. Here things were in a state of almost hopeless confusion, and the troops waiting to be embarked were scattered all over the neighbourhood, foraging the countryside for provisions on their own account. Some of the baggage had been put aboard the transports; some could not be found at all; officers could not find their troops; and the *men* themselves did not know their own officers when they saw them: so it was not until the fleet arrived and the Navy men began to take things in hand that order began to be evolved out of chaos, and matters to straighten themselves out gradually.

At length, however, the last man, the last horse, and the last rifle were safely got aboard the transports, of which there were no less than ten, and the fleet with its convoy got under way for the port of Wi-ju, at the mouth of the Yalu, where the troops were to be disembarked.

The distance from Wei-hai-wei to Wi-ju is a little under two hundred miles, and the voyage was completed without mishap in about twenty hours, the whole fleet coming to an anchor in the roadstead just as the first shades of evening were falling. There being no facilities at the port for working during the night, the task of disembarkation was deferred until the following morning, and the soldiers on board the troop-ships seized the opportunity to indulge in a “sing-song” to while away the evening—the last entertainment of its kind that many of them were ever to take part in.

The transports were of course anchored nearest the shore, with the war-ships outside of them for protection in case of a sudden raid by the Japanese fleet; while outside of all, a mile distant, the seven torpedo-boats steamed constantly to and fro, acting the part of patrol-boats, and keeping a sharp look-out seaward, for the Chinese would have been caught in a trap had the enemy appeared while they were lying at anchor in the roadstead, unable to manoeuvre.

Night came down as black as the inside of a wolf’s mouth; the air was thick and heavy, difficult to breathe, and surcharged with electricity; and to Drake, intimately acquainted as he was with these seas, it seemed that a typhoon was more than probably brewing. There was a sense of discomfort and uneasiness in the atmosphere which communicated itself to man and beast, for in the stillness of the night, in the pauses in the singing and uproar, the horses in their stalls on board the transports could be heard whinnying and neighing, as though not altogether at ease. Little balls of electricity came and went on the yards and at the mastheads, like mysterious signals, presenting a very weird and uncanny effect; and some of the superstitious Chinese sailors, who had had no previous experience of “Saint Elmo’s fire”, burnt joss-sticks and twisted their prayer-wheels, in the hope of scaring away the evil spirits which they averred were hovering round the ships.

From the moment of joining the *Chih’ Yuen*, Frobisher had been working early and late to get his ship into proper fighting trim; and being

thoroughly tired out by the time that the fleet anchored, he had turned in for a few hours' well-earned repose. He seemed, however, to have been asleep only a few short minutes, instead of some four or five hours, when he was aroused by a gentle but persistent knocking on his door.

In a moment he was broad awake, out of his bunk, and across to the door, being too cautious, in face of the stealthy character of the summons, to call a question as to who was there.

Opening the cabin door, he found Drake, who, with a worried and mysterious air, proffered the request that the captain would come up on deck for a few minutes, if convenient.

"Why, what's the matter, Drake?" asked Frobisher. "Are there any signs of the storm bursting?"

"Well," was the reply, "it certainly does not look any too healthy. But it is not on that account that I have disturbed you. I believe there is some hanky-panky work going on, sir, and that's why I want you to come on deck and see for yourself."

"I'll be up in a minute," replied the captain; and in less than the time specified he had pulled on his trousers, flung a greatcoat over his shoulders, and was standing by Drake's side at the taffrail. "Now, what is the business?" he said.

"It's got something to do with that Prince chap, or I'm a Dutchman," was Drake's reply. "I was leaning over the rail here, a little while ago, thinking of nothing in particular—for Lieutenant Sing is on duty until midnight—when I saw a light appear suddenly away in that direction," pointing. "There was nothing out of the way in that, you'll say; but this light was a red one, and, what's more, somebody was holding it in his hand, and was waving it about. That lantern, to my mind, was a signal; for after waving it for a few minutes, the man who held it began to open and close the slide rapidly, as though sending a message by flash-light. I don't know the Morse code of flash telegraphy, and for aught I know it may not have been Morse; but it certainly was a signal, and when I tell you that it came from the *Ting Yuen*, and from the same cabin, so far as I can judge, as the 'helio' message was sent from at Tien-tsin, you will see why I thought

it best to call you."

"You were quite right, Drake," replied the captain. "There was something very queer about that business at Tien-tsin; and from what you say, it would seem that the same man is playing the same trick here. I only wish I could catch him at his dirty work. It seems strange to me that nobody on board the flagship has got an inkling of—well, we will say, the unknown man's game. Or perhaps it is that they do suspect, but dare not speak? Did you by any chance catch sight of an answering light of any sort?"

"I was just coming to that," replied Drake. "I did. When the first set of signals was finished, the red light disappeared, and away in the offing another red light showed. That's what really made me come down and rouse you."

"Perhaps it may have come from our own torpedo-boats," suggested Frobisher.

"No," replied Drake, "it came from a spot beyond them, and—there you are, sir; look there! There's the light again on the *Ting Yuen*. Now, watch for the light from seaward in reply."

Frobisher did not do so, however. Without even answering, he darted forward, gave a few low-voiced orders, and then came back to Drake. Immediately afterwards could be heard the sound of bare-footed seamen running about, carrying out some duty, and then a man stepped up to the captain and announced that all was ready.

"Very well; wait for the signal," was Frobisher's reply, and he turned his eyes seaward, watching for the answering flash. A second later it came; and as it winked out, the captain placed a whistle in his mouth and blew three short calls.

In an instant the *Chih' Yuen's* great search-light blazed out, to the astonishment of Drake and sundry other folk, and began to sweep slowly and steadily back and forth across the horizon. The light on the *Ting Yuen* vanished instantly, Frobisher noticed, and the one to seaward went out immediately afterward. But the vessel from which it had been shown could not put herself out of sight so easily.

The beam of the search-light hesitated a moment, and then settled unwaveringly upon a little vessel about five miles away. She circled and dodged, but all to no purpose; she could not escape that unblinking ray, which followed her, relentless as fate, revealing every detail on board her as distinctly as though she were under the light of day.

That she was a destroyer was at once apparent; there could be no mistaking the long, low, clean-cut black hull, with the four squat funnels and the short signal-mast. Nor could there be any doubt as to her nationality. Chinese she was not, China possessing no boats of that description; and since she was lurking in that particular spot under the cover of night, there was only one thing she could possibly be—a Japanese scout. The locality of the Chinese fleet had been discovered, thanks to the traitor in their midst, and the destroyer would now return to her parent fleet with her report; and, unless the Chinese were very careful, they would be caught in the roadstead, like rats in a trap.

Frobisher watched the flying shape of the destroyer, undecided whether or not to try a shot from his heavy guns; but he soon realised that, by the time that the gun could be loaded and trained, the chances of making a hit would be small indeed. He therefore ordered the search-light to be kept going in case any other similar craft should be lurking in the offing, and, after a few words to Drake, went below and dressed himself fully. Then, late as it was, he ordered his gig, and had himself pulled across with all speed to the *Ting Yuen*. He smiled grimly as he pictured Admiral Ting's face when he should hear what he was about to tell him.

Chapter Eighteen.

The Battle of the Yalu.

Directly he got on board the flagship, Frobisher, through his interpreter, sent a message to the admiral, asking whether he would see the captain of the *Chih' Yuen* immediately, upon urgent business, and alone; for the Englishman had no mind to have the interview interrupted by the presence of Prince Hsi. Whatever happened, that individual must be kept in ignorance of the fact that his treachery was so strongly suspected as to

be almost a certainty, otherwise he would be on his guard; and it was Frobisher's intention, if Admiral Ting agreed, to leave the man in ignorance of the suspicions he had aroused, until he should grow careless and over-bold, and then to pounce suddenly upon him and catch him red-handed. The Englishman knew that unless the man were actually caught in the act, so that there could be no possible doubt as to his treachery, he possessed sufficient money and influence to worm himself out of almost any predicament, however strong appearances might be against him.

Fortunately the admiral was still awake, and, what was more to the point, was alone; and he immediately sent back word by the messenger that if Captain Frobisher would kindly step down into the cabin, he would grant him the interview, with pleasure.

Frobisher descended to the admiral's private quarters, dispensing with the services of the interpreter—since Ting spoke English—thereby ensuring that the conversation should be strictly private. Then he proceeded to give as succinct an account as possible of the occurrence that had just happened, not hesitating to express the opinion that Prince Hsi was playing the role of traitor.

Admiral Ting was much alarmed at hearing that a Japanese destroyer had been detected prowling about in the offing, but did not express any surprise when Frobisher mentioned his suspicions about the Prince. Indeed, he admitted that, although he had nothing definite to go upon, he had for some time past been extremely doubtful as to Hsi's loyalty to his country. The man was so highly connected, however, and had so much influence at the Chinese Court, that all the efforts that Ting had made to get him transferred had been unsuccessful; and he had only succeeded in making of his Highness a bitter enemy. What reason the fellow could have for wishing to betray his country it was impossible to say, and Ting could only surmise that he must have lost a great deal of money at play, of which he was inordinately fond, and was looking to Japan to fill his coffers again in return for services rendered.

Ting averred that all he could do would be to have the Prince watched closely; but, if he were actually detected in the act of attempting any treachery, the admiral vowed that he should be punished, happen what

might.

As there could be no longer any doubt that the Japanese fleet was in the neighbourhood—or, if not near at the moment, very soon would be, when the destroyer had delivered her report—it had become necessary to act at once. There were no facilities for disembarkation at night, as has already been mentioned; but under the new circumstances it was imperative that the troops should be landed immediately, so that the fleet might be free to go out and fight without being obliged to leave any ships behind to cover the landing. Ting therefore ordered a gun to be fired, and the signal to be made for all captains to come aboard; and he announced that the disembarkation was to take place at once, the process to be facilitated as much as possible by the various ships' search-lights, which would give enough illumination to prevent accidents. Consequently, about midnight the work commenced, much to the annoyance of the soldiers, who did not, of course, know the reason, and had been looking forward to another comfortable night on board.

Every boat belonging to the fleet, as well as the pontoons and rafts carried on board the transports for the purpose, was called into requisition, and very soon a long procession of craft of all shapes and sizes was seen plying to and fro between transports and shore, guided by the powerful rays of the search-lights. The horses were simply slung by means of broad straps to the end of a whip, hoisted out of the ships, and swung overboard, the straps being released as soon as they were in the water, when they swam ashore of their own accord, being caught upon their arrival by the soldiers who had already landed, and picketed.

So rapidly and methodically was the work carried out—due principally, it must be acknowledged, to the efforts of the British officers belonging to the Navy ships—that when daylight broke, about four o'clock, the disembarkation was already half completed.

Meanwhile Ting had issued orders for a full head of steam to be kept up on board every ship, transport as well as man-of-war, for he intended to put to sea the instant that the last man was ashore. He had no desire to be caught where he was by the Japanese fleet, especially since he would then be seriously hampered in his movements by the helpless, unarmed transports. Anxious eyes were often turned seaward to where the

torpedo-boats were still carrying out their patrol duty in the offing; and more than one brave man heaved a sigh of relief as hour after hour passed without one of them steaming in at full speed to give notice that the enemy were in sight.

At length, about ten o'clock in the morning, the last horse had swum ashore, and the last boatload of soldiers was on its way. The rafts and pontoons were hoisted in and secured, and the boats, as they returned, were run up and swung inboard; the various captains hied them to the bridges of their respective ships, from the steam-pipes of which white feathers of steam were escaping; and at midday, just twelve hours after Frobisher's midnight visit to the admiral, the signal for departure floated up to the yard of the *Ting Yuen*. The fleet steamed slowly and majestically out of the roadstead, in two columns, with the transports well away to starboard, on the opposite side from which the enemy might be expected to appear; the torpedo-boats spread themselves out fan-wise, carrying out their office as scouts; and the course was shaped for Wei-hai-wei, under the guns of which the transports would be safe from capture.

They had been steaming for about five hours, and had covered a little more than a quarter of the distance to Wei-hai-wei, when a puff of smoke burst out on board one of the torpedo-boats, the one farthest away to port, or toward the north-east, followed by the sharp, ringing sound of one of her twelve-pound quick-firers. This was the signal agreed upon, should the enemy heave in sight; and the fact that the little craft had already turned and was steaming at full speed toward the flagship gave sufficient proof that the long-expected moment had at last arrived. In fact, by the time the torpedo-boat reached the *Ting Yuen* it was possible to make out no fewer than thirteen coils of smoke away on the eastern horizon, showing that the enemy's fleet was arriving in force, steaming in line abreast, and that it outnumbered the Chinese squadron by three ships. Thus, as two of the latter were not fit to take their place in the fighting line, the ratio was about one and a half to one in favour of the Japanese, so far as numbers were concerned.

Judging from the numbers that nearly, if not quite, the whole of the Japanese fleet was present, Ting immediately ordered the transports to break away and make for Wei-hai-wei at full speed, the men-of-war

undertaking the duty of preventing any of the enemy getting past and going in pursuit—in itself an unlikely contingency, since the Japanese admiral would need all his ships if he was to gain a victory over China—the transports consequently quickened their pace, being all fast steamers, and gradually began to draw away from the slower and more unwieldy battle squadron. And here it may be stated that they were not pursued, and all arrived safely at Wei-hai-wei without any mishap whatever.

Ting now hoisted the signal to clear for action, and a scene of bustle and orderly confusion at once ensued. All the boats belonging to the squadron were hoisted out and lowered, and the *San-chau* went the rounds, collecting them all. Having done this, she took them in tow and steamed slowly away to the westward, so as to be out of the way when the hostile fleets presently came to grips.

Stanchions were taken down and stowed away, the magazines were opened, ammunition placed in the hoists, the guns loaded, and the fire-hose connected and laid along the decks, which were thoroughly drenched to lessen the possibility of fire. Buckets of fresh water for the use of thirsty and wounded men were placed in convenient positions round the decks; and lastly, all the lighter and loose furnishings in the cabins, ward-rooms, and gun-rooms were taken down and put out of the way, to avoid their being smashed through the terrific vibration when the great guns began to fire.

The fire-control officers made their way with their range-finding instruments into the fire-control tops, the captains went to their conning-towers, and word was sent below to the engine-room staff warning them of what was coming, so that steam might never be lacking. Finally, the shell-proof gratings were slid over the engine-room hatches, watertight doors were closed, and in grim silence the Chinese fleet steamed ahead, waiting for the word which would start the mighty guns roaring and the great, armour-piercing shells hurtling through the air on their errand of destruction.

By the time these preparations were complete, the Japanese fleet had approached closely enough to allow of its various units being easily distinguished through a telescope from the level of the deck; and

Frobisher observed that the largest ships were placed at the starboard extremity of the long line, the smallest and weakest being at the other end. The size of the cruiser nearest the Chinese fleet he estimated at about nine thousand tons; then came two of about seven thousand, then two more, of six thousand or so, then three of four thousand; and next five small cruisers and gunboats, ranging from one thousand to two thousand tons. Besides these there were four destroyers of about three hundred and fifty tons; and he guessed that the fighting speed of the fleet would be about twelve or thirteen knots, against the Chinese ten—a vast advantage, enabling the possessor practically to choose his own time and position for fighting.

Comparing the two fleets, Frobisher came to the conclusion that, despite the preponderance possessed by China in her two powerful battleships, Japan's was the stronger, since she possessed more ships, while several of her smaller cruisers were larger than China's largest. When to this was added the fact of the extra three knots speed, it began to look as though China would find all her work cut out to come off victor. But if there is one thing more certain than another it is that, before the beginning of this battle, there was not a single officer among the whole Chinese fleet who did not feel convinced that China was going to win; and after-events proved that, had the issue lain in their hands alone, their stout hearts would have forced the victory, notwithstanding the disparity between the two fleets.

The Japanese fleet had now approached to within about six miles, and the gun-layers were beginning to fidget, and to wonder when the action was to commence. Then a signal broke out on board the Chinese flagship, and the two columns swung grandly to starboard in a wide sweep, until their bows pointed full at the Japanese ships.

Suddenly a bugle shrilled forth its challenging order—"Commence firing", and with a crash that made the very air vibrate, the great guns on board the two battleships opened fire, sending their ranging shots so truly that the announcement from the fire-control stations of "Range correct" seemed superfluous. Fire had been opened with the guns laid to eight thousand yards, and all four heavy, armour-piercing shells had found their billets. The historic battle of the Yalu had commenced.

Nor were the Japanese behindhand in accepting the challenge. With what appeared to be almost lightning speed, the Japanese admiral, Nozu, changed his formation from column in line abreast to column of divisions steaming in echelon, the starboard division being led to starboard by the cruiser *Yoshino*, of nine thousand tons, and the division to port being led by the *Fuji*, of about the same measurement, these two being the most powerful ships possessed by the Japanese. This particular formation enabled the Japanese to direct the whole of their fire against the Chinese ships, since the two divisions of their fleet were to pass on the inside of the Chinese double column, while the double Chinese column would prevent their ships in the port line from firing to port, and those in the starboard line from firing to starboard. Likewise the inner line of each of the Japanese divisions sheltered the outer line from the fire of the Chinese port and starboard columns respectively. This amounted, in plain language, to giving the Japanese four times the volume of gunfire that the Chinese could bring to bear, and was a masterly stroke of genius on the part of Nozu which Admiral Ting did not comprehend until it was too late to remedy matters, and he found himself hopelessly enveloped in the net.

As yet, however, the action had only commenced. Through the observation slits in the walls of the *Chih' Yuen's* conning-tower Frobisher saw, as the Japanese fleet completed its evolution, several dazzling flashes of flame dart out from the turrets of the *Yoshino* and the *Fuji*, and simultaneously it appeared as though the entire Japanese fleet had fired at the same moment, so fierce and so continuous were the flashes of the discharges. He felt his ship reel and stagger as no less than five heavy shell, fortunately not armour-piercers, struck her almost simultaneously, and he heard the shrieks and cries of men in mortal agony as the deadly flying fragments scattered like shrapnel about the decks.

This would never do, said Frobisher to himself; if this kind of thing continued, his ship would be put out of action before she had an opportunity of giving back as good as she received. So, without waiting for the admiral's signal for "General action", he pressed one of the electric buttons close to his hand in the wall of the conning-tower, and the two 9.4's in the *Chih' Yuen's* forward barbette roared out their hoarse defiance, dropping their shells full upon the *Yoshino's* after turret, where they burst with an explosion like that of a small powder-magazine, but

without doing much damage. Had they fallen under the muzzles of the guns, neither of the weapons would have been heard from again.

But although the turret itself appeared uninjured, Frobisher would have been quite satisfied with the execution wrought if he could but have looked inside. The guns' crews within, while in the act of serving their weapons, had, some of them, become aware that the after end of the turret had suddenly glowed red-hot for a moment; after that, none of them knew what had happened, for they had all been killed as by a lightning stroke, by the terrific concussion of the two shells striking together; and had a man been foolish enough to place his hand on that spot even five minutes afterward, he would have left the skin behind, so intense was the heat generated by the impact.

Frobisher, however, could not know this, and he sent word to the lieutenant in charge of the barbette to plant his shells, if possible, on or near the guns of the enemy which were already in action, leaving the after guns until later. And presently he had the satisfaction of seeing one shell after another crash down on the very spot where the *Hakodate's* single gun protruded from her turret. When the flash of the explosion and the yellow fumes of the bursting charge had cleared away, there became visible a black, ragged hole where the gun-port had been, and the gun itself, blown from its mountings, was pointing its muzzle upward to the sky, useless for the rest of the action.

Both fleets had now broken their formation to a large extent, and the fight had resolved itself more or less into a series of individual actions between ship and ship. The Chinese flagship was close alongside the *Fuji*, giving her a most unmerciful hammering with her eighty-ton monster guns, which sent their high-explosive shells crashing through her sides as through match-boarding, these subsequently bursting inside, between decks, carrying death and horrible mutilation in their train. The plucky *Chen Yuen* and her gallant British captain, who, with Frobisher, most distinguished himself that day, had been laid in between the already severely punished *Yoshino* and the celebrated *Matsushima*, which, so far, had not received a single injury, although she had entirely disabled and very nearly sunk the little Chinese unarmoured *Hai-yen*. The latter, with only one boiler available, and a very low pressure of steam in that, most of her guns disabled, her captain killed, and all her officers wounded,

could do no more; and when the *Chen Yuen* came up and drew the *Matsushima's* fire upon herself, a quartermaster, one of the few surviving petty officers, steered her slowly and painfully, like a crippled-animal, out of the press, when, unpursued—being too small fry to trouble about—she turned her bows in the direction of Wei-hai-wei, and hobbled into port some twenty hours later, the dismal forerunner of the shattered and broken remnant that was so soon to follow her.

Frobisher, knowing the strength of his own ship, with her strongly-reinforced and far-protruding ram, determined to try whether he could not do more wholesale execution with it than with his guns alone; for he could already see that the superior number of the Japanese ships and their consequent heavier weight of metal were beginning to tell severely upon the Chinese fleet. He therefore singled out as his prey the *Surawa*, one of the smaller protected cruisers, determining to experiment upon her before charging blindly into one of the heavily-armoured ships; for the loss of the *Chih' Yuen*, or indeed of any more of the Chinese ships, at this juncture would be fatal to their hopes of gaining a victory.

Accordingly he telegraphed down to the engine-room for full steam, and passed the word "Prepare to ram". Then, sweeping round in a circle that caused the cruiser to heel at a considerable angle, he set her going at full speed in the direction of his intended victim, firing his fore barbette and machine guns as he went, so as to demoralise her crew and, if possible, prevent them from escaping the blow. A perfect hurricane of lead and steel descended on the *Chih' Yuen's* decks and sides as the ships of the Japanese squadron awoke to what was intended, and in a few seconds her fore-deck was swept bare, as though by a gigantic plane. But the cruiser was well into her stride, and as long as no shot penetrated to her boilers she was bound to carry out her design.

The captain of the *Surawa* rang frenziedly for full steam ahead, but although the Japanese craft certainly did gather more way, the menacing stem of the *Chih' Yuen* followed her, relentless as fate. Then, suddenly, the *Surawa* plumped into the stern of the *Nagasaki*, cutting her down to the water-line, and rebounded under the impact, to find the bows of the Chinese ship on the point of cutting into her. The *Chih' Yuen's* men flung themselves to the decks in preparation for the shock, and many of the *Surawa's* crew leaped overboard to avoid it.

A second later it came. The *Chih' Yuen* sank her iron ram into the side of the smaller craft as irresistibly as a knife sinks into butter, and although the shock was terrific the Chinaman took no harm. The *Surawa*, on the contrary, heeled over until the sea lapped over the edge of her deck, both her masts snapped like matchwood, and the funnel guys broke, letting the smoke-stack topple into the sea.

"Full speed astern!" roared Frobisher down the speaking-tube, forgetting that the order was in English. The engineers understood—perhaps the command was expected—and slowly the *Chih' Yuen's* destroying ram withdrew itself from the gash in the other cruiser's side. In less than a minute, so deadly was the wound, the *Surawa* rolled heavily to port, settled sluggishly on an even keel once more, and then suddenly heeled over again and capsized, her boilers exploding as she did so, and down she went, carrying with her over three hundred of Japan's bravest hearts.

Frobisher, emboldened by success, looked round for more prey. The *Nagasaki*, wounded to death by her sunken sister, was slowly settling down; she could be left. Ha! why not try for bigger game—why not try for the flagship, the *Yoshino* herself? If the *Chih' Yuen's* ram crumpled—well, she would surely destroy the *Yoshino* as well, and the sacrifice would be worth the gain. By Jove, he would try it! The name of Captain Frobisher should be on men's lips that day, or he would know the reason why.

A hideous wreck above her gun-deck, with funnel pierced, both masts tottering to their fall, guns dismounted, and planks stained red with the life-blood of many a gallant Chinaman, the *Chih' Yuen* quickly gathered sternway, piling the water up in a white, foaming mass under her round counter, while the vengeful guns of the Japanese squadron never ceased to thunder their hatred of the destroyer of two of their ships. Frobisher himself was obliged to relinquish the command to Drake for a few minutes, while the surgeon bound up a bad scalp wound which was blinding him with blood, this having been received from a fragment of flying shell that had managed to penetrate through the observation slit of the conning-tower.

Then, quite by accident, the cruiser added another success to her roll of destruction that day. The enemy's destroyers had for some time past been hovering round, in the hope of getting home a torpedo which would

send a Chinese ship to the bottom, and one of these had considered the opportunity favourable when the *Chih' Yuen* was entangled in the wreck of the *Surawa*. She had stolen up astern, and had come to a standstill a few hundred yards away from the cruiser, intending to send a Whitehead into Frobisher's stern; but the air-chamber proved to have been leaking, and it became necessary to pump some more air in before the torpedo could be discharged. Her men were so busy attending to this that they did not observe the *Chih' Yuen* gathering sternway until it was too late, and they only awoke to their danger as the cruiser's stern crashed into them, rolled them over, and sent them headlong to the bottom in a wreck of bursting steam-pipes, spilling furnaces, and crumpling machinery.

With a fierce laugh Frobisher pushed away the surgeon, who had finished, and himself seized the spokes of the steering-wheel and spun them over until the cruiser's bows headed for the *Yoshino*. Then he rang for full speed ahead.

But the pause between the checking of the *Chih' Yuen's* sternway and her gathering speed ahead would have been fatal had it not been for Drake. Another of those stinging little wasps, the destroyers, had dashed past at full speed, and, although severely punished by the cruiser's machine-guns, had managed to discharge a torpedo full at her side. The cruiser was helpless, unable to move until her engines had overcome the inertia, and for a few seconds it looked as though nothing could save her. But with a hoarse cry Drake dashed out of the conning-tower, where he was of course assisting Frobisher, ready to take charge if the latter were killed, and without a moment's hesitation leaped overboard, swimming powerfully toward the rapidly-approaching torpedo.

"Come back, you madman!" shouted Frobisher. "What are you about?" But Drake either could not or would not hear; he kept on his way, regardless of the hail of rifle and machine-gun bullets which flicked the water into foam all round him.

Then Frobisher and his crew saw what the gallant Englishman was about. As the deadly missile approached, hissing its way along the surface of the water, Drake stopped swimming and awaited it, and, as it swept past, flung his arm round the smooth, glistening machine. His arm was nearly torn from its socket, but he managed to get a grip upon the

thing just forward of its greatest diameter; and, once he had secured his hold, he was not going to let go again. Then with fierce, strong strokes Drake began to kick out with his feet, pushing strongly at the nose of the torpedo as he did so; and, wonder of wonders! the menacing head gradually swung away from the *Chih' Yuen's* side. She was saved!

But that was not enough for Drake. The torpedo might hit some other Chinese craft, so, encouraged by his first success, he did not cease his efforts until he had turned the Whitehead completely round and got it headed direct for a cluster of three Japanese cruisers. Then he struck out for the *Chih' Yuen*, and was hauled aboard just as the cruiser was beginning to forge ahead once more. The torpedo, unnoticed, plugged into the side of the unsuspecting *Soya*, and a huge column of white water, upon which the ship appeared to rise bodily, announced the fact that it had done its deadly work effectively. And so it had, for before another five minutes had elapsed that unit of the Japanese Navy had also capsized and disappeared!

But while the *Chih' Yuen* had been piling up successes for herself, and earning laurels for her brave young skipper's brow—laurels with which the Chinese Government was afterwards only too proud to crown him—and while the gallant Englishman who captained the battleship *Chen Yuen* had been engaging no fewer than five Japanese ships at one and the same time, ay, and beating them off, too, matters had been going badly for the rest of the Chinese fleet. It is no exaggeration to say that if all the Chinese captains had fought as stubbornly as did the Englishmen, and if the ammunition had not proved, as it did in so many instances, to be faulty, the Chinese fleet would undoubtedly, in spite of the superior numbers of the enemy, have utterly destroyed the latter, and obtained full command of the sea. Japan would have been put back twenty-five years, there could have been no Russo-Japanese war, and China, instead of being, as she now is, a third-rate Power, might have held the premier position in Asia, as Japan so splendidly and skilfully does now. But, as so often happens, greed and dishonesty, self-seeking and cowardice on the part of high officials, nullified the efforts of the brave seamen who unavailingly gave their lives for their beloved country.

When Frobisher, intending to ram the *Yoshino*, came to look about him, his heart sank as he saw the havoc that had been wrought among the

rest of the Chinese squadron. But, alas! worse by far was yet to come.

Note. The term “echelon” means, literally, “steps”, or a zig-zag formation of columns, such as is shown in sketch Number 2, where the Japanese formation has been altered from “line ahead”, as in sketch Number 1, to “echelon.”

Chapter Nineteen.

Caught at Last.

The *Yen-fu* and the *Tung-yen* were mere motionless hulks, lying inert upon the bosom of the sunlit, shot-torn sea, the one with her rudder and propeller blown away by a torpedo that had all but sent her to the bottom, the other with her engines badly broken down, the result of Chinese officials having stolen and disposed of many parts, which had had to be roughly replaced at the last moment. They were both fighting fiercely, however, like tough old wolves at bay, and, although hemmed in by several Japanese cruisers, were as yet giving back almost as good as they got. The game was up for them, though, as they were quite unable to manoeuvre, and only the thickness of their armour and the light calibre of the guns of the ships opposed to them had prevented them from going down long before. Frequently, too, Frobisher noticed, there were long pauses between the discharges of the *Yen-fu's* and the *Tung-yen's* great guns, as well as those of others of the Chinese ships; and he made a shrewd guess that these were the occasions when the faulty, charcoal-filled cartridges failed to explode. The *Shan-si*, with Captain James in command, was practically the only entirely undamaged ship still possessed by the Chinese—not because she had not been in the thickest of the fight, for she had, but just through one of those curious chances of warfare which are constantly occurring. She was doing sovereign service, rushing here, there, and everywhere, planting her shells coolly and accurately, and sweeping the Japanese decks with rifle and machine-gun fire; and many were the attempts made by the enemy's destroyers to torpedo her and put her safely out of harm's way. But, thanks to her captain's skill and his personal care of everything pertaining to his ship, neither was she badly hit, nor did her machinery break down at a critical moment; and she went her relentless way, dealing death and destruction about her unchecked.

The *Yung-chau* and *Kau-ling* were being engaged by the *Hiroshima, Naniwa* (a ship afterwards celebrated in the Russo-Japanese war), and the *Okinoshima*—each of which was much larger than either of the Chinese ships—and were getting a terrible punishing. Although still

moving, and more or less under control, they were leaking steam and smoke from every crevice and opening, and ominous spirals of smoke were filtering up through the *Yung-chau's* decks. She had been set on fire close to her bunkers by a Japanese shell, and, almost in less time than it takes to write it, was a mass of roaring, spouting flame, for she was old, and blazed like a volcano. Her men—such of them as could reach the decks—jumped overboard, and were hauled by ropes up the sides of whichever ships happened to be nearest; for the Japanese, like their opponents, had discarded all their boats and pontoons before going into action.

The *Chen Yuen* and *Ting Yuen* were busily engaged in hammering away at the biggest of the enemy, the *Yoshino*, the *Shikishima, Fuji*, and *Niitaka*, and it was to relieve the two battleships, which were being somewhat severely handled, that Frobisher determined to charge the *Yoshino* with his ship.

Signalling once more for full steam, and firing as he went, according to his former tactics, he drove the *Chih' Yuen* at her utmost speed toward the Japanese flagship, which by this time had lost one of her military masts and her forward funnel, from whose torn base smoke and flame were pouring voluminously, wrapping the conning-tower round as though with a black mantle, and utterly preventing her skipper from seeing what was going on. He, poor man, was obliged to rely entirely upon the discretion of the gunnery-lieutenant in her forward turret; and that this individual was doing his duty well was proved by the frequency with which his guns boomed out, sending shell and solid shot spattering against the heavily-armoured sides of the Chinese battleships, where they splintered and burst, cracking and starring the thick steel, but very seldom penetrating to their vitals, close though the range was.

As the *Chih' Yuen* clove her way through the water, one of the Japanese destroyers discharged a torpedo at her, which missed her by inches only. It was not wasted, however, for it struck the disabled *Yen-fu*, which heeled over as though pressed by some gigantic hand, and a few minutes later went down, taking her crew with her.

The *Hiroshima* also tried to ram in her turn, leaving the stricken *Kau-ling* for that purpose; but she also was too late. The *Naniwa* and the

Shikishima saw the *Chih' Yuen* approaching, like the messenger of death she was, and backed away from their opponents; the *Fuji* turned her guns on the approaching vessel; but the *Yoshino's* captain, blinded by smoke from the wrecked funnel, did not see what was coming until it was too late, and a moment later the Chinese ship crashed into his stern, unfortunately striking a glancing blow instead of a direct one, as Frobisher had intended.

It was severe enough, however, to make the *Yoshino* shiver from stem to stern, from truck to keelson; and as the *Chih' Yuen* drove past, Frobisher saw that he had sliced a great gash in her port quarter nearly down to the water-line, and dismounted both the guns in her after turret. The attempt had not entirely succeeded, but it had done a great deal of damage, and with that he had to be content.

Then, as Frobisher circled his ship round to come into action again, he saw something that made him gasp with astonishment and apprehension. There was a fight of some sort going on upon the deck of the Chinese flagship herself! What on earth could it mean? She had not been close enough to any of the enemy's ships to enable them to board her, and, moreover, they were Chinese sailors, not Japanese, who were fighting. What could possibly have happened? The seamen on board were entirely devoted to their admiral, and if any mutiny had arisen it must be through the machinations of some other person, some traitor who had seized this opportunity to—

By Jove, he had it! All his old suspicions came thronging into his mind in an instant, and in that same instant he believed he could make a very good guess at what had occurred. Of course it was that scoundrel, Prince Hsi, who was at the bottom of the mischief; Frobisher seemed to know it instinctively. He also recollected the numerous occasions on which his Highness had acted in an extremely suspicious manner, to say the least; and it did not take him long to guess that he was now beholding the consummation of a plot up to which Hsi had been leading for some considerable time past. But what had happened to Admiral Ting, he wondered, that Prince Hsi should have matters all in his own hands? Frobisher knew that so long as the gallant admiral was alive, or conscious, he would never permit his command to be taken from him thus; and his heart fell, for he feared that the traitor, to attain his

detestable ends, must first have killed the brave old man.

Well, Frobisher vowed to himself, the traitor should not succeed in his scheme, whatever it might be, even though he had to board the *Ting Yuen* himself, and slay Prince Hsi with his own hands, to avenge the death of the admiral.

And then he saw what it was that the traitor prince intended. The commotion on the deck of the flagship had ceased, the mutineers having either slain or driven overboard all those who opposed them, and, while Frobisher's ship was still some distance away, he saw the Chinese flag flutter down from the *Ting Yuen's* peak, to be immediately replaced by the Japanese naval ensign; and the ship herself swung round in the direction of the enemy's squadron and began to forge ahead toward it, Prince Hsi having evidently determined to turn his guns against his own countrymen.

As the Japanese ensign fluttered aloft there fell a sudden silence over both fleets. As though by mutual consent every gun was hushed for a few moments, and hoarse, stern, and menacing above the strange stillness rose a roar of execration from the throats of the Chinese, as they at last realised the meaning of the extraordinary scene that had just taken place aboard the flagship.

Defiantly her captain trained his guns on the nearest Chinese ships and fired; but whether his gunners could not bring themselves to the actual point of firing on their country's flag, or whether it was due to the excitement of the moment, every shot missed, and a shout of derision went up from the Chinese squadron.

But Captain Frobisher knew that curses and shouts of execration would not bring back the *Ting Yuen*. If she was to be saved to the Chinese Navy she must not be allowed to gain the shelter of the Japanese main body. If she reached that, she would be lost for ever, and the day would be lost beyond hope of redemption for the Chinese. To lose one powerful battleship, and to find another suddenly arrayed against them—for that is what it would of course amount to—would so weaken the already enfeebled Chinese strength that success would be out of the question; and the Englishman determined that, come what might, he would prevent

the traitor prince from carrying out his foul intentions.

He shouted a few brief commands to Drake, who vanished like a puff of smoke from the conning-tower; issued an order to the quartermaster at the wheel; and rang to the engine-room the two short calls that signified that he required all the power the engines could develop, for a sudden emergency. Then he looked to see that his sword was loose in its scabbard and his revolver fully charged, and waited for Drake to reappear, while the *Chih' Yuen*, bounding forward under the full power of her engines, turned her nose toward the stern of the *Ting Yuen* and kept it fixed there, relentless as fate.

By this time the cannonade had again become general throughout the fleet, but ringing high above the crashing roar of the guns could be heard the wild cheering of the Chinamen as they realised the gallant exploit that the English captain was about to attempt.

Prince Hsi realised it also, and put on full steam to escape, but he was a few minutes too late. Before the unwieldy battleship could get into her stride the more nimble cruiser would be upon her, and, knowing that he could not hope to reach safety before he was overtaken, the Prince determined to wait and fight the matter out with the Englishman whom he had already learnt to hate so intensely. He therefore reversed his engines, trained every available gun upon the advancing *Chih' Yuen*, and opened fire.

The cruiser reeled and quivered as the hurricane of shot and shell struck her, but she received no injury to her vital parts, and was checked not a moment in her headlong course. Frobisher had given orders that his fire was to be reserved until he himself gave the word, and he now watched for that moment as a tiger watches its prey.

A few seconds later the time arrived. Frobisher pressed the button that let loose the storm of death upon the flagship, rang off his engines, handed over the command to Drake, who had just reappeared, and then left the conning-tower.

On the port side of the deck, behind the steel citadel, he found that Drake had already drawn up the fifty volunteers he had called for, fully armed,

and ready to follow their captain wherever he might choose to lead.

A second later there arose from the *Ting Yuen* a chorus of yells of astonishment and fury as the *Chih' Yuen*, instead of lying off and fighting with her guns, as Prince Hsi had expected, ground her sides against those of the flagship, and came to a standstill right alongside.

Frobisher shouted a word of command to the expectant sailors, and led them round the citadel, across the cruiser's decks, and up on to those of the battleship, before the *Ting Yuen's* men realised what was happening. Most of the latter had thrown off their cutlasses, the better to handle their guns, and it was on their unpreparedness that Frobisher relied when he led his fifty boarders to the attack.

Like a whirlwind he swept down upon the rebel seamen, who stood petrified with alarm and astonishment beside the now useless guns, and the broad-bladed cutlasses rose and fell for a few seconds to the accompaniment of shrieks and yells for mercy. But Frobisher, with his small force, could not afford to give quarter until it was certain that there would be no more resistance; and, much as he detested the butchery, he simply dared not stay his hand. Forward and upward he and his men cut their way; they encountered more and more opposition every minute, as the mutineers found time to recover their wits and secure their weapons, but his men would take no denial. Their blades, now dyed a deep red, swept through the smoky air, and their revolvers crackled and blazed merrily, as the Englishman led them forward; and presently, after a stern and stubborn five minutes' fighting, the rebels broke and fled below—overboard—anywhere to escape the avenging swords of their outraged countrymen.

So far, Frobisher had seen nothing of Prince Hsi; but the moment the mutineers were broken and he had released the remnant of the loyal Chinese sailors, he went in search of the arch-traitor himself, having first headed both ships back toward the Chinese squadron.

The Prince was not in the conning-tower, as Frobisher discovered when he went there with one of his own helmsmen to send the necessary orders to the engine-room, nor was he in his own cabin, which was the next most likely place to look for him; and diligently as Frobisher

searched, the man was not to be found. He appeared to have vanished completely. Perhaps, Frobisher decided, the traitor had seen that his shameful plot had failed, and had thrown himself overboard to avoid the consequences of his act. That, however, did not seem quite like Hsi; he was more likely to be up to some deeper villainy still; and as this thought occurred to the *Chih' Yuen's* captain his blood ran cold, for some sixth sense or instinct seemed to warn him what Hsi was about.

With every nerve tingling, Frobisher darted below and began to search for the magazine, for it was thither he guessed the traitor had betaken himself; and it was indeed fortunate that he found it just where he had expected it to be.

The door of the magazine was open, and a man was to be seen inside, with his back to the entrance, engaged upon his diabolical work by the aid of a carefully-shaded lantern. Another few seconds and Frobisher would have been too late, and the ship would have been blown into the air with all her crew; for the Prince was even then applying a light to the end of the fuse which he had already cut, the other extremity of which was concealed from view.

Frobisher repressed a shiver of horror, and with one bound flung himself upon the traitor, dropping sword and revolver as he did so. This was a case for the use of bare hands alone, man to man; the discharge of a pistol might only complete Hsi's work for him, and Frobisher did not feel that he could cut the man down from behind, in cold blood, richly as he deserved it, and as the man himself would undoubtedly have done, had the positions been reversed. He gripped the sacred person of the Prince round the body, and endeavoured to hurl him to the floor and so stun him; but Hsi was a powerful man, and although taken at a disadvantage, managed to twist himself so that Frobisher's superior strength expended itself in vain.

Then, with a mighty effort, he wrenched one arm free and seized the Englishman by the throat, sinking in his fingers with a fury that testified all too plainly to the intensity of his hatred.

Do what he might, Frobisher could not wrench the traitor's fingers away; and although with his left hand he managed to prevent Hsi from drawing

the knife suspended from his belt, he knew that unless he could release himself from that bulldog grip, he must very soon lose consciousness, for already his eyes were beginning to protrude, the dim light of the magazine seemed full of flashing stars and blazing fireworks, and the blood drummed horribly in his ears. Besides, good heavens! there was that deadly spark hissing and sputtering its way along the fuse, and unless it was quenched within a minute, the *Ting Yuen* and her crew would be flying skyward, a cloud of splintered steel and dismembered human bodies.

This last thought gave Frobisher back his strength for a moment, and with a herculean effort he wrenched his throat from Hsi's grip; then, recovering himself quickly, before the Chinaman had his knife more than half-way out of its sheath, he drew back his arm and struck Hsi a mighty blow full on the point of the chin.

The Prince's neck clicked like a breaking stick, and he was dashed senseless against the steel walls of the magazine, falling in a tumbled heap upon the floor. Without looking to see whether the man was unconscious or not, Frobisher dashed at the fuse and trampled it fiercely underfoot until the smouldering spark was entirely extinguished; then, with a sob of relief, he withdrew its other end from a pile of explosives and tossed it out of the door.

Then he lifted Hsi on his shoulders, carried him out of the magazine, closing the door after him, and took him to his own cabin, where he deposited the senseless body in its bunk, afterwards securing the Prince's wrists and ankles firmly with some lengths of rope which he procured from one of the men. This done, he locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and went in search of the admiral, whom he fully expected to find dead. At the same moment he heard the *Ting Yuen's* guns again opening overhead, as her temporary commander brought her into action once more, and he smiled grimly as he thought that, if Hsi had had his way, the shells from those very weapons would at this minute have been crashing their way through Chinese hulls, instead of being directed, as they were, against the Japanese ships.

Frobisher found Admiral Ting lying on the floor of his cabin, his hands lashed behind him, and senseless from a severe cutlass or sword cut

across the forehead. He had evidently been cut down while in the conning-tower, and had been brought to the cabin and there secured and flung down; for the Englishman had noticed a trail of bloodstains on the deck on his way to Ting's quarters.

In a very short time he had cut the old gentleman adrift, and after a few drops of brandy had been forced down his throat, Ting quickly revived, and gave Frobisher an account of what had occurred.

It was short, but to the point. Hsi had entered the conning-tower with a drawn sword in his hand, and before the admiral could open his mouth the Prince had ruthlessly cut him down. After that the admiral knew no more until he awoke to find Frobisher pouring spirit and water down his throat.

He was profuse in his thanks to the young Englishman, and, when he had learned from the latter all that had happened, promised that he would never forget the brave deed by which he had been rescued from eternal shame and dishonour. Then, despite his wound, which Frobisher roughly bandaged, the plucky old fellow insisted upon going on deck again and taking charge.

But when the two men regained the open, what a sight met their horrified eyes! The *Kau-ling*, which, although dismantled, had been fighting bravely when Frobisher led his boarders away, had disappeared, and the *Tung-yen*, the engines of which had broken down, had been surrounded by five Japanese ships, and was even then sinking. The *Yung-chau*, which had taken fire early in the fight, was now but an abandoned, charred wreck; and even the gallant *Shan-si* and *Chen Yuen*, which had done great deeds ever since the beginning, were now terribly damaged. Frobisher's own ship, a short distance away, under Drake's able seamanship was still giving a splendid account of herself, but even she, Frobisher's experienced eye could tell, was very badly mauled.

In short, of the ten ships which China had possessed that morning four were destroyed, one had crept away too seriously damaged to remain in action, one had gone as convoy to the transports, and the remaining four were all badly damaged. As for the torpedo-boats, the Japanese destroyers and smaller cruisers had made short work of them. Of the

seven, three were sunk, one had been captured, two had fled toward Wei-hai-wei hotly pursued by a big Japanese destroyer, and only one remained with the remnant of the Chinese fleet.

The Japanese had lost only three small cruisers and a destroyer, so that their fleet was even now almost as numerous as China's had been at the beginning of the battle. True, the *Yoshino* and the *Fuji* were little better than wrecks, and the other ships had one and all received a very severe drubbing; but they were still afloat and more or less under control, while their undamaged guns now outnumbered those of the Chinese by about six to one.

The odds were too heavy. To keep on fighting with the four remaining ships against the still powerful Japanese fleet would be simply throwing those four ships away to no purpose, and shedding China's best blood without avail. If those two battleships and two cruisers could still be retained for China, they would live to fight another day, for with the addition of the southern squadron, still intact and undamaged, they would once more make up a powerful fleet; but if they were lost or captured now, that would be the end of them, and possibly the end of China also.

Ting realised all this at a glance, and with a bitter groan ordered the signal to retire to be hoisted—the enemy to be held at bay, if possible, while the evolution was being carried out.

As it was manifestly impossible for Frobisher to rejoin his own ship, owing to lack of boats, he took charge as captain of the *Ting Yuen* in place of the traitor prince, confined below, and, in company with the other battleship, the *Chen Yuen*, endeavoured to beat off the Japanese craft that were manoeuvring to surround the two remaining Chinese cruisers. And so bold a front—or rather, rear—did the four ships present that the Japanese before long relinquished the pursuit, not caring, in view of the success already obtained, to risk losing any more of their already sadly-battered ships by exposing them to the now-concentrated fire of the big Chinese ships' eighty-ton guns, the projectiles from which had already done so much damage.

They accordingly drew off and gave up the half-hearted chase, employing the short time still remaining before darkness fell in effecting some very

necessary repairs to their ships; while the broken remnant of China's northern squadron pursued its halting way toward Wei-hai-wei, the small torpedo-boat still remaining to them acting as scout in advance, on the look-out for the Japanese destroyer which, earlier in the day, had left the action in pursuit of a couple of damaged Chinese torpedo-boats.

In the late twilight they fell in with the destroyer on her return from her unsuccessful pursuit, the two small craft having succeeded in effecting their escape. She had evidently anticipated a complete victory for her own side, and seeing lights in the distance, had made for them, thinking that, by this time, every ship would be in Japanese hands; and she did not discover her mistake until she was under the Chinese guns. Then she attempted to cut and run; but she was too late. There was a rattle of machine-gun fire which drove her men from the deck torpedo-tubes, and a few seconds later one of the *Chen Yuen's* big guns plumped a shell right into her, crumpling her up like cardboard and sending her to the bottom within a few seconds. Some—a very few—of her men were rescued and made prisoners by the Chinese torpedo-boat, but the majority, dead or disabled from the effects of the bursting shell, went to feed the sharks.

Early the following morning, just after daybreak, the four ships overtook the *San-chau* and the transport fleet, which circumstance rejoiced Admiral Ting exceedingly, as he had been extremely anxious lest they might perhaps have fallen in with some prowling Japanese cruisers and been snapped up. Then the war-ships and the transports kept company until they reached Wei-hai-wei, where they found the little *Hat-yen*, but recently arrived in a sinking condition, so that it had been necessary to beach her immediately to save her from sinking at her anchors.

Admiral Ting lost no time in docking such of his ships as there was room for; the others were run alongside the wharves, to have their guns replaced and their upper-works repaired, after which they would, one by one, go into dock as their repaired sisters came out. The admiral then dispatched to Tien-tsin the *San-chau*, the only undamaged war-ship, with an account of the battle; while the torpedo-boat, after a few minor repairs, was dispatched south with a similar message to Admiral Wong-lih, suggesting that he should bring up the southern fleet, so that, together, the united squadrons might seek the Japanese fleet and once more give

battle, in an attempt to recover the mastery of the sea, which was of paramount importance to China.

Chapter Twenty.

On Special Service.

For the first few days after the return of the fleet to Wei-hai-wei everybody was very fully employed, including even the admiral himself, who, despite his deep and painful wound, insisted on being about the dockyard, his head tied up in a bandage, superintending the refitting of the shattered ships. Nothing was mentioned with regard to Prince Hsi. That arch-villain had not even been seen; and Frobisher supposed it was Ting's intention to send him, as soon as he could spare an escort, to Tien-tsin to stand his trial—a procedure which the Englishman was inclined to think very likely to end in a farce, since, once among the circle of his rich and powerful relatives and acquaintance, the man was wily and cunning enough to be able to extricate himself even out of such a predicament as that in which he was now plunged.

Frobisher had, however, forgotten a certain promise which Ting had made at Wi-ju, at the mouth of the Yalu, when Prince Hsi had been so very nearly discovered in communication with one of the enemy's destroyers—the promise that, if he actually caught the Prince red-handed, so that there could be no possible doubt about the matter, not all the influence or powerful relations in China should save him from the fate he would so richly deserve.

There could be little doubt that it was due to the signals sent that night by the Prince to the destroyer that the Japanese had learned the strength of the Chinese squadron and its destination, and had thus been enabled to come up in full force, as they had done, and practically annihilate the northern squadron. This was not the first nor the second time that Hsi had played the traitor, although until now there had been no actual proof of his treachery; he was strongly suspected, for instance, of having brought about the disaster to the transport *Kowshing*, when she had been sunk by the Japanese cruiser *Naniwa*, with over a thousand Chinese

troops on board.

Admiral Ting had not allowed his oath to slip his memory, and the old fellow, gentle, kindly, and courteous though he was to his friends, could be very vindictive when it came to dealing with evil-doers, especially criminals of the hardened, remorseless type which Prince Hsi had proved himself to be. He was only biding his time, as events were very soon to prove.

One evening Frobisher received a polite message from the admiral that his presence would be required on board the flagship at ten o'clock on the following morning, and so did the other captains and first lieutenants. Consequently, at the hour named, Captains Foster, James, Frobisher, and Quen-lung, of the *Chen Yuen, Shan-si, Chih' Yuen*, and *Hat-yen* respectively, together with their first officers, found themselves assembled in Admiral Ting's cabin on board the flagship, each of them attired in full-dress uniform and wearing their side-arms. The admiral himself was also present, dressed in the fullest of full dress, and wearing all his various Chinese orders and decorations; while the cabin door was guarded on each side by a Chinese sailor with drawn cutlass.

The room had been cleared of most of its usual furnishings, and a plain, long and narrow oak table had been placed in the centre, with chairs sufficient to accommodate the little party of officers assembled. At a short distance from the table there was placed another chair, standing by itself, the use of which was to be discovered presently.

As soon as the last officer had arrived, Admiral Ting explained that they were met together to sit in judgment on the person of Prince Hsi, a member of the royal house of China, and lately captain of the battleship *Ting Yuen*, the said officer being accused of treachery to his country, mutiny, and desertion to the enemy during the time of battle. The accuser was, for official purposes, the first lieutenant of the *Ting Yuen*, an officer of high birth and proved integrity, who had also been struck down and confined below by Prince Hsi's mutinous sailors. Admiral Ting himself intended to act as Judge Advocate; and the other captains and officers made up the court, their opinions as to the guilt or innocence of the accused to be taken after the hearing of the case, beginning with the man of lowest rank present, the idea of this being to prevent the younger and

less experienced officers from being influenced by the decisions of their superiors.

On the table, with its point directed toward the Judge Advocate's seat, lay Prince Hsi's sword, which had been taken from him at the time of his arrest.

The officers having taken their seats in the order of seniority, Admiral Ting declared the court open, and directed the prisoner to be brought in. A few seconds later the door opened and Prince Hsi entered, guarded by two sailors with drawn swords, and himself wearing his full-dress uniform, with all his orders displayed across his breast. He looked, Frobisher thought, a trifle pale, but was otherwise cool and collected, and his face wore its usual expression of cold and haughty resentment. With him entered another officer belonging to Admiral Ting's staff, whose duty it would be to act as the prisoner's "friend", a position something similar to that of counsel for the defence at a civilian trial.

Having bowed to the assembled court, the Prince, in view of his rank, was permitted to seat himself in the chair provided, and the trial commenced. From the first it was quite evident that Hsi believed his judges would never dare to proceed to extremities, for his replies were always careless, and often flippant; but Frobisher could see that the court was very much in earnest, and that the Prince was deceiving himself very badly.

It began to dawn on the prisoner, after a time, that his accusers were making out a very serious case against him—as, indeed, they could not help doing, in face of the evidence they possessed; and he made desperate efforts to justify his conduct and to excuse his actions, though, in face of the facts, he was attempting an utter impossibility.

At the expiration of an hour the accusation and defence had been heard, and the Prince was ordered to be removed. Admiral Ting then summed up, and asked the verdict of the court, commencing with the youngest lieutenant present, and working up until the last pronouncement rested with the captain of the *Chen Yuen*.

Every officer gave it as his conscientious conviction that the Prince was

guilty, and Hsi was then recalled. He started violently as he saw that his sword had been reversed and that its point was now toward, instead of away from, him; for he knew by that token that he had been found guilty, and that all that now remained for him was to hear his sentence, which even yet, it was clear, he did not believe would be at all severe.

It was, however, the most severe that could be passed. The sentence ran that Prince Hsi, having been found guilty by a court composed of his fellow officers of the charges preferred against him, should be stripped of his decorations and have the insignia of his rank torn from his uniform in presence of the assembled officers and crews of the Chinese fleet, and that thereafter he should be shot upon the quarter-deck of the flagship *Ting Yuen*.

When this terrible sentence was pronounced Prince Hsi was observed to stagger and turn deathly pale. Such ignominy as this he had never dreamed of; and to lose his life into the bargain—

With a lightning-like movement, and before his guards could prevent him, Hsi placed the back of his hand to his mouth, held it there a second, and then, with a groan of deepest agony, reeled backward and fell upon the cabin floor.

When they picked him up he was quite dead, and the cause of his death was revealed by the large ring which he wore on the third finger of his left hand. It had been made hollow, with a tiny hinged cover, and concealed in the hollow there had evidently been a minute dose of an extremely powerful poison which, from the odour of almonds that filled the cabin directly afterward, Frobisher recognised as being prussic acid, one of the quickest and most deadly poisons known to science.

With a solemn, courteous gesture Ting dismissed his officers, and they trooped silently out of the cabin, leaving the admiral alone with the dead. A little later in the day the body was enclosed in a coffin and placed on board a ship bound for Tien-tsin, with directions that it should be delivered to the Prince’s relations.

Thus perished a man who bad used his high position to attain his own base ends at the expense of his country and the lives of his countrymen.

Nemesis had overtaken him at last, as it sometimes does evil-doers; and the high-born Prince Hsi died miserably, a condemned criminal.

Frobisher returned to his own ship from the court of justice saddened and disheartened. True, the Prince had richly deserved his fate, and China could never have known safety while he remained alive; but it seemed a dreadful thing that a young man like Prince Hsi, with all life's infinite possibilities to one of his standing before him, should deliberately imperil and finally forfeit those possibilities for the equivalent of a few thousand English pounds, in order to be able to practise vices which had originated in the first place simply through the possession of so much money that he felt he had to get rid of it somehow, and so adopted the quickest means available.

But the young English captain had very little time in which to moralise over Hsi's miserable end; for shortly after his return to the *Chih' Yuen*, while he was changing into his undress uniform, a messenger came aboard with a request that he would wait upon the admiral again immediately.

Wondering what was now in the wind, Frobisher went across to the *Ting Yuen*, to find the admiral anxiously pacing the deck awaiting him; and he soon learnt what it was that his superior required him for.

It appeared that a ship had come in but a short time previously, bringing important news, which her captain had just communicated to Ting, to the effect that the Japanese had resolved upon the seizure of the Chinese island of Taiwan, or Formosa, and that they intended to dispatch an expedition thither under General Oki, in two transports, each conveying twelve hundred men; and as the intended invasion of the island was believed by the Japanese to be a dead secret, it was proposed to send only one gunboat or small cruiser to convoy the transports. They evidently considered that, the Chinese northern fleet being still under repair at Wei-hai-wei, and the southern fleet away in southern Chinese waters, they had little or nothing to fear, and that a very small measure of protection, or even none at all, would suffice. How the man had obtained his information he declined to say; but he solemnly declared that the news was genuine, and spoke so convincingly that he quite satisfied the admiral of the need for taking immediate action.

Ting therefore asked Frobisher whether it was true that the repairs to his ship were all but completed; and on being informed that another day's work would suffice to render the *Chih' Yuen* ready for sea, if her services were urgently required, he ordered the young Englishman to expedite matters as much as possible, get his stores and ammunition on board, and sail at the earliest moment for Kilung, at the north end of the island of Formosa, at which spot it was reported that the Japanese intended to disembark their troops. This disembarkation, said Ting, must be prevented, if possible, and the gunboat and transports were to be destroyed, or captured, as circumstances should decide. This ought, he added, to be an easy task for the *Chih' Yuen*; and it would prove a very adequate reprisal for the sinking of the transport *Kowshing* and some of her attendant ships by the Japanese squadron some weeks previously.

This was just the kind of commission that appealed to Frobisher, who had still a great deal of the boy left in him; there was nothing that he liked better than to be able to get away on special service. He therefore assured Ting that he would return on board, hurry his preparations forward, and get away at the very earliest moment.

The morning but one following, therefore, found him steaming out of the harbour of Wei-hai-wei, with Drake, almost as eager as himself, standing on the bridge beside him. There had been very little prospect of active service for either of them until Wong-lih could join forces with the northern fleet, and that might possibly not be for some time; therefore both men were in the highest spirits at the thought of getting to hand-grips with the enemy again so quickly, and it was with a light heart indeed that the young captain ordered the admiral's salute to be fired as the *Chih' Yuen* swept seaward out of the harbour.

The distance from Wei-hai-wei to Kilung, at the north end of Formosa, is close upon a thousand miles, and Frobisher reckoned that it would take him some seventy hours to do the trip. On the other hand, the distance from the nearest Japanese port, Nagasaki, to the same spot was only about seven hundred miles; therefore if the proposed invading expedition sailed at the time when the *Chih' Yuen* left Wei-hai-wei, the probability was that the Japanese would be there first, in which case his task would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Once let the soldiers get ashore, and he, with his small force, would be quite unable to turn them

out. It was only by meeting the transports and gunboats at sea that he could hope for success; and he did not spare coal, or his engineers' and stokers' feelings, in his eagerness to reach the scene first. Of course, there was always the possibility that, believing their plan a secret, the enemy would not greatly hurry to get to Kilung; but Frobisher was not taking any chances, and he drove his ship through the short, choppy seas at the full power of her engines.

He had an additional incentive to haste in the aspect of the sea and sky; for there seemed to be another typhoon threatening, and he was keenly anxious to run out of the storm area before the hurricane should break. When twilight fell that evening, the sun was already enveloped in a peculiar, dun-coloured mist that resembled an enormous pall of distant smoke, in the midst of which the orb appeared like a dimly-seen, red-hot iron disk, as it sank toward the western horizon. The darkening sky overhead and away to the eastward glowed with a dull incandescence, like the reflected glare of an enormous furnace; while the short, choppy waves of the forenoon had given place to a long, oily, sluggish swell, without a single ripple to disturb its surface, through which the *Chih' Yuen's* stem clove its way like a knife shearing through butter. The ship was rolling heavily; and in the queer, eerie stillness that fell with the disappearance of the sun, the usual ship-board sounds, the clank of machinery far below, and even the voices of the men, assumed so weird and unnatural a character that Frobisher felt himself gradually being overcome by a most unpleasant, dismal sense of foreboding.

The sea, reflecting the ruddy glow from overhead, looked ghastly in the extreme, recalling to the Englishman's disturbed fancy the old sailor's legend of the appearance of the "Hand of Satan in the Sea of Darkness". This was precisely the kind of sea out of which such a terrible apparition might be expected to appear; and so strongly did the feeling of menace take hold of him, that he actually caught himself at times glancing apprehensively over his shoulder, in spite of his resolve to the contrary.

About an hour after sunset, puffs of hot wind came moaning about the ship from all directions, oppressive, and almost as noxious as the fumes from an open furnace door. Indeed, there was a distinctly sulphurous smell in the atmosphere; and the air was so full of electricity that a quite perceptible shock was to be felt if the bare hand were placed on metal,

especially upon the copper fittings of the binnacle. A feeling of vague uneasiness seemed to have taken possession of every man on board; and tempers were short almost to the point of acerbity. The petty officers could be heard snarling at the men, the officers grumbled at their subordinates, and even Frobisher and Drake had something of a passage of arms up on the bridge, until they realised that their fretted nerves were due to the extraordinary weather conditions, and laughed the little unpleasantness off accordingly.

Frobisher now gave orders that all the guns were to be doubly secured, so that they might not break adrift in the event of the ship being overtaken by the typhoon, the approach of which now appeared most probable; and everything that might possibly strike adrift was fastened and double fastened, in view of what was almost certainly coming. The canvas dodgers round the bridge were taken down and put away, and the quarter-deck and forecastle awnings were removed, and the stanchions taken out of their sockets and placed below. The lashings of the boat covers were again looked to, and the boats themselves secured more firmly in their chocks, until finally there remained nothing more possible to be done for security, and the outbreak of the storm could be awaited with reasonable confidence.

About eight o’clock in the evening the swell became even more pronounced, and the ship commenced to roll so heavily that it was necessary to run hand-lines fore and aft the deck to enable the seamen to go about their duties, otherwise there was great danger of the men being hurled right across the decks and sustaining serious injuries. The gloomy, lowering, red light which had suffused the sky at the going down of the sun had given place to a dull, copper-coloured glow, mingled with a kind of brassy glare, all the more ominous from the fact that there was no visible source of its origin; for in the ordinary course of events it should have been quite dark, except for such light as was given by the moon, the sun having disappeared more than an hour and a half previously. So strong was this unearthly light that the horizon was plainly visible in all directions, save away to the northward, and there the blackness was intense. Not the faintest glimmer of a star was observable through the inky curtain which covered about ten degrees of the horizon in that direction, but now and again a sudden dazzle of wicked-looking forked lightning shot across the face of the bank. As yet, however, there was no

sound of thunder, and the same unearthly stillness prevailed, save when a moaning sound could be plainly heard as the puffs of hot wind more and more frequently scurried through the ship's wire rigging, or sobbed weirdly in the hoods of the ventilators.

"There is certainly something pretty bad coming, sir," Drake presently volunteered, unable any longer to endure the strained silence. "I have sailed these seas before; and although I have never seen the sky looking quite so threatening as it does now, there were much the same premonitions before the great hurricane of 1889, when more than twenty thousand Chinamen were drowned, and hundreds of junks, sailing ships, and steamers were destroyed, and their wreckage strewn up and down the coast. I was in the old *Barracouta* at the time; and although she was as well-found a craft as ever I sailed in, I never expected her to live through it. It would be a queer state of affairs if we were to drop across the enemy now, sir, wouldn't it? The men would have a pretty job serving the guns, and no mistake!"

"An action, with a swell such as this running, would be an utter impossibility," was Frobisher's reply. "Before long we shall be having all our work cut out to take care of ourselves, without troubling to attempt the destruction of the other fellow. And by Jove, Drake! I believe it's coming now."

Drake glanced apprehensively behind him, and there, *sure* enough, just below the inky curtain of blackness on the northern horizon, which was now being rent in every direction by continuous lightning flashes, could be seen a long line of whitish colour, which, there could be no doubt, was approaching the ship with more than the speed of an express train.

Frobisher had scarcely uttered the words before the darkness was rent by the most terrifically vivid flash of lightning that he had ever seen, while simultaneously the air was shattered by a clap of thunder of such frightful volume that the cruiser jarred and shivered from stem to stern, as though she had taken the ground at full speed; indeed, for some seconds Frobisher was not at all sure that they had not happened upon some uncharted shoal. And while all hands were still cringing involuntarily from the shock, there came another dazzling flash of lightning, apparently within a few yards of the vessel, followed immediately by peal on peal of

thunder, which rolled and reverberated over the sea as though all the great guns in existence were being fired at the same time within a few miles of them.

Then the rain came down as it only can in those latitudes—as though the bottom of an enormous tank had been suddenly knocked out; the roar of that colossal volume of water beating on the deck being such that, although Frobisher put his mouth to Drake's ear and shouted with all the power of his lungs, the latter could not distinguish a syllable.

For only a few brief seconds did this last; then it ceased as suddenly as though a tap had been turned off. An instant later the line of white water appeared, scarcely a hundred yards distant from the *Chih' Yuen's* stern. Frobisher had barely time to yell an order to the men on deck to "hold on for their lives" before the oncoming wave and the attendant hurricane broke upon the cruiser.

The wave, black, gleaming, and sinister in the sheen of the lancing lightning flashes, and capped with a ridge of phosphorescent foam, swept over the cruiser's stern, down upon the quarter-deck, and then forward, burying the ship in an instant from stern to stem, so that her captain, up on the navigating bridge, was unable for a few seconds to see anything of his vessel's decks, the bridge on which he and Drake were standing—or endeavouring to stand—and the tops of the ventilators being all of the upper-works that showed above the racing turmoil of foam-covered water. At the same time Frobisher and Drake were literally jammed against the quivering rails of the bridge and held there, powerless to move, by the amazing force of the wind.

A perceptible quiver thrilled through the hull of the sturdy vessel as, like a live thing, she endeavoured to free herself from that enormous weight of water, and a few moments later she emerged from the swirl, which poured off her decks in cataracts. Then, rolling herself free of the rest of her burden, she was carried irresistibly forward on the back of the wave, like a chip in the current of a mill-race.

Frobisher gave a big sigh of relief as he saw his ship shake herself free. "A little longer, Drake, and she would have foundered under our feet," he managed to gasp; "if she had not been the sturdy craft that she is, she

would not have come up again."

"You're right, sir," replied Drake, wiping the spray out of his eyes; "that was a narrow squeak, if ever there was one. But hark to the wind! It must be blowing at ninety miles an hour, at least. I pray that nothing may get in our way, for we could not possibly avoid it. A hair's-breadth out of our course, and the ship would broach to and capsize with us."

Drake spoke truth. Although the sea was absolutely smooth—every wave-crest being shorn off by the terrific force of the wind almost before it had time to form—the extremely heavy swell that had arisen earlier in the evening was still running. Even the hurricane could not flatten that, and the *Chih' Yuen*, driven forward by her own steam and the power of the wind behind her, rushed down one steep slope and up the next with a speed that made even the most experienced seaman gasp. A very slight alteration of the helm, at the speed at which the ship was then travelling, would certainly suffice to send her reeling over upon her beam-ends, aided by the "send" of the sea.

Looking round him, after the storm's first wild outburst, Frobisher was horrified to observe the terrible damage and loss of life that had been caused by that first great rush of water. Of the men who had been on deck at the time, only some half a dozen poor, draggled, half-drowned creatures, clinging limply to the nearest support, could be seen; while every movable object had been swept overboard into the sea, as well as a number that are not usually considered easy of removal. Several ventilators had been shorn off level with the deck, and the water had poured in tons down the openings thus formed; the two quarterboats had disappeared altogether, and of another boat only the stem and stern posts remained, hanging to the davit tackles by their ring-bolts. Stanchions were either missing altogether, or bent into a variety of curious and extraordinary shapes; and even some of the lighter machine-guns mounted on deck had been torn from their tripods, and were by this time at the bottom of the sea. The havoc was simply indescribable, and Frobisher's heart was full of bitterness as he surveyed the shocking wreck of what had, a few minutes previously, been the smartest and finest cruiser in the whole Chinese Navy, and thought of the poor souls who were perhaps, even now, struggling feebly as they gradually sank to their watery graves.

All that night both Drake and Frobisher remained on the bridge, not daring to leave the ship to herself for an instant; and many and many a time during those hours of darkness did each of them think that his last moment was come. Yet time after time the cruiser recovered from the staggering blows inflicted by wind and sea, and rushed from crest to crest of the swell like a flying-fish pursued by dolphin.

Several times during the night and the following morning her skipper tried to gauge the speed at which his ship was travelling, and ultimately he estimated that she must be doing fully twenty knots over the ground. As the cruiser was travelling at this high speed Frobisher became particularly anxious to obtain a sight of the sun at midday, in order to ascertain his position; for he was of opinion that he must be very near, if not actually among, those islands forming the Chu-san Archipelago; and he feared, every moment, that the *Chih' Yuen* might crash headlong upon some submerged rock. But, unfortunately, the atmosphere was far too thick to render any observation possible; indeed, what with the black, low-hanging clouds, and the dense spindrift with which the air was filled, it was as dark at midday as it would have been, under ordinary circumstances, half an hour after sunset; and he was perforce obliged to content himself with the very unsatisfactory result obtained by dead reckoning.

Late in the afternoon the typhoon eased up a little, and Frobisher sent Drake below to secure some rest—for both men were completely worn out—promising to call him and take his own turn after the first lieutenant had refreshed himself with three hours' slumber.

At the expiration of that time the wind had dropped so much that he felt quite justified in leaving the bridge; and he therefore had Drake called to take his place. With the easing of the wind, however, a very steep and heavy sea naturally began to rise, and Frobisher therefore instructed Drake to call him immediately should any danger arise to the ship. He then went below and turned in "all standing", excepting that he discarded his boots and his water-soaked oilskins; and he was asleep almost before his head had touched the pillow.

It seemed to him that he had been sleeping but a few minutes when he felt himself violently shaken by the shoulder, and awoke to find Drake,

still haggard and worn for want of proper sleep, standing over him in his dripping oilskins.

“Hillo! Anything wrong, Drake?” was his immediate enquiry, followed by a request to be told the time, since his own watch appeared to have run down.

“Nothing absolutely wrong, sir,” was the reply, “but what you can feel for yourself. The sea has risen very badly; and the ship is not behaving as well as I should like. The chief engineer, also, has just sent up word that the engines are working a bit loose, and that some of the bearings are almost red-hot. He thinks that some parts of the machinery must have been strained when that first wave swept over us; so I thought it just as well to let you know. As for the time, sir, it is nearly three o’clock in the morning.”

“Three in the morning!” ejaculated the captain. “Surely not, Drake! I must have slept nearly ten hours, in that case. All right! I will be on deck in a few seconds.”

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when there arose on deck a fearful outcry, as of men in the extremity of fear and dismay; and before Frobisher and Drake had planted their feet on the first steps of the companion-ladder, the ship struck heavily, plunged forward, and then struck again. At the same moment the electric lights went out, and everything was in darkness.

Chapter Twenty One.

In the Hands of Formosan Cannibals.

“Heavens above!” shouted Frobisher, as he and Drake picked themselves up from the floor, to which they had been hurled at the first shock; “the ship is ashore!”

As if to emphasise the statement, just as the two men succeeded in reaching the top of the steeply-inclined ladder a deluge of water crashed thunderously down on the cruiser’s poop, driving in a solid mass along her decks from end to end, and causing her to bump again heavily. Then came a terrific shock, accompanied by the heart-stopping sounds of rending and tearing iron, shearing rivets, jangling machinery, and, worse than all, the despairing screams of men who had been caught by the giant comber and swept overboard to death among the rocks which were grinding and tearing their way into the unfortunate *Chih’ Yuen’s* vitals.

When Frobisher and his lieutenant gained the wave-swept deck, the first faint glimmerings of coming dawn were just appearing away to the eastward, and objects close at hand were beginning to take on recognisable form in the ghostly, grey dawn light; so that, although all the lamps in the ship had gone out with the stoppage of the dynamo, which had been jolted from its bedplate at the first shock, it was to some slight extent possible to see what was happening, and to dodge the masses of wreckage which were being hurled hither and thither about the decks.

Frobisher’s first instructions were to the engine-room staff, to stop the engines, which the engineers had omitted to do, doubtless waiting for orders; and the next was to the carpenter, to sound the well and ascertain how much water the ship had inside her. True, she seemed to be firmly enough fixed on the rocks at the moment, but there was no knowing when she might slide off and, if she had taken in much water, carry them all to the bottom.

Then, without waiting to receive the man’s report, he ordered such boats as still remained in a condition to swim to be stocked with provisions and water, and to be hoisted off the chocks ready for lowering in a hurry,

should necessity arise. These, it was soon discovered, amounted only to three, not counting the steam-pinnace, which, Frobisher feared, it would be impossible to get into the water under the circumstances; and it was at once apparent that, notwithstanding the large number of men who had been already swept overboard and drowned, there would not be sufficient accommodation for half the remaining crew.

Meanwhile the seas, although they still continued to break heavily over the ship's stern, were not nearly so violent as the great waves that had swept the decks when she first struck; and the men were able to move about in comparative safety by watching their opportunity. After the first few moments of alarm and confusion, too, Frobisher's strong personality and cool confidence soon restored the men's courage, and discipline once more prevailed.

The carpenter returned after about five minutes' absence, and reported that already there was more than ten feet of water in the fore end of the ship, while in the engine-room it was almost up to the bedplates, and that consequently the stokers were drawing the furnaces as quickly as they could in order to avert an explosion. He also added that, during the brief period while he had been sounding the well, the water had risen almost a foot, and that therefore the vessel could not be expected to float much longer. Indeed it was now evident that, although the bows of the *Chih' Yuen* were supported on a ridge or pinnacle of rock, the after portion of the ship was in deep water, in which it was quickly sinking lower and lower, so that it was almost a question of minutes before she must either break in two or else slide backward off the rock and founder.

By this time the light had become so much stronger that it was possible to make out, in some small degree, the position in which they were situated. The ship had apparently driven upon an outlying ridge of rock, stretching a mile or more into the sea in a north-easterly direction, from an array of black-looking, rugged cliffs, which towered upward to a height of several hundred feet above the sea. The cliffs themselves shut out the view to the south-westward, but toward the south the shore line could be seen running away until it became lost in the distance, thus proving—although the light was still too poor to enable the men to see very far—that it was not some isolated, uncharted reef upon which the ship had run, but an island of considerable size. Although it seemed to Frobisher

almost impossible that the land could be actually the island of Formosa itself, yet it was still believable when he came to consider the great speed at which the *Chih' Yuen* had been travelling during the storm, urged forward both by her engines and by the terrific force of the wind. In fact, a few minutes' consideration sufficed to convince him that this must indeed be Formosa, since there was no other island of such extent as this, anywhere in the vicinity, upon which the cruiser could possibly have struck.

Seeing, then, that there was no time to be lost, Frobisher gave orders for the boats to be hoisted out, as many men as they could safely hold being told off to each, with instructions that, upon their cargoes being landed, they were to be brought back to the ship by a crew selected among themselves, for the remainder of the *men*. In the meantime, while the boats were transferring some of the men to the shore, the remainder were to set to work to construct rafts as quickly as possible out of the raffle of wreckage washing about the deck and alongside, so that, in the event of the boats not having time to make more than the one trip, those left behind should have some means of saving their lives other than by swimming.

Very fortunately, the now fast-increasing light disclosed a strip of sandy beach, on the west side of, and very largely sheltered by, the ridge of rocks on which the *Chih' Yuen* had struck; and it was for this spot that Frobisher directed the boats to make, as offering the most suitable landing-place in sight.

These orders given, the men rushed to execute them, and in a few minutes the first boat was ready for lowering into the water. The crew got in, while others stood by the tackles, prepared to lower away at the word of command. Drake, carefully watching the seas sweeping up behind the ship, waited until an especially heavy wave dashed past, and then, when the ensuing "smooth" arrived, gave the word to let run. The boat dropped down the cruiser's steep side like a rocket, hit the water with a resounding splash, the bow and stern men unhooked the tackles, the oars pushed the little craft away from the ship's side, and the perilous journey toward the beach was commenced.

Time after time it appeared as though the boat must be overrun by the

sea and swamped; but the coxswain in charge of her was an old man-o'-war's-man, and each time he avoided disaster by a hairbreadth, until, at the expiration of a breathless five minutes, Frobisher saw her living cargo leap safely out on the beach, and heaved a sigh of relief. By this time, too, the second and third boats had been got into the water without mishap, and were also on their way shoreward, leaving about a hundred and fifty men still remaining aboard the cruiser, working like madmen to complete their raft; for it now appeared almost certain that the *Chih' Yuen* could not live long enough to allow all hands to be taken off by the boats.

The engine-room staff had been driven on deck some time previously by the inrush of water, and were also making a raft for themselves up in the bows of the ship. Others were busily engaged in getting up such unspoiled provisions as they could lay their hands on; and yet another party, headed by Frobisher himself, was collecting a little armoury of weapons on deck, ready to be taken ashore, for the Englishman had heard some ugly yarns of the savage character of the natives of the island, and their methods of treatment of such shipwrecked crews as were unfortunate enough to fall into their hands. Among these yarns were one or two to the effect that they were also strongly addicted to cannibalism; and neither he nor Drake, nor indeed any of the rest, were at all desirous of ending their careers as part of the ingredients of a cannibal banquet on the desolate and forbidding shores of Formosa.

Unfortunately, the magazine was flooded, so that it was impossible to procure any ammunition for the fire-arms, but all the rifles in the arm-belts happened to be loaded in readiness for the expected encounter with the Japanese gunboat and transports; these were therefore unloaded and the cartridges placed in a box for safe transit. The officers' revolvers were also all fully charged, while Frobisher, Drake, and the second lieutenant had a small quantity of revolver cartridge loose in their cabins. This was added to the general store, and it was then found that the entire supply of ammunition available amounted to three hundred rounds of rifle ammunition and a little over a hundred rounds of revolver cartridge.

This, together with a supply of rifles, revolvers, and cutlasses, formed part of the second cargo of the first boat, which had by this time returned to the wreck; and she was soon on her way back to the shore, with a small party of seamen as well as the weapons.

Frobisher was on the point of going below again, to endeavour to rescue a few more articles likely to be of use to people in their position, when Drake suddenly shouted:

“Look out, sir; look out, men! Jump for your lives; the ship is sinking under us!”

And indeed, even as the words left Drake’s lips, with a terrible grinding sound of rending iron and timber the *Chih’ Yuen* began to slide backward off the sharp pinnacle of rock that supported her bows.

Some of the men followed Drake’s advice and leaped overboard, others seized anything handy that would serve to support them, while one small body of seamen made herculean efforts to launch the half-completed raft. But these last were too late; the structure had been made of large dimensions on purpose to sustain the weight of a considerable number of men, and it was too heavy to be moved unless all hands had applied themselves to the task. It refused to budge, and while the men were still struggling with it, the cruiser slid clear of the last ridge of rock into the sea in a terrific swirl of foaming water, rolled sluggishly once or twice, with the water up to the level of her gun casemates, and then slowly capsized and sank, throwing all the men who were fortunate enough to have been above-deck into the water, where a terrible scene of struggling among the drowning at once ensued.

Quite a large proportion of the Chinese were unable to swim, and those of them who possessed no spar or piece of plank to cling to either strove to save themselves by clutching at the nearest swimmer, or fought to tear their more fortunate companions from their supports and seize them for themselves. There were many exhibitions of mad brutality, selfishness, and cowardice, as there too frequently are on such occasions; but these were redeemed by the heroic deeds of others who retained their senses and their manhood.

The raft had, of course, floated clear when the ship sank; and Frobisher and Drake, after being submerged so long by the suction of the sinking craft as to be almost suffocated, were lucky enough to come to the surface close alongside it. Having gained the raft, they at once set to work to haul on board everybody within reach, and then, with the

assistance of a few oars which had floated free of the broken boats remaining on the cruiser, the occupants managed to propel the raft, despite the heavy sea still running, to a large grating, to which half a dozen men were clinging, submerged to their chins.

By this time, however, the raft was as heavily weighted as it could safely be—the water, indeed, was sweeping over it at times in such volume as to bury the men almost to their waists; and it was fortunate for its occupants that the other two boats now returned and, getting alongside, proceeded to relieve it of some of its living burden, otherwise a great number would inevitably have soon been swept away to death.

There were still a few men either swimming or clinging to pieces of wreckage, and when these had been taken on board the boats, the mournful harvest was completed. Save for spars, gratings, and fragments of wreckage, the sea was clear of every trace of the once-proud cruiser. All the survivors of the catastrophe were either ashore, on the raft, or divided between the two boats; and after another careful scrutiny in every direction, Frobisher recognised that there were no more to be saved, and ordered the boats to pass lines aboard the raft and tow it to the shore.

The landing was effected in safety, except for the loss of one man, who was snapped up by a shark as he sprang out of one of the boats to help to run her up the beach. The great fish swooped up with a rush, turned on its side in the shallow water, and dragged the man away before a hand could be lifted to rescue him. His despairing shriek rang in the ears of everybody for many a day afterwards; yet his fate was a lucky one compared to that in store for some of those who stood shivering and wet upon that sandy beach in the chill air of early morning.

Once safely ashore, Frobisher proceeded to count the survivors; and out of the crew of three hundred and thirty men who were on board the *Chih' Yuen* when she left Wei-hai-wei, he found only a hundred and forty remaining. Of the others, some had been washed overboard during the typhoon, more had been swept away when the ship first struck, and the rest had gone down when she sank, either between her decks or sucked down and drowned in the vortex caused by the sinking hull.

This was no time for repining, however; they were not yet by any means

out of the wood, and there was a good deal of work to be done at once. First of all, the provisions and water-casks were left on the beach under a guard, while two parties, headed by Frobisher and Drake respectively, armed themselves from the stock of weapons brought ashore, and went off in different directions, in search, first, of a water supply, and secondly, of a spot in its immediate neighbourhood where they might construct some sort of a defence to protect themselves from any attack until rescued.

That there was urgent need for such a structure was very soon demonstrated, for scarcely had Frobisher and his party penetrated a quarter of a mile into the jungle, when they were saluted by a shower of spears and arrows that stretched no less than thirteen of their number dead on the ground, and wounded several others. Frobisher immediately threw his men roughly into a square formation, and fired a volley into the surrounding bush, in the midst of which naked brown forms could be seen flitting hither and thither; and by the volume of shrieks, groans, and cries that arose immediately after the discharge, it seemed that he had taught the savage natives a sharp and wholesome lesson. At any rate, they retreated in confusion; and soon afterward Frobisher was fortunate enough to discover a spot that would serve admirably as a site for a sort of blockhouse or fort. There was a spring of good water sufficient in quantity to supply the needs of his whole force, an open space of ground on which the structure could be built, and an abundance of small timber that could easily be worked up into palisading with the assistance of the tools from the carpenter’s chest—one of the first things that Frobisher had thought of sending ashore, after the arms and ammunition.

The party was therefore divided, one half remaining to defend the chosen site, if necessary, while the other half was dispatched to inform Drake of their success, and to bring up the beach party with the provisions and water-casks, arms, and boxes of cartridge. The boats, Frobisher ordered, were to be hauled as far up the beach as possible, together with the raft, and all of them were to be well secured. It was not considered very likely that the savages would attempt to seize the boats, for they would not know how to handle them; but if they did, Frobisher was determined that the task should be made as difficult for them as possible. That they might break them up for the sake of the nails was a contingency that would have to be faced, as he dared not leave a small guard to protect them,

and had not men enough to be able to leave a large one.

When Drake arrived with his exploring party, he informed Frobisher that he, too, had been attacked by a party of the natives, although there had apparently not been so many of them in his case as in that of the captain, and a few shots fired into the jungle had been sufficient to clear the road for them. These two incidents served to convince Frobisher that there had been no exaggeration in the tales concerning the dangerous character of the Formosan savages; and he realised that the sooner a stockade and fort of some description could be erected, the better it would be for all of them.

The carpenter's chest was therefore at once opened, and the available tools divided among as many as the supply would allow; and while four men with axes started to cut down small trees of a size suitable to make posts for the stockade, others set to work with their cutlasses—for want of better instruments—to mow down and root up the scrub with which the site of the proposed fort was covered, putting it on one side for use afterward as a protective hedge. Others, again, using the saws, proceeded to cut the trees into suitable lengths as soon as they were felled by the axemen; a fourth party, using their cutlasses as spades, undertook to dig holes for the reception of the finished posts; and the remainder were employed in the task of guarding the labourers, with rifle and drawn cutlass, from the chance of attack by the savages.

By midday, when all hands sat down to a hasty meal, the actual erection of the stockade had been commenced, and by the time that darkness had fallen the first line of posts was completed, in the form of a square some thirty feet by thirty, all but a length of about twelve feet, which perforce had to be left open for that night, since the men could not work in the dark—a guard being posted there to prevent any unauthorised persons from entering.

Fires were lighted all round the outside of the stockade, so that no savages could approach without being seen; while light of every description in the interior of the enclosure was strictly forbidden by Frobisher, in order that the advantage should be all on the side of the defenders, in the event of attack.

Half a dozen men were told off to take the first spell at guarding the twelve-foot gap in the palisading, and two more were stationed at loopholes which had been formed in each of the other three sides, to prevent a surprise from either of those directions. Then, rifles and revolvers having been reloaded and piled in different parts of the enclosure, ready to hand, and cutlasses resharpened on the grindstone belonging to the tool-chest and placed close to their owners' hands, the remainder of the little company stretched themselves out on beds of bracken, which had been cut during the day, and in a few minutes were fast asleep, completely worn out by the fatigue and excitement of a very long and arduous day.

Frobisher, however, though extremely tired, would not permit himself to sleep, feeling to the full the responsibility resting on his shoulders for the safety of his men; but he insisted that Drake should do so, for he had been awake most of the previous night while Frobisher was resting. To keep himself awake, the captain periodically perambulated round the stockade, constantly replenishing the watch fires, which had been placed at a considerable distance from the fort, and seeing that the men told off for sentry duty were keeping awake and on the alert.

But strive as he might against the temptation to close his eyes, if only for a moment, he found himself continually nodding, even as he walked; and once or twice he awakened to the realisation that he had, for a few seconds, actually been walking in his sleep. The unfortunate watchmen, too, were constantly needing to be roused; and before long Frobisher found that, each time he made the rounds, it was necessary to reawaken them, all of them being found sleeping, leaning on their rifles or against the stockade.

All the while he, too, was becoming more and more drowsy; and at last, shortly after midnight, he determined to rouse the second lieutenant and a dozen of the sleepers to take the place of those who had been doing the first spell. Accordingly he reeled in through the opening in the stockade, scarcely noticing that the men who were supposed to be guarding the gap were all so nearly asleep that they were quite useless as sentries.

It took him some little time, in the darkness, to find the spot where the

second lieutenant was lying; and he was just shaking the man gently by the shoulder to rouse him when the still night air was rent by a most heart-shaking yell, instantly followed by several shrill screams of agony in quick succession. As Frobisher started to his feet in horror he saw the somnolent sentries at the gap in the very act of falling under the flashing blades of a horde of yelling, shouting, ferocious savages who, at the first wild rush, had broken into the fort, and were now spearing the hapless Chinese seamen, who, scarcely half-awake, were blindly searching for their rifles and cutlasses.

Himself armed, Frobisher desperately strove to break through and get to the front, so that he might in some degree stem the rush until his men could recover their wits; but it could not be done. The Chinese were being driven backward and jammed together by sheer weight of numbers, until they could move neither hand nor foot, and were being slaughtered like sheep. The last thing that Frobisher was conscious of was that he was shouting frenziedly for Drake; then something flashed before his eyes, a thousand sparks danced through his brain, and he knew no more.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Japanese Troops to the Rescue.

The next thing of which Frobisher became aware was that he was in an extremely uncomfortable position, and that he was suffering a very considerable amount of pain. It also appeared to him that he was experiencing an altogether unpleasant degree of warmth; while he seemed to hear, ringing in his ears like the echo of something listened to ages ago, the sound of what very strongly resembled a steamer’s syren. Added to this, he was conscious that there were many people quite close to him, groaning in varying degrees of agony; and finally, as his faculties resumed their normal condition, he began to realise that he was in a very disagreeable predicament.

Refraining from opening his eyes, he waited patiently until the feeling of sickness and dizziness with which he was oppressed had slightly worn

off, striving meanwhile to remember how it came about that he was wounded in the head, and firmly lashed, with his arms behind him, to the trunk of a tree, in unpleasant proximity to a large fire. Little by little his memory returned, and he remembered clearly everything that had taken place, up to the time when the enclosure had been rushed by the Formosan savages, and he himself had fallen unconscious from the blow of a spear haft across his head. What, he wondered, had become of poor Drake? He had not set eyes on him during the whole of that brief scuffle, and he began to fear the worst for his friend.

A remarkable sight revealed itself to his wondering gaze when he at length opened his eyes. Instead of being bound to the trunk of a tree, as he had previously supposed, he found that he was secured to a stout post driven into the ground, his arms, behind him, encircling the post, with the wrists lashed together by what felt like rough ropes of native fibre. Glancing downward, he saw that his ankles had been placed one on each side of the stake, and secured there by several lengths of rattan; and it was to this that his uncomfortable and cramped position was due, as his whole weight was thus thrust forward until it was supported almost entirely by the wrists.

Looking round him, he saw that a number of similar stakes had been erected in the form of a circle, in the centre of which was a roaring fire, the heat from which he had become unpleasantly aware of on his return to consciousness; and to each post was secured the body of a man, supported in the same manner as himself. Many of them appeared, Frobisher noticed, to be in a state of entire, or nearly entire, unconsciousness. These men were, of course, the Chinese seamen who had escaped death at the first onslaught of the savages, and had survived, he very greatly feared, only to meet a far more sinister fate than that of sudden death.

His gaze diligently searched the circle for Drake, and he was beginning to fear that his old friend must be numbered with the slain, when one of the figures raised its head slowly and painfully, as though just returning to consciousness, and revealed the blood-stained, haggard features of the first lieutenant. At the same time Drake turned his eyes in Frobisher’s direction, stared blankly at him for a second, and then smiled a glad but painful smile—painful because of the slash which he had received across

the face; but he refrained from calling a greeting, and Frobisher instantly recognised that the other must have some good reason for remaining silent—a circumstance very much opposed to his usual nature.

That reason soon became apparent as Frobisher managed to twist his head round, with considerable difficulty, and look behind him; for he then saw that he and the survivors of his crew were tied up in front of a native Formosan village; the spot where they were standing being evidently the open space which is to be found in some portion of every savage town. It was still night-time, but the glare of the great fire shone redly on the low, reed-thatched huts, with their two-foot-high doors, covered with fibre mats, through which the occupants were obliged to crawl on all-fours; and the reason of Drake's silence became apparent in the bronze shapes of several of the savages themselves, either lounging against the walls of the huts, or seated on low stools before the doors. All of them, without exception, were nursing evil-looking, long-hafted, broad-bladed spears, and carried, belted to their waists, long-bladed knives, with wavy blades, somewhat similar to the Malay *parong*, or kris; and these they were evidently very ready and willing to use on the least provocation.

The natives had all the appearance of people who were waiting impatiently for some pleasurable happening to take place; and Frobisher realised how very much it was to the advantage of all of them to feign unconsciousness as long as possible. The "exhibition", in which the prisoners were undoubtedly to become the principal actors, could hardly take place while the prisoners were still insensible, and therefore not in a fit condition to furnish "sport"; but there was no doubt that, directly any of them showed signs of being in a condition to feel pain, the savage revels would begin. What form these would take Frobisher did not, of course, know; but he could shrewdly guess, by what he remembered to have been told about these folk, that it would be something very horrible, and he shuddered involuntarily.

At this moment there thrilled through the still night air that same deep, throbbing note that he believed he had heard at the moment when he had been struck down. His sub-consciousness had then attributed the sound to the result of the blow, and he had since thought no more of it; but now that he heard it again he had no doubt as to what it really was. It was the deep-toned vibration of a steamer's syren, not so very far away;

and he cast a quick glance in Drake's direction. If there were a steamer so close at hand, there might yet be a chance of being rescued if communication could possibly be established with her people.

The lieutenant had also heard it; and directly his chief's eyes met his, his lips slowly but very distinctly formed one silent word: "Japanese."

It was quite possible at that short distance, and in that strong light, to read from one another's lips, provided the motions were slow and very distinct, and the two men at once entered into a silent conversation relating to the situation in which they found themselves. Drake all the time kept a wary eye on the guards, and feigned unconsciousness—a course immediately followed by Frobisher—immediately there seemed the least likelihood of one of them turning his head in the prisoners' direction.

There could be no question as to the identity of the stranger—or strangers. The steamer undoubtedly was either one of the transports, or the gunboat sent by the Japanese to take possession of the island—part of the very expedition that Frobisher would now have been engaged in fighting, had it not been for the terrible catastrophe of the *Chih' Yuen* being cast away.

The questions then arose—how soon would it be before the troops were landed? would they be likely to come that way in their search for a spot on which to erect fort and barracks? and if they did so, would they arrive in time? They would scarcely begin the disembarkation before dawn, Frobisher conjectured; but dawn must surely be not very far off now. He found himself praying fervently that his Chinese seamen might remain insensible as long as possible; for the first that recovered his senses would be almost certain, in his astonishment and alarm, to betray the fact; and he could not but believe that when once the "entertainment" commenced, the savages would not trouble to discriminate between insensible and conscious victims, but would butcher the entire company to satisfy their lust for blood.

He had been carrying on a silent conversation with Drake for nearly an hour, during which time neither prisoners nor captors had moved; and the first streaks of dawn were appearing to the eastward when the lieutenant

suddenly dropped his chin on his chest, as though shot; and so naturally was the performance carried out that for a few seconds Frobisher believed his friend had fainted. He was wise enough, however, to follow the example instantly, and presently, through his half-closed eyelids, he saw a couple of the savages rise to their feet and stroll toward the circle of prisoners.

Drake himself was one of the first at whom they stopped. They looked keenly at the down-hung head, and even prodded him in the ribs with a spear-haft; but although the blow must have been exceedingly painful, Drake retained sufficient self-possession not to utter a sound or exhibit a single sign of consciousness, and after a pause the two men strolled along to the next prisoner. This was the Chinese quartermaster of the *Chih' Yuen*; and directly they touched him Frobisher realised that the man was dead—fortunately, perhaps. There could be no mistaking the inert manner in which the body responded to the shaking of the taller of the two Formosans; and with an animal cry of disappointed rage the fellow reversed his spear and drove the broad blade again and again into the insensate figure. The sight was a sickening one, and Frobisher's only consolation was that the object of the barbarity was beyond the reach of cruelty for ever.

Then the men passed on to another figure, another, and still another, always without result, until Frobisher became aware that his turn was coming next. Drake's eye was on him, he knew, watching anxiously, and he braced himself to bear in silence whatever barbarity the savages might feel inclined to inflict.

He knew, of course, when they stopped opposite him, although he had now closed his eyes tightly; but he could scarcely repress a start when he felt a heavy hand fall upon his shoulder, for he did not know what next to expect. The temptation to open his eyes was almost irresistible, but with a strong effort he managed to keep them closed, and it was indeed well for him that he did so. Drake, who was watching, told him afterward that when he saw the horribly suggestive gestures that followed upon the man placing his hand on Frobisher's shoulder he almost fainted from very horror, and was scarcely able to draw his breath until, after a few seconds' hesitation, the men decided to postpone their barbarous idea until the victim was in a state to anticipate and to feel, and passed on.

Frobisher heard them depart, but forbore to open his eyes for a few seconds, lest they should be playing him some trick, and so he did not see what happened to the man on his left; but Drake did, and not with all his iron nerve could he repress a muffled cry of horror.

Immediately the men wheeled, but luckily, having their backs turned at the time, were unable to locate the sound accurately. They fancied that it was uttered by one of the seamen who, unhappily for him, had just regained consciousness and was gazing about him in blank amazement and terror; and with a shout of exultation the two inhuman wretches left the cruelly mangled form of their victim and passed on to the sailor.

They paused in front of him for a few moments, gesticulating and laughing fiendishly, and then, to Frobisher's amazement, left him untouched, and returned to the huts.

Here they uttered a peculiar kind of cry, and presently could be heard sounds as of a number of people approaching through the jungle. A few others appeared sleepily at the doors of some of the huts, and crawled out, yawning and blinking, into the fire-light. Here they remained, talking in their harsh, unmusical tongue, and chuckling at some suggestion put forward by the tall man, until the arrival of a party of men, all armed with spears and krises and, in some instances, bows and arrows, or blowpipes, who had evidently been out hunting to procure breakfast for the tribe; for they carried with them a number of small animals somewhat resembling hares, and a few splendidly-plumaged birds, all intended for the pot. On hearing what the tall man was saying, however, their burdens were contemptuously cast on one side, and they eyed the prisoners with an expression that told Frobisher more plainly than words that he had fallen into the clutches of cannibals, and the discarding of the spoils of their night's hunt proved only too clearly what their intentions were.

How Frobisher prayed and prayed again that the Japanese troops might pass that way in time! It would, of course, mean the exchanging of one prison for another, he knew. But the Japanese were civilised, and their officers gentlemen; and no indignity or other hardship would be inflicted upon their captives beyond temporary confinement; and the Englishman felt that he would almost be willing to undergo lifelong captivity if he might, by so doing, save his comrades and himself from the dreadful fate

that, only too plainly, was in store for them.

The chief having now concluded his harangue, his audience, with shouts and chuckles of anticipation and ferocity, dived back into their huts, to reappear a few seconds later with a number of wooden shovels, and stakes sharpened to a point and hardened in the fire, these being evidently intended for the breaking up of hard earth for the shovels to deal with more easily. Then the whole of them, with the exception of a couple of spearmen left to guard the prisoners, trooped off into the bush, stopping a little distance away and proceeding to dig eagerly, as Frobisher could tell by their shouts, and the sounds of shovels and picks being driven into the ground.

Ah, if only it were possible for either Drake or himself to loosen their bonds while the savages were away! A few seconds would suffice to dispose of the guard; a few seconds more would liberate the rest of the prisoners, most of whom were now showing signs of returning consciousness; and they could all be away in the depths of the forest before those others could reach the spot. Once free, it would be strange indeed if they could not reach the protection of the Japanese troops, who would by this time surely be disembarking, possibly only a short mile away, if they should have elected to land at the spot where the *Chih' Yuen's* boats had been left.

"Phew!—the boats!" thought Frobisher to himself. If the troops should land where he expected they would, the officers could not avoid seeing them; and, seeing them, they would naturally at once endeavour to discover whose they were. The name of the ship was on each boat—if the Jap officers could understand Chinese characters—and surely, surely they would try to locate the people who had landed from the vessel, if only to attack and drive them from the island. If the disembarkation had begun at dawn, a strong force might even now be in the vicinity searching—perhaps within earshot. At this very moment a concentrated shout on the part of Drake and himself might reach the ears of the troops and bring them to the spot in time to save all hands from a horrible death!

But the risk was too great. A shout would inevitably bring back the savages, even if the guards did not punish the outcry with a spear-thrust; and then all would be over. No, the only thing to do was to wait, and pray

fervently that the preparations of the Formosans might take them some considerable time, thus giving the Japanese more opportunity to find the prisoners before it was too late, if they were coming at all. It seemed strange to Frobisher that the savages had not also heard the steamer's syren; but he attributed the circumstance to the fact that perhaps his own ears and Drake's were more sensitive to such a sound, in the presence of imminent death, than those of the Formosans. Besides, he and the lieutenant knew that the arrival of the Japanese was expected, whereas the Formosans had no reason to suspect anything of the kind.

While he was debating the matter in his mind he heard the noise of the savages crashing through the bush on their return, and knew that, unless assistance came within the next five minutes, it would arrive too late for all of them.

Presently the cannibals reappeared in the clearing, laughing and joking among themselves; and, having thrown their shovels and picks down by the side of one of the huts, they picked up their spears and advanced expectantly toward the circle of bound men, baring their gums, showing their teeth, and exhibiting every symptom of pleased anticipation.

Then the tall chief, who had been the last to return, dived into his hut, while the others stood around, leaning on their spears or running their thumbs along the edges of their *parongs*, waiting impatiently for him to reappear.

It was at this moment that Frobisher, who was staring hard at Drake, trying to attract his attention, thought he caught the distant echo of a voice; and by the sudden start that the lieutenant was unable to repress it was evident that he, too, had become aware of something. He immediately glanced across at his captain, raising his eyebrows and nodding his head in the direction of the sound; and Frobisher nodded in return, at the same time glancing warningly at the Formosans, and forming the word "Wait" with his lips as distinctly as he could. Drake understood, and flashed his comprehension at the moment that the savage chief reappeared in the doorway of his hut.

He had dressed himself, in celebration of the occasion, in a splendid tiger-skin cloak, and wore the skull of a tiger on his head as a kind of

helmet. A necklace made of the teeth and claws of that beast was suspended round his neck, supporting a huge unset emerald, which was fastened by a piece of gold wire run through a hole which had been drilled through an angle of the stone. He also wore a pair of white cotton trousers, terminating just below the calf, and kept in position by a belt made of silver medallions, connected by pieces of deer-hide; while from this belt depended a very handsome silver-hilted kris in a wooden scabbard, very richly ornamented, which had undoubtedly been stolen at some time from a rich Malay trader. Gold bracelets encircled his arms nearly from wrist to elbow, and his ankles were ornamented by soft gold bands which could be clasped on or taken off as their owner desired. He made a fine figure of a man, and was evidently quite aware of the fact, for he stood still for a few moments, sunning himself in the admiration of his followers, until Frobisher trembled lest the voices should again make themselves heard and be detected by the waiting cannibals. In fact, as he strained his ears, the Englishman could now distinctly hear the distant crackling of undergrowth, announcing the passage of a number of men through the bush. It was as yet very faint indeed, and would have passed unnoticed but for the strained condition of his nerves; but it was to him quite perceptible, and approaching closer and closer every second.

To his unbounded delight, the cannibals now formed a circle and began to sing, slowly parading round the doomed men and clashing the hafts of their spears, thus effectually drowning any sounds the approaching troops might make, and at the same time notifying their presence to the Japanese. It was broad daylight by this time, and Frobisher kept his eyes glued in the direction from which the sounds had proceeded, hoping every second that they would be gladdened by the glitter of approaching bayonets.

In the midst of the singing the chief, suddenly whipping out his kris, paused a few seconds on the edge of the circle, looking for a victim, then sprang like a tiger at one of the Chinese seamen. The man saw him coming and shrieked pitifully; but he could scarcely have felt his death, poor fellow, for the next second his severed head fell to the ground.

Waving the kris above his head, and laughing madly, the chief looked round for the next victim, and his eyes fell upon Frobisher. The Englishman breathed a prayer and prepared to meet his death bravely,

keeping his eyes fixed undauntedly on the chief's face. And as he looked, the fellow suddenly dropped the streaming weapon and, falling upon his knees, collapsed in a heap, simultaneously with the crack of a revolver, which was immediately followed by a quick succession of rifle shots, as hidden marksmen picked out their victims.

Taken completely by surprise, the cannibals were shot down like sheep; and Frobisher scarcely realised what was happening until he saw the last savage throw up his hands and fall. Then he felt his bonds slacken, and he staggered weakly forward, to find himself supported by the arms of a Japanese officer, while, standing about in groups at the edge of the jungle, could be seen the figures of the soldiers, leaning upon their still-smoking rifles.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Frobisher Captures the "Satsuma."

Several months had passed since the moment when Frobisher stood staring in the face of death in the Formosan clearing, to be saved in the very nick of time by a well-directed shot from a Japanese officer's revolver. Now he, together with Drake and all that remained of the crew of the *Chih' Yuen*—twenty-three seamen only, out of her complement of over three hundred—were crawling slowly and carefully, on hands and knees, down a steep jungle path, not half a mile from the scene of the rescue, on their way to the beach. How they come to be in this position, creeping along and keeping cautiously within the shadow cast by the moon, can soon be told.

Immediately the cannibals had been slain by the Japanese volleys, and the officer and his men had cast loose the cramped and stiffened forms of the prisoners, the wounded Formosans—of whom there were very few—had been executed by the orders of the Japanese captain, who said that he could not afford to take any savage prisoners. But he courteously informed Frobisher that, although he was delighted and honoured at having been the means of succouring the "honourable captain" and his men in their extremity, he would be obliged, as the two countries were

still at war, to make him and all his men prisoners until such time as they could be exchanged. If, however, Frobisher would give his parole for himself and his crew, he would be very glad to give them all a passage to Japan when the transports returned thither; otherwise, he should be obliged to keep them with him on the island until he was relieved or the Japanese garrison withdrawn.

Frobisher and Drake, after consulting, decided that they would not give their parole. They were both eager to get away from Formosa and back to their duty as soon as possible, and they believed they might be able to form a plan by which to bring this about, if they were not sent to Japan.

He therefore informed General Oki of his decision. That officer shrugged his shoulders, and ordered the two Englishmen and the twenty-three Chinese to be closely guarded until a building could be erected as a prison for them. This was soon run up, and the twenty-five men placed therein, with sentries stationed at the doors night and day.

They were well treated, but very strictly guarded; and it was a long time before even a glimmering of an opportunity to escape occurred. The gunboat had convoyed the transports back to Nagasaki; and as escape was impossible without the assistance of a ship, it became necessary to wait until another returned, as she was expected to do, in about three months' time, with stores.

It was longer than that, however, before she appeared, and provisions were becoming exceedingly scarce when one day everybody awoke to find one of the latest and finest Japanese torpedo-boat destroyers lying off the beach, and with her an old tramp steamer laden with stores. It was then that Frobisher and Drake decided to attempt putting into execution the scheme matured by them months previously, and which had been simmering in their brains ever since the departure of the gunboat and transports.

This scheme was nothing less than the capture of the war-vessel which would certainly accompany the storeship; but the question now was, How was the scheme to be carried out with so small a number of men? Twenty-five to a hundred and ten—which would be about the complement carried by the destroyer—was very long odds; but Frobisher

and Drake between them evolved a plan that they thought might meet with success.

They had observed—at the time when the Japanese were first landing their stores, after the troops had been disembarked—that the crews of transports and war-ship had been allowed to come ashore in detachments to stretch their legs after the voyage, being permitted also to go into the woods at the back of the cliffs with rifles, after tigers and other game, provided always that they went in large parties, so as to avoid any danger of being cut off by the cannibals. They had also made a note of the fact that, when the gunboat's crew had taken their turn at shore leave, fully three-quarters of the men had arranged to do so at the same time, so that a *battue* on a large scale might take place, leaving only a few men behind to look after the ship. This *battue* had proved such a tremendous success that the crews of the two transports had followed the example of their Service comrades, and had likewise had excellent sport.

The reports of these successes, Frobisher felt sure, would be communicated to the crews of the ships which were to bring the next consignment of stores; and it was upon the possibility of the major portion of the destroyer's men coming ashore together, leaving the ship very indifferently manned, that the Englishmen had built their plan. If the Japanese did not follow their predecessors' example, then another plan would have to be thought out after the ship's arrival, when it could be seen what arrangements were actually in force.

But, fortunately for the success of Frobisher's scheme, everything had fallen out as he had hoped. The storeship's crew came on shore first, and met with splendid success; and, as the destroyer and her consort were making but a brief stay, the war-ship's crew had arranged to hold their *battue* the following day. Frobisher had therefore warned his men, directly he became aware of what was intended; and it was with mingled feelings of delight and apprehension that he saw and heard the laughing Japanese tars making their way into the bush, as twilight fell, to take up their posts for the moonlight "shoot."

The prison had been built at some distance from the storehouse and the barracks, close to the edge of the jungle, and not far from the strip of

beach where the *Chih' Yuen's* boats had landed. The other two buildings just referred to were more than half a mile away, at the top of the cliff, where a signal-station had also been established. On the night selected for the attempt, the crew of the store-ship happened to be holding a "sing-song", to which the officers on shore and a number of men from the barracks had been invited; and it seemed as though fortune herself were on the side of the conspirators.

Frobisher gave the hunters half an hour in which to make a good "offing", as he phrased it, and then, when the shades of evening had well set in, passed the word to his men to be ready.

There were two sentinels on guard, night and day, over the prisoners, and these had been changed half an hour before the time the attempt was to be made. Frobisher could hear them pacing slowly up and down outside; and he whispered to one of the sailors, who could speak Japanese, that the moment had arrived.

The fellow immediately shouted, at the top of his voice:

"Help! help! I have been bitten by a snake!" and, acting on Frobisher's instructions, the remainder of the men began to raise a tremendous hubbub, as though trying to find the reptile to kill it, while the "bitten" man, altering the tones of his voice, called wildly to the sentries to bring their rifles to shoot the thing.

The plan worked to perfection. The prisoners had always been quiet and well-behaved, and had never made any attempt to escape, so no suspicions now suggested themselves to the guards. They hastily unlocked the doors and dashed in, with rifles held ready to shoot—and the next moment they were on the floor, with half a dozen men on the top of each of them, and their rifles in the hands of Frobisher and Drake respectively.

They were bound and gagged in less time than it takes to tell; and five minutes later the little band were in the situation in which they were discovered at the beginning of this chapter, crawling cautiously along the jungle path toward the beach.

Once there, in the shadow of the cliffs, they hastened to the spot where

the arms and stores from the *Chih' Yuen* had been concealed when they first landed, some of which had been left there when they went to build the fort. If the Japanese had not discovered them, they should be there still; and there they were soon found.

Frobisher distributed a rifle and cutlass to each man, saw that the rifles were loaded and that the remaining cartridges were distributed as far as they would go, then gave Drake a cutlass and revolver, and took one of each himself. Then the little band crept quietly along toward the place where the Japanese boats had been pulled up.

Nothing of this kind having been anticipated, it had not been deemed necessary to leave a guard over the boats, and the fugitives had things all their own way. Oars were muffled with pieces of the men's clothing, and the boat was carried bodily down to the water's edge and placed carefully in the water to avoid the noise created by running her down the beach. There might be sentries on the destroyer and the store-ship (although in the case of the latter this was not very probable, owing to the concert proceeding on board); but if anyone should be watching on the destroyer Frobisher hoped that his crew would be taken for a party of the hunters, returned early for some reason, until it would be too late to offer resistance. If there were no sentinels on guard—well, attention to the fugitives would not be attracted by any undue disturbance.

Quietly but quickly the men slid into the boat, and were soon on their way toward the destroyer, lying about half a mile from the store-ship. They were within a few yards of her when, to their astonishment and momentary dismay, they were challenged—there was a sentry on watch, after all!

The Japanese-speaking seaman replied to the challenge with a statement that they had "returned early, as the sport had turned out to be poor"; and before the sentry could make up his mind whether or not he recognised the voice, the boat's crew were on deck, and he had no opportunity to rectify his mistake. He was silently overcome, gagged, and bound in a trice, and in less than ten minutes the remainder of the destroyer's men—most of them captured while enjoying a well-earned nap—were in irons and confined, with a sentry over them, in their own vessel's forecastle, the scuttles of which were closed and screwed home

with a spanner, so that no outcry of theirs could reach the other ship.

The fires were banked and the steam pressure was low, but by an extravagant use of oil a working pressure was soon raised. Frobisher wisely waited until he had a full head of steam before slipping his cable, lest he might be chased by the store-ship before he had power for full speed; but at the expiration of an hour all was in readiness. The word was given, the cable slipped through the hawse-pipe with a roar, the screw revolved, and the *Satsuma* swung round in a circle and headed northward for Wei-hai-wei.

The sound of the cable running out alarmed the crew of the store-ship, and the concert ceased abruptly. But that craft might as well have hoped to catch a streak of lightning as the *Satsuma*, when once she was well into her stride; and two days later the destroyer, now flying the Chinese flag, steamed proudly into Wei-hai-wei.

But, alas! pride soon had a fall, for the harbour was full of Japanese war-ships! Matters had been progressing while Frobisher was a prisoner in Formosa, battles had been fought on land and sea, and China had been humbled in the dust. Her men, both in the Navy and the Army, had fought like heroes; but, alas! it was always the same tale. Victory, dearly bought, but still victory, would have been theirs in nearly every case but for the peculation of the mandarins and other high officials, who supplied everything of the poorest to the unfortunate men whose duty it was to do the fighting. Poor weapons, poor food, cheap boots and clothing, faulty ammunition were the cause of China’s downfall—nothing else.

The remnant of her fleet, under Admiral Ting, had fought another bravely-contested naval action, and had been destroyed, with the exception of one ship, the *Chen Yuen*, which had been captured. Her southern fleet had been bottled up by another Japanese squadron, and Admiral Wong-lih had gone to Tien-tsin to see whether he could be of use there. The army in Korea had been crushed by an enemy superior in numbers and in everything else but bravery; and at the moment of Frobisher’s return the peace envoys were in the act of concluding the treaty of Shimonoseki.

The higher Chinese naval officers, broken-hearted at disgrace which was

none of their own fault, had one and all committed suicide, and the Dragon's teeth were drawn, his claws pared.

Would he ever rise again, Frobisher wondered, under men worthy of the heroes who were only too willing to fight his battles? Time alone would show.

There is little more to add to the present history of Captain Murray Frobisher.

The captured destroyer was, of course, claimed by Japan, and Frobisher himself remained a prisoner for one day, until the treaty was signed. Then, being free, he sought Admiral Wong-lih, who had refused to follow his comrades' example and destroy himself. The Englishman obtained from him the loan of an old gunboat, armed and manned her at his own expense, went up the Hoang-ho, and settled an outstanding account with certain pirates and an individual by the name of Ah-fu.

Then Drake and he revisited the ruined palace, and brought away Genghiz Khan's hoard, which the two men shared and brought to England, where they arrived about Christmas time.

Frobisher was now an immensely wealthy man, and a famous one, too, for he found that the account of his services with the Chinese Navy had reached home, and that his name was in everybody's mouth.

He was surprised, on the day following his arrival, to receive a visit from Dick Penryn, who, after the first warm greetings had passed, handed him a document intimating that the former sentence of the court martial had been reversed; that Frobisher had been reinstated in the British Navy, with the rank of captain; and that a ship was waiting for him as soon as he cared to take command.

He had, however, a little business of his own to transact first; and the nature of it became apparent, a little more than a year later, when Captain Murray Frobisher, of Her Majesty's cruiser *Dauntless*, presented to a grateful and astonished country no less than four splendid battleships of the latest design, built in the mother country with part of the proceeds of his share of the hoard of the ancient "Conqueror of Asia". He did not intend, he said to the deputation who waited upon him to thank

him, that his country should ever be exposed to the danger of the fate that had overtaken China. If China had had more ships she might have come off victorious in her war with Japan, in spite of the manifold disadvantages to which she had been subjected. These were disadvantages of a kind to which Great Britain, he knew, would never be exposed; but he wanted his beloved country to possess a good “margin of safety.”

After this generous and unparalleled gift, will it surprise readers very much to learn that the lieutenant who was once cashiered from the Navy for losing his ship is now Captain Sir Murray Frobisher, Baronet, holding the rank of post-captain on board one of the battleships which he himself presented to his country?

The End.

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