KAI WANG;

A TALE OF SOUTHERN CHINA.

CHAPTER XIV.

The first round had been quickly fought, with but trifling danger to the brave couple who had boarded the floating junk in search of Dr. Jack's widow.

True, they had not allowed the ragged line of Celestials to come within striking distance, and the latter had been unable to put their knives against the action of modern firearms, else the result might have been somewhat different.

It was necessary, however, that they proceed to take advantage of the respite offered them, since the golden opportunity might prove to be the desideratum upon which their whole future depended.

So Larry edged his way further along in the quarter where he knew the door of the junk's cabin lay.

And close to his side the more bulky frame of Plympton kept pace with his movements.

The latter had grave doubts regarding the tactics of the Chinese crew of the boat, and believed it his duty to keep their rear well guarded.

He had considerable respect for the well-known trickery which has always marked the character of the race, and feared less this sudden change of base might be only a means to an end.

In other words, Lord Rackett, blunt and straightforward himself in his bluff English fashion, dreaded the enemy fully as much when they threw themselves upon the bloody deck and ceased their clamorous outcries as when they surged forward in bold attack.

Some characters are more dangerous when still than while whooping it up like wild Bedouins of the desert.

They reached the cabin door.

Larry's groping hand came in contact with the knob by means of which it was opened.

Of course it moved outwardly, so that a heavy sea might not force its way inside during some tropical typhoon.

A Chinese junk is an ungainly craft in the eyes of sailors accustomed to the trim outlines of boats built upon the Clyde or in American waters. She rears her squatty shape out of the water much after the fashion of a Dutch galiot of olden days, and it takes some time and experience to realize what weatherly qualities may be in such a quaintly-formed vessel.

And yet a deal of comfort lies in some of these same junks, fashioned to cater to the tastes of native nabobs and powerful mandarins. The cabin is usually richly furnished, after the prevailing Chinese style, to be sure, but those who affect to sneer at all such clumsy pleasure craft would doubtless change their tune could they have a glimpse of their luxurious surroundings.

Larry, having clutched the brazen knob, which was fastened in fantastic guise, perhaps after the manner of a dragon's head, started to pull open the door.

It resisted all his efforts.

Whether the sheer weight was against him, or the door was held by some contrivance on the other side, Larry had no means of discovering—all he knew was that his most earnest efforts to drag it open were in vain.

Again he deemed himself signally fortunate in having such a robust comrade in the hunt.

Lord Rackett, seeing that his help was needed, stretched out a hand, took a good grip upon the metal knob, and with a sudden muscular contraction of his tremendous powers tore the door open, its mate also flying outward.

The cabin was before them.

Neither stopped to take an observation, but plunged boldly in.

It would have been the height of folly to have lingered even a second, a tempting of Providence, as it were, for the rasping voice still harangued the wretched Chinese, and some of the sailors, either stung into activity by this bitter goad, or the realization that their desperate enemies were on the retreat, had scrambled to their feet and were rushing pell-mell in the direction of the cabin entrance, yearning to get in at least one savage stroke ere this bold foe passed from the immediate range of their vision.

The two men had an indistinct view of a dimly-lighted compartment where sinken draperies hung, and many rich Oriental divans and pillows were scattered about.

Lord Rackett turned instantly to snap the doors shut and fasten them, if possible, against the projected intrusion.

He uttered a shout of delight when his eye discovered that the double doors could be rigidly fastened by means of a bar which, when dropped into certain metal arms foshioned for the purpose, might hold out against any ordinary force from without.

It was a close call.

Even as the weighty bar clanked into place, a hand was eagerly laid upon the dragon's head without and the door was shaken with a violence that spoke of extreme passion.

Little Plympton cared; with him a miss was as good as a mile, and he felt as though they were favored by fortune, being so placed as to hold the fort against the foe.

Meanwhile Larry had been enjoying something of an adventure—though one might perhaps question whether he fancied the sensation very much, for it certainly is not altogether conducive to the greatest pleasure in the world to have a small revolver thrust directly into one's face, with a nervous finger toying with the trigger.

That was Larry's experience.

He had not been looking for any such sudden meeting, and was for the moment rendered quite breathless by his recent labor and this really startling denouement.

At the same time a voice he should know, a voice that thrilled every fibre of his being, a voice he had been dearly wishing to hear, exclaimed in accents that spoke of bravery wrestling with womanly fear:

"Stand back, you villain! I may be trapped, but not conquered! Stand back, or——"

She left her sentence incomplete, for by this time she had been enabled to catch a glimpse of Larry's face, now wreathed in a huge grin of astonishment and pleasure.

"Larry! God be thanked!" came in accents of keenest delight, and in an instant the situation underwent a kaleidoscopic change.

The little man was threatened with death from a toy weapon at one moment, and the next he found himself in danger of the same violent end through being smothered.

For in the excess of her emotions, due to the revulsion of feeling upon discovering who this intruder on her privacy really was, Avis had gathered the little man in her arms and given him a genuine, hearty, cousinly hug.

Larry made no protest, not he; such things are like angels' visits, too few and far between, and he was ready to stand the consequences with the valor of a stoic, however short of breath the vigorous attack might leave him.

Besides, Larry infinitely preferred this sort of an assault to being compelled to face even a toy revolver that blinked into his left optic with threatening zeal.

Lord Rackett now came up, and Avis quickly held out her hand for him to clasp.

The dim past was forgotten.

Once she had dreaded contact with this man, at the time his soul was consumed with a mad love for her—once she had despised, aye, feared him as an enemy of her husband.

That was all gone.

The big Briton had conquered himself, and his life since had been in positive evidence of the sincerest reformation.

To-day, at this hour and minute, he was proving the wonderful change that had come over his nature, and, instead of taking risks in the endeavor to bring harm upon any whom she loved, was placing his own life in deadly peril, so that he might stand between Dr. Jack's widow and calamity.

And this with no other prospect of reward—at least that she knew anything about—than the pleasure that overwhelms one when the call of duty has been obeyed.

She therefore gladly gave him her hand, and thanked him with an eloquent look from her glorious blue eyes, now bright with tears that had been started by this sudden change from darkness to the dawn of new-born hope—tears that no danger could have forced her into showing.

And Plympton, thrilled by the touch of her hand, felt that his grievous errors of the wretched past had been freely and fully forgiven; and that henceforth she would look upon him as an honored and trusted friend

It were well worth enduring many times what he had gone through in order to gain the good-will and confidence of so charming a woman.

He experienced a solid satisfaction, such as had probably never come to him before in that other day when, urged on by jealousy and malice and envy, he had conspired to rob Dr. Jack of his wife as well as his fortune.

Lord Rackett was well aware, however, that the present was no time to indulge in these reflections; his work, although thus far successful to remarkable degree, could not by any means be regarded as completed—indeed, he felt it had only been fairly started.

Enemies were close at hand; the stout doors alone stood between them, and no doubt such clever rascals would speedily find a way of getting at the beleagured ones in the cabin.

This being the state of affairs, it behooved the two comrades to prepare for action and place themselves on a footing to meet any new emergency.

Their first move must be to restore their faithful weapons to a condition in which they would be able to do further damage should the exigencies of the case require it.

So Lord Rackett thrust a hand deep into one of his pockets.

Larry did likewise.

These hands came out holding extra cartridges.

"Load!" said Plympton.

There was a succession of clicking sounds and a tossing aside of empty brass shells—then both cylinders were freshly charged, and the new power had been placed at their disposal.

Now we can consider what may be done to further our escape," said Plympton, gravely.

"By Jove! What d'ye think of that, now?" snapped Larry, as he suddenly threw up an arm and discharged his weapon in the direction of a cabin window where the wriggling figure of a Chinese pirate could be seen pushing through.

CHAPTER XV.

Evidently the people of the junk did not intend to give up the ship or call off the dogs of war so easily, after all.

Because all the first round in the battle had gone against them was no sign of defeat; he laughs loudest who laughs last; and so long as the Russian could control his voice, with Chinamen to obey his commands, there was little or no danger of his crying quits.

Larry had taken a snap-shot at the chap so industriously engaged in the endeavor to enter by the window.

He had no positive means of knowing whether he had struck him or not, but at all events the result was the same for the fellow vacated his lodgings in such quick order that it was utterly impossible to say whether he clambered aloft or dropped into the dark river.

Lord Rackett sprang to the spot, ready to present his particular compliments to any others who might be attracted by the prospect of another "grand opening," but the prompt action taken in the case of the leader served as a check upon their actions, since none put in an appearance.

There was now time to examine their situation with a view to extracting all the comfort possible out of it.

Taken as a whole, the condition of affairs was decidedly unique.

There they were shut up in a cabin of a hostile junk, with vengeful enemies on deck, and drifting down the river.

What would be the end? A score of things might happen to them, any one of which could only be considered with a shudder.

Even the sea lay beyond, and there were many ways in which their enemies might force them into a surrender, or accomplish their destruction if it came to that desperate end. In imagination Lord Rackett could see the junk beaten by one of those fierce temests that sweep the Chinese coast, born of tropical influences amid the islands of the Eastern seas, or else engulfed in flames, with not a boat remaining in which to escape.

The prospect was not alluring.

Indeed, it presented a grim aspect to even such an old and tried campaigner as himself.

Not that he had any idea of submitting to the pleasure of those on deck one minute longer than was absolutely necessary.

Such acquiescence would not have been in accordance with the nature of the man.

Escape from the floating prison they must, and with Avis in their company.

But how was it to be done?

That was the all-important question.

The situation was unparalleled. Plympton could rack his brain and not find anything in his stormy past that held a candle to it.

This threw him entirely upon such resources as the cabin of the junk offered, backed up by the inventive abilities of himself and comrade, which it may be understood were of no mean order.

They could tell from the motion of the boat that the junk still floated, and, so far as they were able to detect, no movement was in progress looking toward reaching land.

It evidently quite suited the purposes of those on board to keep afloat while wrestling with the unique problem they had on their hands.

Plympton looked out of the stern window in which the piratical chap had been lodged at the time Larry gave him his compliments.

It was some little distance over the sombre-looking water of the river, but a valorous man would have thought little about making the plunge when his life was at stake.

This method of procedure was not in his mind just at present; some other means of escape would have to be considered, since they had a lady to look after.

He glanced back over the course they had come.

Lights could be seen about the city, but after all it made a miserable showing, considering the immensity of space covered. Chinese methods are still of the antiquated kind that were good enough for their ancestors. Should they insult the reverend memory of those worshipful generations by deserving better?

Perhaps Plympton had cherished a hope that a boat of some kind might be trailing astern of the junk.

Alas! there was no sign of one, and whatever fancies clustered about this chance vanished in thin smoke.

Then he looked up.

To clamber out of the window and gain the poop deck of the junk was certainly feasible, since one of the sailors had effected a reverse movement.

What good would it accomplish? He could not thus gain the mastery of the boat and send her ashore.

Evidently the game was to be fought out from another vantage point, and he must look within for means of continuing the contest.

So Larry was posted to cover this weak place, where the open windows invited an assault, while Plympton examined the cabin in order to obtain his bearings.

Avis had recovered her usual self-possession and watched these manoeuvres with considerable interest.

She quickly comprehended that Lord Rackett hoped to find some means of leaving the cabin besides the door or the window, and presently joined him in the search.

It seemed useless, however.

While they were speculating as to what might lie beneath the cabin floor, Plympton felt a trembling movement under his feet.

His first thought was that the junk had struck some floating object—then it flashed into his head that mayhap the rascals had started to scuttle the vessel, hoping that those in the cabin might drown like rats.

The most amazing fancies are apt to surge into one's mind when an earthquake thrill makes the footing insecure.

Again he felt that strong quiver beneath his feet.

Then it suddenly dawned upon him that some unknown person was endeavoring to raise a board in the cabin floor.

There was, after all, a cavity or hold, beneath, and a means of reaching it from the cabin; but the sagacious enemy had taken possession of it first, and thus shattered any dreams he may have indulged in.

Lord Rackett was a very accommodating man; at least his friends all thought so

He sympathized with the aspirations of those whom circumstances kept down and who were ambitiously trying to rise above the environments.

Now, he could only give a rough guess as to the identity of the man who from below was endeavoring to raise the trap in the cabin floor, nor was he in a position to fully decide what his designs might be, but somehow he felt that here was a chance where assistance and appreciation were needed.

Accordingly Plympton stepped suddenly back, and, relieved of his weight, the trap, owing to the tremendous pressure below, flew up into the air.

With it came the head and half the body of a very dirty and extremely astonished Chinaman, who, never suspecting the true cause of the resistance, had been doing his level best to accomplish the work in hand.

Of course, he had no idea of coming into the cabin, but such a warm-hearted and generous-minded fellow as Lord Rackett could not bear to refuse a favor, since he hated to see any one left out in the cold.

Acting upon this impulse he had stooped down and laid hold of the fellow by the neck ere he could recover sufficiently from his stupefaction to dodge.

Not understanding this philanthropic action on the part of the big Englishman, the yellow fellow began to wriggle and squirm after the manner of a serpent, doubtless under the mistaken notion that he could in this way slip out of the clutches of his master.

A less muscular man would have lost him most assuredly, but Lord Rackett had landed many a lordly salmon, and he slapped this contortionist upon the cabin floor with a vigor that warned him to desist.

The trap had fallen in its place again. Evidently if there were other fellows below, they had been frightened off by the fate that so suddenly befell their leader, for, according to the ethics of warfare in vogue among themselves, he must be a dead herring ere this.

Plympton begged Avis to secure some cord, and when this had been brought he wrapped his captive in it, arms at his sides, until he was little better than a mummy.

"Let them only come one at a time, and we will soon have the whole gang in limbo; but I fear they have taken the alarm, and mean to try other methods," was what he said.

There was a reason for his belief.

Already sounds came from the direction of the doors, sounds that indicated a gathering of the clans in that quarter.

Lord Rackett had faith in the bar, but still it was not irresistible, and the crew of the junk might yet find some means of clearing away this stout barrier to their progress.

Indeed, they appeared to be working upon that theory at the present moment.

Bang!

Lord Racket uttered an exclamation.

He had seen the effect of this concussion on the doors, and realized that it would not take a very great number of such blows to weaken, aye, utterly demolish their barrier.

There was no mystery about it at all.

The Russian diplomat had gone back to antiquated methods of warfare, but which under certain conditions were just as efficacious to-day as in the times of the stone-throwing catapult.

A fragment of mast or spar had been obtained, which, put in action by the Chinese, was being made to do duty as a battering ram.

Such an object in the hands of men entirely great, and used for such a purpose, is mightier than the sword.

It looked as though the temporary security which had been achieved through the strategy of the two friends was about to be shattered and give way once more to the stir of battle.

Lord Rackett's first thought was in the direction of strengthening the doors, but he almost immediately realized how utterly impossible such a thing must prove.

Then it became evident that a meeting must take place, and that he and Larry would be only wise in taking time by the forelock and making such preparations to receive their foes as lay in their power.

(To be continued).

BRAVERY IS REWARDED.

Carter Receives the English Royal Humane Society's Reward.

The Royal Humane Society at its annual meeting in London, England, the other day, awarded the Stanhope gold medal for the most daring rescue of the year to John Stockton, a baker's carter, of Warrington.

The heroic action for which this honor has been conferred took place on March 6, when a workman while engaged in cleaning a sewer was overcome by foul gas and became unconscious. Two fellow-workmen who went to his help were also struck down.

Stockton volunteered to try to save them, but on going down the manhole was at first driven back by the deadly gas. A second attempt was more successful, and he brought up one man alive. A third and fourth time he went down and brought up the other two, but one of them was dead.

ARTFUL MRS. WITHERBY.

Witherby—"I've invited a fellow here to dinner to-morrow night."

Mrs. Witherby—"Oh, my dear, what did you do that for? Why, the new cook is coming to-morrow, and you know it will be just awful."

Witherby—"I don't see anything awful about it. Give him what we've got. I guess it's good enough."

Mrs. Witherby—"That's just like a man. You don't seem to care for appearances at all. Can't you put him off?"

Witherby—"No, I can't. The ideal I invite a friend to dinner, and my wife protests. But, madam, he comes just the same. As long as I am running this house I propose to do as I please."

Mrs. Witherby—"Who is it?"

Witherby—"Wigson. You know him, don't you?"

Mrs. Witherby (seized with an inspiration)—"Know him! I should say I did. Why, he's an old sweetheart of mine."

Witherby—"I guess not."

Mrs. Witherby—"But he is. Have him to dinner by all means. Oh, I should just love to see him! How he used to make love to me!"

Witherby—"He did, eh?"

Mrs. Witherby—"Yes, indeed. It was only by the merest chance that I didn't become his wife. This is indeed a pleasure. Dear boy! Let's see; I haven't seen Charlie Wigson for four years."

Witherby (dryly)—"You haven't, eh? Well, I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't see him for four more."

Mrs. Witherby (feigning great disappointment)—"Oh, you haven't changed your mind, have you? Aren't you going to bring him to dinner?"

Witherby—"No, madam, I'm not."

And Mrs. Witherby, having gained her point, glided blandly from the room.

QUITE GENEROUS.

One Sunday recently a lady went into a church in a town to which she was a stranger and asked to be shown to a seat. The sidesman conducted her to a back seat in the gallery, the only other occupant at the time being an old gentleman, who rose to let her pass.

It was somewhat dark, and the lady, as she shook her skirts and settled down, had a horrible suspicion that she was sitting on something besides the cushion. She put out her hand and drew forth the sad remains of a silk hat.

"Oh," she said to the old gentleman, "I beg your pardon. I'm so sorry."

The old gentleman looked at the melancholy ruin, and replied that it could not be helped.

"Oh, it's truly generous of you to say so," said the lady, "but I'm afraid you're angry."

"Not in the least," said the old gentleman, straightening out the hat and placing it under the seat; "you see, it's not my hat. It belongs to Mr. ——, who showed you in!"

At an election meeting recently the candidate was somewhat troubled by a man in the audience, who at length became offensively personal. "Is it true that your mother washes——" he began; but before he could add the word "clothes" the witty candidate called out smartly: "Of course she does; why, don't you?" This raised a loud laugh at the disturber's expense; but, still undaunted, he returned to the attack. "You can't deny," he said, "that your father was a rag-and-bone man. I bought some old clothes off him thirty years ago." "And I see you're still wearing them!" was the candidate's lightning retort.

THE ADVANTAGES OF WEALTH.

Doctor — "Is the cough any easier, madam?

Patient — I think not. Marie, cough for the doctor as you heard me this morning.