

A DYING PROMISE

OR, THE MISSING
WILL

CHAPTER VII.

The next few weeks left upon Jessie's mind a lasting impression of Philip, hollow-eyed and desperate, sitting before piles of papers and books, and sometimes breaking off to lean back in his chair, push his hands wildly through his hair until it literally stood on end, and gaze distractedly before him.

"Let me help you. I believe that I could at least do those things as well as you," she said once; "you are not made for business."

"You poor dear kitten," he replied with a tender smile, "I wonder what you are made for, except to be taken care of."

Then he plunged into the papers again, troubled not so much by his supposed incapacity for business, as by the unpleasing revelations the papers yielded, and wondering what demon had tempted Mr. Meade to speculate so madly.

By the time he rejoined his regiment his labors were so far rewarded that he knew how Mr. Meade's affairs stood, and found that when all was arranged and the mill sold, they might still hope to rescue a small residuum for Jessie, as they eventually did.

But those things were not so quickly effected, and when he bid Jessie good-by it was with the assurance that he should constantly be running down to Cleeve to consult with Mr. Cheeseman and transact business.

As he left Cleeve farther and farther behind a great weight rolled from Philip's breast. The few weeks that had passed since that night of music and mirth when he had been so rudely awakened to the homely tragedy of life, had been too full of sorrow and care; his youth rebelled against them. When he drove toward the barracks and the familiar cheerful notes of a bugle rang out upon the clear air, all the suffering and care and death of the last weeks faded away like a bad dream. How cheery the smart step of a firing-party returning to barracks sounded. How pleasant it was to see the sentries pacing up and down, how gay were the red coated soldiers strolling to and from the barracks in thicker clusters near the gates, thinner farther off, like bees about the entrance of a hive.

A few days later he was searching for something he mislaid, rummaging among clothes and making confusion worse confounded, after the petulant fashion of male creatures under small discomforts, when he took the uniform worn at the ball and dashed it angrily on the floor. As it fell a small hard substance dropped from a

pocket and rolled into a patch of sunlight with a ruddy scintillation from the sparkling facets of a jewel. He looked blankly at the glowing stone for a second, its rosy hue reflected in his face, and then picked it up remembering how it had flashed at the white throat of his pretty partner Miss Maynard. It was then set in a locket; it had fallen from its setting during the dance, and at her request he had searched for and found it and put in his pocket for safety. He did not know much about jewels, but this one struck him as being large for a ruby, and Miss Maynard had expressed some concern about it. The thing was vexatious; the Maynards had sailed for India, he had no means of finding their address. By this time they were probably rounding the Cape, and by this time the intimate social relations on shipboard had no doubt done their work and Miss Ada had doubtless promised her butterfly affections to some fellow-passenger—some long-legged idiot with a sabre clanking at his heels, Philip reflected. He could do nothing but place the stone in safety and seize the first opportunity of restoring it to its owner. It lay in the palm of his hand, the brilliance flashing from its deep crimson heart, like a live thing. Dark rose red like joy and love, sparkling with the sparkle of wine and mirth, the shining gem seemed to disclose a new world to him. His hand thrilled with vague desire that the jewel, lightly and imperceptibly quivering, shook back the sun rays in a thousand sharp, bright flashes. Some dim recollections of magic in jewels, of fascination exercised upon men and women, by those fiery-hearted things came to him; was there not enchantment in this? Though he did not know it, blood had been shed for that stone's sake, it had flashed from the dim shrine of an Indian Temple upon dusky worshippers and strange heathen rites, had glowed in the turban of an Indian prince, had been stolen, swallowed, bought and sold, set and reset, given in love, given in tribute before it came to deck the throat of a thoughtless girl, who lost it.

He held it long in his open palm, absorbed in a kind of dream, then he closed his fingers over the red radiance and shut it away in a dark safe place.

"Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens
through thee are fresh and strong."

He said to himself, and his face was

sad until he went out into the bright spring sunshine and thought of other things.

Jessie remained at the mill, clinging to the old empty nest, poor forlorn bird that she was. Bills announcing the sale of the furniture were pasted on the garden wall and the mill-front, but while the chairs and tables still remained, Jessie begged not to be moved.

It was now early April, the almond tree by the gate spread a mass of pink blossoms against the pale blue sky, violets and hyacinths were sweet in the borders, the flowering currant made a pungent fragrance in the sunshine and attracted the bees from the hives at the top of the garden—even the bees were to be sold. Jessie strolled over the little domain of which she had all her life been queen with an overflowing heart bidding a mute farewell to her lie-long friends, animate and inanimate. The garden, the arbor, in which her father had smoked on summer evenings, the strawberry-beds, the garden-plots, she and Philip had called their own, the little house he had built in the wood-yard, the swing in the orchard, the flowers her mother had cultivated and loved, the pigeons and poultry, the row of bee-hives, all were beloved, all twined with life-long associations, they were part of herself, without them she would not longer be Jessie. She looked in at the grated dairy window and pictured her mother busy among the pans of thick creamed milk, or turning and working great golden masses of butter with a quick, deft hand; she would never see her any more; a stranger would stand there and desecrate the place with an alien touch. Jessie's throat swelled chokingly and she turned away, passing the mill, over the half-door of which she would never more see her father leaning, as she half expected to see him lean now. Past the mill, whence the soothing homelike throb, throb, still issued, though he was not there to set the familiar pulse going, she strolled into the meadow, full now of young innocent-faced daisies, where the stately willow dropped leafless above the clear water and the white swan glided over it, her pure plumage dazzling in the spring sunbeams. How often she had played or dreamed there, careless and happy in the willow's shade, watching the water striving with perpetual baffling to climb the wheel's always turning stair, wasting and scattering itself in crystal spray in its fruitless endeavor. She used to be sorry for the baffled water till Philip laughed at her and showed her how the endeavor was not indeed fruitless, but set all the wheels and cogs going to grind the corn into meal for men's food. Others would watch the turning wheel, and pity the water's weary baffling, and she would be away and lonely among strangers; but Philip dear Philip, was left—she was not all desolate. Then the singing of birds fell pleasantly on her ears, and she went back to the house, thinking that perhaps it was well she was to leave the old home, after all. She went in through the kitchen, where she sat awhile to talk to Sarah and

to be comforted and companioned a little.

"I can't give up this yer dresser, Miss Jessie," Sarah said, "the years and years I've a scoured on kep on white. I be gwine to bid for he. You go on in and hev tea now, I've a made ye some scones, and there's a letter from Master Philip."

Jessie went into the parlor with something more of a dance in her step than it had had for a long time, and eagerly opened Philip's letter.

Poor Jessie! the letter was dropped on the table, the golden head was upon it, and she was crying bitterly. Philip was ordered to India!

He had kept it from her as long as he could, but he was coming down on the morrow and could not bear the telling by word of mouth, so broke it in the letter. He would remain in England as long as possible, not sailing in the troopship, but starting later, taking the short overland route and joining his regiment on its arrival at Calcutta.

He arrived in Cleeve on the day the mill was given over to the auctioneer, and saw Jessie in Miss Blushford's drawing room, feeling half guilty at leaving her.

"How well you are looking, child," he said with forced gaiety; "why, I do believe you are grown."

He held her at arm's length, as if to get a better view of her, but his glance travelled no higher than her shoulders and she saw that there was a faint quiver on his lip.

"I am grown," she replied, "I have grown very fast this spring," Jessie's lip quivered too; neither of them knew what to say, the subject of the parting was too painful, they sat side by side on Miss Blushford's ample old-fashioned sofa which was covered with needle-work from past and present pupils, and looked sorrowfully at the well-saved carpet for some minutes.

"Jessie," said Philip at last, "it breaks my heart to think of leaving you just now, but—I will not go if you tell me to stay."

"But how can you help it?" she asked, surprised.

"I can sell out," he replied.

"But if you sold out, Philip, what could you do?" Jessie asked, simply.

"Heaven knows. I might learn farming or some trade," he answered; "anything would be better than to leave you if you felt it would be too lonely."

"You must not sell out," she said gently. "You forget that you are going to be a great soldier. Why, you always hoped for India, Phil." "Yes," he replied, still looking at the neat carpet, so seldom profaned by the steps of men, "if only I could be sure you were happy here, that no harm would come to you." He paused and sighed, his heart was riven asunder by the two duties, one calling him abroad, one bidding him stay with Jessie. While away from her it had seemed comparatively easy to leave her, but now, in her presence and touched by the added sorrow he felt rather than saw in the child's thin face, it seemed impossible. "If you could say that you didn't much care—that you could make yourself happy for this

year until you could come out to me—whatever we may wish—they refuse their consent to your marriage till you are eighteen."

"I should think so," she interrupted, a faint rose tinging her transparent face. "It is no use to fret. You have to go to India, I have to stay here. After all, you may as well be in India as at Plymouth or Aldershot. You can't very well live at Miss Blushford's, you see. And I can't very well live in barracks. Miss Blushford says it will improve my style to write to you by every mail. And you will be able to describe your tiger hunts and—oh! all the wonderful things you will do and see—"

Jessie's eyes were full of tears though she was laughing, her voice broke into a little sob; but Philip's heart grew light as he listened, grateful to her for taking it so easily and sparing him the lamentations that would have made things so much worse. Yet he wondered that she was so slightly constituted and could take things so lightly.

"I am glad at least to be able to see you settled at Miss Blushford's," he said; "she is a kind old woman and must of course be prim in her position, and that will be all the better, it would be impossible to place you in safer hands. Shall you like it, Jessie?"

It was a crime even to look out of the window in that house, while to say one hated anything was shocking and unladylike; she wondered if prisons could be more cramping; but it was better than living altogether with Cousin Jane, her only alternative.

"I shall do very well here," she replied; "but you don't know what it is to be a girl and be taken care of. If I were but a boy and could knock about as I liked!"

"You little rebel!" he exclaimed, "A precious pickle you would be as a boy; you would want a thrashing a day at least."

(To be Continued.)

FIRE WALKERS IN FIJI.

Step Along on Red Hot Stones Without Any Injury.

Those who witnessed the coronation procession will doubtless recollect a small group of copper-colored soldiers, with bare legs and outstanding hair innocent of covering. These strange people—Fijians—and their ancient ceremony of the Vilavilavevo, of fire walking, were the subject of a paper read by W. L. Allardyce, C.M.G., at a meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute recently. Admiral Sir N. Bowden-Smith presided.

The ceremony of fire walking, Mr. Allardyce explained, is performed by a certain tribe at the island of Bega, and originated in a legend that in reward for having spared the life of a man he had dug out of the ground, one Tuivakalita was invested with the power of being able to walk over red-hot stones without being burned. An earth oven is made and filled with layers of wood and stone. In this a fire is kindled about twelve hours before the fire walking takes place, and, when the hot stones have been exposed by brushing away the charcoal, the natives, under the direction of a master of ceremonies, walk over them barefooted.

The temperature at the edge of the oven is about 120 degrees Fahrenheit, while on one occasion, when a thermometer was suspended over the stones, it registered 282 degrees, and the solder was melted. Yet, stated Mr. Allardyce, after the ceremony the natives show no signs of the terrific ordeal through which they have gone. By means of a number of views the lecturer gave a realistic idea of the ceremony as performed nowadays.

Vice-Admiral Lewis Beaumont described a fire walking ceremony, as witnessed by himself. Although those who took part in it showed no signs of discomfort, he remarked that apparently they did not like it overmuch.

Replying to questions, Mr. Allardyce said the only explanation he could give of the apparent immunity from harm following on the process was that the soles of the feet of the natives were hardened to an unusual degree through constant walking on a sandy soil, covering coral, which became exceedingly hot under the sun. There was also the element of absolute belief by the natives in the legend that they were proof against fire.

HIS GREAT HEAD.

Farmer Honk.—I s'pose your nephew has been a great help to you since he graduated from the academy?

Farmer Bentover.—Well, no—not so's you could notice it. You see, he's been so busy 'iggerin' on a plan for interestin' capital in a scheme to build a railroad from Hudson Bay to Paragua, and make the everlasting fortunes of everybody connected with it, by shippin' broken icebergs to Paragua, where they don't have ice, and carryin' back pampas' plumes to Hudson Bay—it's kept him so steadily engaged, in fact, that he hain't had time to do anything else but eat.

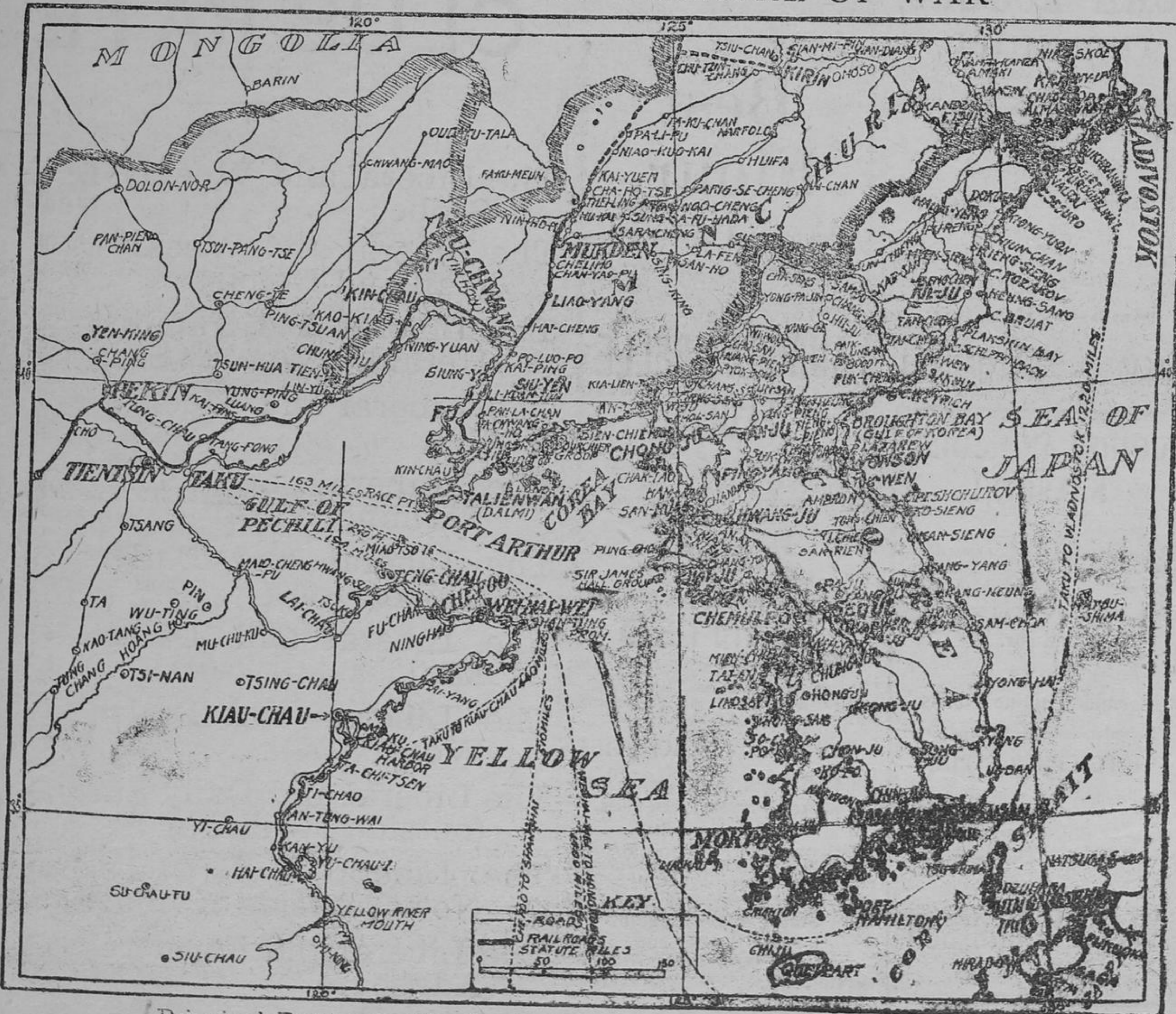
THE RETORT DISCOURTEOUS.

Scene—A public meeting of a non too successful mining company.

Shareholder addressing chairman.—"You, sir, deserve to be pelted with rotten eggs." (Cheers.)

Complacent chairman.—"I am indeed sorry, sir, if you cannot find a better use for your brains than throwing them at me!" (Uproar.)

GENERAL VIEW OF THEATRE OF WAR



Principal Routes in Far East—Showing Distances in English Miles.