

Henty George Alfred

**With the Allies to Peking: A Tale
of the Relief of the Legations**



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George Alfred Henty

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PREFACE

The campaign which ended with the relief of the Peking Legations is unique in its way, carried on as it was by an army made up of almost all the nationalities of Europe. The quarrel originated in the rising of a mob of ruffians who were known by us under the name of Boxers. The movement spread like wildfire, and soon developed into the wholesale massacre of the missionaries of Northern China. The Empress, seeing the formidable nature of the rising, and hoping to gain by it the expulsion of all foreigners from her dominions, allied herself with the Boxers, besieged the various Legations, and attacked Tientsin, which stands upon the river by which the trade with Peking is carried on. Admiral Seymour, with a force of little over a thousand men, marched to the relief of the Legations. The railway, however, was cut both before and behind him, and after severe fighting he retired upon a Chinese fortress a few miles

from Tientsin, where he maintained himself until he was relieved by another force which had arrived by sea and had destroyed the forts at the mouth of the river. Tientsin itself was captured by the allies after one day's hard fighting, and the army then advanced to the relief of the Legations. The opposition they met with was trifling in comparison with that which they had encountered at Tientsin, and they arrived at Peking not a moment too soon. It was found that the Legations had been very hard pressed, some of them having been destroyed by fire. But the garrison had maintained a heroic defence, aided by the native Christians who had escaped the massacre and taken refuge with them, and who had done excellent work in the building and constant repair of the defences, sometimes under the heavy fire of the enemy. The Empress had fled, but negotiations were opened with her and terms of peace were ultimately agreed to. For the particulars of the campaign I have relied chiefly upon *The War of the Civilizations*, by George Lynch, *China and the Powers*, by H. C. Thomson, and *The Siege of Peking Legations*, by the Rev. Roland Allen, M. A.

G. A. HENTY.

CHAPTER I

SCHOOL

“Well, Rex, how do you think you will like school?”

“I don’t know very much about it yet, Uncle. You told me that I was to expect to be bothered and bullied a bit just at first, but it was not so bad as I supposed. I was asked a lot of questions, and when I said I had been taken to China when I was a year old and lived there ever since, they gave me the nickname of the Heathen Chinee at once. Of course I did not mind that at all. You told me that probably they would give me a nickname of some sort, and that was just as good as another. Anyhow, after the first two days they let me alone. I came off better than some of the other new boys, who got out of temper to begin with; so I expect it is all over as far as I am concerned now.”

“I expect so, Rex. The boy who takes things good–temperedly is soon left alone.”

The speakers were Mr. Bateman and his nephew Reginald, who was always known as Rex. They had landed at Southampton a month before. Mr. Bateman, who was a member of a firm of merchants at Tientsin, had returned to England to take up the management of the London house, the senior partner having died. Rex was the son of James, the younger brother of the two remaining partners. As soon as it had been arranged that the elder

brother should return to England, it was agreed that he should take Rex with him. It had for some time been a settled thing that the boy should come home for three or four years in order to associate with English boys and learn their ways, and at the end of that time should return to China and begin to learn the business. Robert, now the chief partner, was unmarried, and as it was therefore probable that Rex would some day become in turn the head of the firm, both his father and uncle were anxious that he should be prepared as far as possible for that position.

Rex would have been sent over sooner had they not been afraid that he might altogether forget Chinese, which he now spoke as well as English. From his early childhood he had been principally under the charge of a Chinaman named Ah Lo, who had been chosen from among the Chinese servants for that post. Ah Lo had at that time been a strong young fellow of eighteen years of age, intelligent and good-tempered. He was the son of the native storekeeper, and the child had taken to him. The choice had been a good one. The lad had watched over his charge with the care of a woman. He regarded it as a great honour to have been chosen for the post, and was never so happy as when he took the child out, perched on his shoulder, or rowed him about in a sampan. As he grew up Rex had to spend half of his time at his books, and his mother kept him a good deal with her, as it was as necessary that he should speak English perfectly, and receive the usual education, as that he should speak Chinese perfectly. And then, when it was decided that his uncle should return to

England, it was at once agreed that Rex should accompany him.

“I should be glad,” his father said, “if he could go to a great public school, and then to one of the universities; but there are two objections to that course. In the first place, when he was finished he would be less inclined to settle down to office work here; and in the second place, he would entirely forget Chinese. He might pick it up again, but he would never come to speak it like a native – an accomplishment which would unquestionably be a very great advantage to him in many ways. You and I, Robert, can get on fairly well, but we help our Chinese largely with pidgin English, and often feel the disadvantage of not being able to talk fluently to the people in their own language. Of course I quite agree with you that it is necessary for Rex to mix with English boys of his own age, and become in all respects like them, but I am sorry to think that in four years he will have lost a great deal of his Chinese.”

“I have been thinking of that too, James, and my idea is that it would be a good thing to take Ah Lo to England with us. He is very much attached to the boy, and the boy to him.”

“Yes,” the other said doubtfully, “that is so; but it would not be possible to have Ah Lo with him when he is at school.”

“Quite impossible, James; the boy’s life, even if it could be managed, would be made a burden to him. No, I should propose that Ah Lo should remain with me. He is a useful fellow in many respects, and when Rex is engaged with his lessons, he, like most of his countrymen, can turn his hand to anything. My idea is

that we arrange with the master of the school to let Rex off two afternoons and evenings in the week. He could then meet Ah Lo at the railway-station, or at some other place a little distance from the school, and could go out for walks with him, and if there is a river, go on the water, or make an excursion by rail. In that way, as they would be together for five or six hours twice a week, Rex could keep up his Chinese. Of course I should choose some school within a reasonable distance of London. I shall probably take a house eight or ten miles out of town, near Surbiton, or somewhere in that direction. We have agreed that Rex cannot go to one of the great public schools, as, although perhaps better read in English literature and history than most boys of his age, he is backward in Latin and mathematics. Still, I could find some good school, say within ten or fifteen miles of my house. Moreover, the plan I suggest could not be carried out at a public school. It would not be permissible, at such an institution, for boys to break through the ordinary routine, but I have no doubt that I could make the arrangement I propose at what you may call a good school, other than Harrow, or Eton, or Winchester.”

“It would certainly be a capital plan, Robert.”

“Of course I should see that his off-days were not the half-holidays, because we want him to learn to play cricket and football, and he would be out of it altogether if he were to lose the half-holidays. I see no reason why the plan should not be carried out. In that way he would keep up the language, and at the same

time would take part in the games played in the school. In winter I should arrange for the use of a comfortable room in the town, where they could sit and talk. I shall let Ah Lo wear his native clothes, if he likes, at my place; but when he goes to meet Rex I shall put him into European costume and make him twist his pigtail up and hide it under his hat. If any of Rex's school chums were to see the boy about with a Chinaman, he would never hear the end of it."

On his arrival in England Mr. Bateman had taken a furnished house near Surbiton, and had made the arrangements he wished for Rex at a large school near the river, some fifteen miles away. Rex had now returned at the end of his first fortnight. He was soon at home in his new life, and ere long became very popular among the boys of his own age. His good temper was unflinching, for although at first he was somewhat awkward in the games, he very speedily picked them up. As usual with new boys, he had one or two fights, and came out of them fairly well. Several of the boys learned boxing from a sergeant in the Guards, who came down from Windsor twice a week to teach them. Rex asked that he might be allowed to take lessons, and his uncle readily agreed.

"Certainly you may do so, Rex, and I am glad to find that you have the opportunity of learning how to use your hands. It is a valuable accomplishment for anyone, for it develops self-reliance and quickness of eye, strengthens the muscles, and improves the figure and carriage, and besides, it enables a man to hold his own in any circumstances; lastly, it is of special benefit

to anyone living abroad and liable to aggression or insult. An Englishman who can box well is a match for any two foreigners knowing nothing of the art, and need not fear the attack of any one man unless he is carrying firearms. I intended to propose that you should take lessons in the holidays, but as you can do so at school, by all means begin at once. Keep regularly at it, and the last year before you go back to China you shall have lessons from one of the best masters I can find.”

Rex found himself very backward, so he set to work hard to repair his deficiencies, and had the satisfaction, at the end of the first term, of getting a remove into a higher form, where the boys were for the most part about his own age. At first many questions had been asked as to the reason why he was allowed to get off school two afternoons in the week; and when he said that as he would return to China when he left school, it was necessary that he should keep up a knowledge of the language, there was a good deal of amusement. Once or twice in his walks with Ah Lo he came across some of the boys, who were fond of hunting for plants or insects, and he was a good deal chaffed at Ah Lo's appearance.

“I thought he would have been dressed in Chinese clothes,” said one of his friends, “with little turn-up-toe shoes, and a skull-cap with a peacock's feather in it, but he is really quite an ordinary-looking chap. He is a big fellow, and of course of a yellowish-brown complexion, with queerly-shaped eyes, which make him look as if he squinted; but he seems very good-

natured.”

“He has got a pigtail, but he wears it under his coat,” said another.

“I should think that he would be an awkward customer in a tussle. I had no idea the Chinese were such big fellows, Bateman.”

“They differ in height in some of the Provinces, but a great many of them are tall, and very strong. You should see them loading a ship or carrying things through the streets. They can carry a good deal heavier weight than most English sailors. They are generally very good-tempered, but they get into a tremendous state of excitement sometimes, and holla and shout at each other so, that you would think they would tear each other to pieces; but it is not often that they really come to blows.”

At the beginning of the next term Ah Lo distinguished himself. He had been for a long walk up the river-bank with Rex, when they saw three of the boys of the school rowing. A barge was coming down, towed by a horse. There was plenty of room inside for the boat to pass, and the rope was trailing in the water, but just as they were about to row over it the man who was riding the horse suddenly quickened his pace. The rope immediately tightened, and catching the bow of the boat turned it over, throwing the boys into the water. The driver and a bargee, who was walking on the bank near them, burst into shouts of loud laughter. The boys could all swim, and as the overturned boat was but twelve yards from the bank, they soon clambered up. They at

once made for the driver and furiously accused him of upsetting them on purpose. The fellows laughed boisterously, and the boys, losing their tempers, made a rush towards them. At this moment Ah Lo and Rex arrived on the scene. They had witnessed the whole affair, and had run up. The Chinaman, without hesitation, brought his stick down on the head of the driver of the horse, levelling him to the ground, but breaking the weapon in his hand. The bargee made a sudden rush. Ah Lo had no idea of fighting, but with a wild shout he threw himself upon the man, striking, shouting, scratching, and kicking.

The bargee was taken wholly by surprise at such a novel assault, and stepped farther and farther back till Ah Lo, seeing his opportunity, clasped him by the waist and hurled him into the river.

“You bery bad man,” he exclaimed, “to strikee lillee boy! You upsettee piecee boat; you comee out Ah Lo breakie you head.”

The bargee stood with the water up to his waist. He did not like the look of this strange adversary, who had, moreover, allies in the shape of four boys, all of whom were evidently prepared to take their part in the fray.

“Tompkins,” Rex said, “you might as well swim in and get those two oars that have drifted down. You cannot be wetter than you are, and if these fellows want any more the oars would come in wonderfully handy.”

“Now then,” shouted the bargee with a string of the strongest possible language, “how long are you going to keep me standing

here, and my mate a-lying there with his brains half knocked out?"

"He is all right," Rex said; "he will come round soon without your help, I dare say. He will have a lump on his head to-morrow, but he will be no worse. I don't think he will try to tighten the rope and upset another boat. As soon as we get the oars you can come ashore, if you like, and see to him."

In a minute or two Tompkins landed with the two oars. Rex gave one of them to Ah Lo, and took the other himself. The Chinaman swung it round his head like a windmill, and then nodded with a satisfied air.

"Now the sooner you three get the boat ashore and turn her over the better," Rex said. "There is no fear of this fellow interfering with us again. Now you can come ashore, bargee, and look after your horse. In another minute the rope will pull him into the river if you don't mind."

The man came out with a growl, and then went to the horse and, taking him by the head, led him up along the bank until the stream drifted the barge alongside. By this time his companion had sat up and was looking round in a bewildered way.

"You just sit where you are," Rex said, "unless you want another crack on the head worse than the first. Your mate is getting the barge alongside. It does not always pay, you see, to play tricks on boys."

They waited until the others had got the water emptied out of the boat and put into the river again. The oars were then

handed in to them and they started down the river, Rex and Ah Lo walking quietly down the path. The bargee scowled at them as they passed him, but the specimen he had had of the Chinaman's strength deterred him from making any outward demonstration.

"You did that splendidly, Ah Lo," Rex said. "I had no idea that you were so tremendously strong. The way you chucked him into the river astounded me as much as it did him."

"He was a bad man," the Chinaman said quietly. "What he want to upset boat for?"

"He will be cautious how he tries again," Rex laughed, "unless he sees that the towing-path is quite clear of anyone who might interfere."

Hitherto Rex had been a good deal chaffed by the boys about this Chinaman, but from this time forward Ah Lo was always spoken of with respect; and indeed a subscription was got up to present him with a handsome silver-mounted stick in place of the one he had broken. There was general satisfaction at the defeat of the bargee, for it was not the first time that boats had been purposely upset, and there was a standing feud between the boys and these bullies of the river.

It cannot be said that Rex was in any way distinguished in his progress with his studies. He was on the modern side of the school, for his uncle did not wish him to waste his time in learning Latin and Greek, which could be of no possible use to him in a career in China. In his English subjects he made fair progress, and maintained a good, though by no means a high, position in

his form. In all sports, however, he took a prominent place among the boys of his own age. Accustomed to take swimming exercise daily, he was, when fifteen, the fastest swimmer in the school. He won several prizes in the athletic sports, and had a good chance of getting into the second eleven at cricket. It was considered certain, too, that he would have a place in the second football team. Before he left, at sixteen, he had gained both these objects of his ambition, and it was generally considered that he might even win a place in the first football team in the following season.

“You would be light for it,” the captain said, “but you are so fast and active that you would be more useful than many of the fellows who are a good deal heavier than you are.”

“I am sorry I am not going to return after this term, but my time is up. I have been nearly four years away from my people now, and I shall be glad to be at work.”

“I suppose it is not a bad life out there?”

“Not at all. Of course it is hot, but one is indoors most of the day, and they do all they can to make the houses cool. The office shuts up early. After that one takes a bath and puts on flannels, and goes for a ride or a row on the river. Of course I could not do much that way then, but I have been so much on the water here that it will be much jollier now.”

“I suppose you don’t have much to do with the Chinese?”

“They work as porters and that sort of thing, but otherwise we do not see much of them. The native town is quite separate from the British portion, and it is not often that Europeans enter it. I

expect that they do so even more seldom now, for my father's last letter tells me that there is a general feeling of disquiet, and that letters from missionaries up the country say the same thing. But our officials at Peking do not seem to be at all uneasy. My father says that you might as well try to drive a wooden peg into a stone as to get the officials at Peking to believe anything that they don't want to believe. That is one reason why I want to be off as soon as I can, for if things look more serious my father might write and say that I had better stay here for a time to see how matters turn out, and naturally if there is a row I should not like to miss it."

"It would be very hard," the other said approvingly, "if there was a row and you were kept out of it. Of course it would be soon over, the Chinese would never stand against European troops."

"I don't suppose they would, Milton; but they are plucky enough in their way, and they are not a bit afraid of death. My uncle says that he hears they have got no end of rifles and guns – good ones, you know; not the old gimcrack ones they used to have."

"Look how the Japs thrashed them, Bateman."

"Yes, but it was from no want of pluck on the part of the Chinese. The Japs were well disciplined, while the Chinese had no discipline at all. Besides, what was worse, they had no officers worth anything. All appointments there are given by exams, and as everyone who is not an ass knows, a fellow who is awfully good at books may be no good whatever as a soldier. Look at our sixth form. Why, among the captains and monitors, how many of

them would make an officer? Peebles is short-sighted, Johnstone is lame, and there is not one of them who is any good at football or cricket; while many fellows who are not so high would make infinitely better officers. Well, it is like that with everything in China. The great thing there is for a man to acquire what is called a classical style – something the same, you know, as Cicero writes in and Demosthenes talked. The Romans and Greeks were both pretty longheaded, but they never thought of appointing either of these men as generals in the field. Why, look at our head; he is choke-full of learning. Well, if he had lived in China he would have been made either an admiral or a general. Just fancy him with his spectacles, a skull-cap with a peacock's feather, and flowing robes, peering vaguely about him on the look-out for an enemy. How can you expect fellows to fight who are officered by men of that sort?"

"But our army is officered by men who have passed exams."

"Yes, but at any rate the exams for the army are not very difficult, and there is time for them to play as well as work. Still, I know my uncle thinks that it is about the worst way that could have been chosen for the selection of officers, and that in the next war we get into there will be no end of blunders."

"It is likely enough that there will be; but there is one thing you must remember, and that is that, fortunately, the fellows who 'muz' at school are not the sort of fellows who go in for army examinations. They go into the church, or to the bar, or as masters in schools, or things of that sort. Look at us here. Lots of

the fellows in the cricket and football teams are intended for the army, and I suppose it is the same in other schools, as it is from them that the officers are drawn. I don't say that there mayn't be a few of what you may call the grinders; still, certainly the bulk of them are not the sort of men who would ever set the Thames on fire if it came to only brain work."

"Have you ever thought of going into the army, Bateman?"

"No, because I have a line ready cut out for me. I think a fellow is a fool who wants to take up a fresh line for himself instead of taking that where he is certain, if he is steady and so on, to do well; and in the next place, when one is an only son, as I am, I think that, even putting aside the question of doing well, it is his duty to help as far as he can to take the burden of the work off his father's shoulders as he gets on in life."

"There is no doubt that you are right, Bateman. That is the way to look at it, though it isn't everyone who has the sense to do it. As I have got two elder brothers I am free to choose my own line, and shall, if I can pass, go into the army; if not, I shall emigrate. I have got grit and muscle enough to do as well as most fellows in that way, and it seems to me that with good health and spirits it would not be a bad sort of life at all. If I manage to pass we may possibly meet out in China some day. There are rows in that part of the world every few years, and although from all descriptions of the country campaigning there must be unpleasant work, at least it would be a change and an interesting experience."

"Well, Milton, if you are out there we shall be very likely to

meet, for any force going towards Peking would be sure to pass through Tientsin, and if that were the case I should try to go with it as interpreter. However, I hope there won't be any rows, for though in the treaty towns we should no doubt be all right and the troops would be certain to lick the Chinese, the missionaries all over the country would be certain to have an awful time of it. We should be very anxious about that, because my mother's sister married a missionary and is settled a long way up the country."

"Is your Chinaman going back with you?"

"Yes; I should be awfully sorry to leave him behind. He has been with me as long as I can remember. My uncle only brought him over here in order that I might keep up my Chinese. I am sure that he would go through fire and water for me. It is a good thing to have a man like that, for, putting aside the fact that I like him tremendously, I would trust myself anywhere with him, for he is very strong, and, as he showed when he attacked those two fellows who upset the boat soon after I came here, there is no doubt that he is plucky. I expect he will be very glad to be home again. He has got accustomed to European clothes now, but I have no doubt that he would prefer his own; and then, of course, his family are there, and in China family ties are very strong. Families always stick together, even to distant relations. My uncle says that the population should be counted by families and not by individuals. Of course I did not think of such matters before I came away, but he says that it is like the old Scotch clans: the State deals with the families and not with the different members

of it. If a man commits a crime and gets away, the family are held responsible for it, and one of them has to suffer penalties and pays either a large money fine or is executed.”

“That would be very rough on a family that happens to have one scamp among the sons.”

“Yes, I suppose so; but it helps to keep them all straight. A fellow who committed a crime, for which his father or any of his near relations had to suffer, would be considered not only as a disgrace to the family but as a man altogether accursed and beyond the pall of pity whatever fate might befall him. My uncle says crime is very rare in China, and that this is very largely due to the family ties.”

“But there are pirates on the coast and, as I hear, robbers on many of the rivers?”

“Yes; uncle says these men are fellows who have left their native villages and have banded together, so that if they are caught it is never known to what families they belong. They are beheaded, and there is an end of them, and their family never know anything about their case. The Chinese are a very peaceable lot, except that they sometimes get tremendously stirred up, as in the case of the Taiping insurrection. The people hear stories that the foreigners are trying to upset their religion or to take some of the land. Hideous stories go about that they have killed and eaten children or sacrificed them in some terrible way. Then they seem to go mad; they throw down their hoes and take up swords and muskets, if they have them, and blindly fall

upon the whites.”

“They call us the foreign devils, don’t they?”

“No, that is a mistake; the real meaning of the words is ‘ocean devils,’ which answers to our word ‘pirates.’ Europeans were called so because the Chinese coasts were ravaged, sacked, and burnt by adventurers who first sailed into the Chinese seas, and the name has been applied to the whites ever since. It is the same way with the name of their country. By a misunderstanding, when we first had diplomatic relations with them the word ‘Celestial’ was applied to their empire, and people ever since have believed that that is what they call the country. The word ‘Celestial’ is applied only to the emperor, who is viewed almost as a god, but they would never dream of applying it to the country. Because the document said ‘the Celestial Emperor,’ it was supposed that the kingdom over which he reigned was called the ‘Celestial Kingdom.’ On the contrary, they call it the ‘Terrestrial Kingdom,’ believing, as they did before they had anything to do with foreigners, that it was, in fact, the only kingdom existing on earth worthy of the name.”

“And can you write Chinese as well as you can talk it, Bateman?”

“I can write the ordinary Chinese, but not the language of the literati class; that is entirely different, and the ordinary Chinaman has no more knowledge of it than I have. I believe that it contains twenty thousand different characters, and it is very doubtful if even the most learned Chinaman understands them all. Even the

popular language is scarcely understood in all parts of China. The dialects differ as much as some of the English dialects, and the native of the Northern Provinces has the greatest difficulty in conversing with a man from the South.”

“There is the bell ringing, and I must run round to the boarding-house to get my books.”

Rex was extremely sorry when the last day of the term arrived and he had to say good-bye to his friends. Ah Lo, on the other hand, when he met him at the station, was in the highest spirits. He was delighted that he was henceforth always to be with his young master, and, though this was a minor consideration to him, he rejoiced at the thought that he was soon to return to his native land.

“This is a good country,” he said, speaking in his own language, “much better than I had thought, and if all my family were not in China I should not mind living here all my life. They will be glad to see me too. Except that I have not been with them for so long, I have been a dutiful son, and have always sent half of my pay to my parents. They are well content with me. Fortunately I am the youngest of five sons. If I had been at home I should have had to stay at home to help my parents; but my brothers are all married and live in the village, so they can look after them and help them in their labours. As I left so young they do not miss me, and the money I have saved has helped to keep them in comfort. They have indeed received much more than they would have done had I stayed at home and worked for them,

for my wages have been as much as my four brothers could earn together. I have only sent from here the same as I did when I was at Tientsin, although I have been paid higher, but then I shall have much to spend before we start, in buying presents for them and all my relatives. Besides, I have saved half of my earnings, for I have had no occasion to spend money here, and with my former savings added to this I shall be the richest man in the village. If I were to go back I could live comfortably all my life, but I should never want to do that, master, as long as you will keep me with you."

"That will be as long as we both live, Ah Lo; but I think that when you get back you ought to take a wife."

"I shall think about it," the Chinaman said, "but I shall think many times before I do it. When a man is married he is no longer master of his own house. The wife is always good and obedient until she has a son; after that she takes much upon herself. If one were to get the right woman it would be very good, but it is not in China as it is here, where you see a great deal of a woman before you marry. In China I should have to say to one of the old women who act as intermediaries, 'I desire a wife,' Then she goes about and brings me a list of several marriageable girls. She praises them all up, and says that they are beautiful and mild-tempered, and at last I choose one on her report; and it is not until after one is married that one can find out whether the report is true or not. Altogether the risk is great. I am happy and contented now; it would be folly for me to risk so much with so small an

advantage. Suppose I had married before I came over here, my wife would have had to stay with my parents, and she might not have been happy there. I could not have brought her over here, for if I had done so everything would have been strange to her; the people would have pointed at her in the street, the boys would have called after her, and she would have been miserable.”

“I am sorry that you are going back, Rex,” his uncle said to him, when all the preparations for the voyage had been completed, and he was to embark on the following day. “I should have liked to keep you here, but naturally your mother and father want you back, and it is certainly best for you that you should, at any rate for some years, be over there to learn the business thoroughly, so that when your father retires you can succeed him, and in time perhaps come back to take charge here, if you can find among the clerks one sufficiently capable to represent us out there. But I shall miss you, lad, sorely. I have always looked forward to your being home for the holidays, and I had great interest in your life and doings at school. Still, I knew, of course, that that could not last for ever. In a small way it will be a wrench losing Ah Lo; I shall find a difficulty in getting anyone to fill his place. A more attentive or obliging fellow I have never come across. It will be a satisfaction to me to know that he is with you, for should any troubles arise, which I regard as quite possible, you will find him invaluable.

“I only intended, when I took this house, to stay here until you returned, but I know so many people round here now that I shall

probably stay on. I found it intolerably dull the first year, but now that I know all my neighbours it is different, and if I were to leave and take a house in town I should have all the work of making friends again.

“I hope that things will settle down in China. Your father’s letters of late have taken rather a gloomy view of things, and he is not by any means given that way. I am more impressed by what he says than by what I read in the papers. In his last letter he says, ‘I feel as if I were living in a country subject to earthquakes, and that at any moment the ground might open under our feet. It does not seem to me that our officials at Peking have any idea as to the extent of the danger, but most of us here believe that it is very real. Happily we are strong enough to hold out here till aid could reach us, and this will be the case in all the treaty ports, but up-country the outlook would be terrible. Emma is greatly troubled as to her sister up-country, although to some extent she shares the belief of Masterton that the Chinese officials will protect them against the mob if troubles should begin. Although I don’t tell Emma so, I do not share in that belief.

“This Boxer movement, as it is called, might be easily crushed now if the Chinese authorities chose, but there is good reason for believing that they have the secret support of the empress, and the men by whom she is surrounded. If so, the officials throughout the country will naturally go with the tide; and as life is thought so little of in China, few of them would bestir themselves in earnest to protect the missionaries, still less the native converts. Well, I

hope that I may be wrong, but I cannot feel at all comfortable in my mind as to the future.’

“Knowing your father as I do, I cannot but think that the outlook is really serious. I was almost surprised that the letter did not conclude by saying, ‘I think that you had better keep Rex for another year at school.’”

“I am very glad that it did not say so, uncle. For many reasons I am sorry to be going back, and I am very sorry to leave you. It has been very jolly at school, but if there is to be trouble I should like to be with my father and mother, and to do what little I can to aid in the defence of the English quarter if it should be attacked.”

CHAPTER II

THE BOXERS

All was ready at last, and Mr. Bateman went down with Rex to join the steamer at Gravesend. As they went out on the tender Mr. Bateman said to a gentleman of about his own age, "Hello, Chambers, who would have thought of seeing you here? Why, I haven't seen you since I came home."

"No, I came three months after you did. I wonder we never ran across each other before. Surely you are not going out again?"

"No, I have done with the glorious East for good," the other laughed. "I am only here to see my nephew off. You will hardly remember him; he was only about twelve when he came home with me."

"I certainly should not have known him again, Bateman. I am here on the same errand as you. My son is going out to Runciman's. I am still in the firm, and act as their agent here. I wonder we have never run against each other. My son is two or three years older than your nephew. Shake hands, you two young fellows. It will be pleasant for you both, starting with someone you know; it makes you feel comfortable at once. I know the purser of the *Dragon*, and will get him to shift one of you so that your cabins may be together. I know he will do that for me if the ship is not very full, which it is not likely to be at this time

of year.”

The two lads shook hands with each other. They had no time for any words, for at this moment the tender came alongside the steamer.

“You had better leave your traps here, boys,” Mr. Chambers said, “while I run down and see the purser before he gets the whole crowd at his heels.” In three minutes he returned. “I have managed that for you,” he said. “Bring all your light traps down and take possession. He has ordered one of the stewards to put your names on No. 17. It is a three-berth cabin, but you will have it to yourselves. When you have put all your light traps in, you had better come and watch the baggage put on board. I suppose you have already sent on board your nephew’s boxes for the hold, Bateman?”

“Yes; he has only two flat trunks for the voyage, made, of course, to go under the berths.”

“That is just what my son has, plus a couple of gun cases.”

“Rex has the same, a double barrel and a Lee-Metford.”

“You don’t think he will want that, do you?”

“I hope not; but my brother James writes so gloomily about the prospect that we thought it just as well to get him a weapon that might be useful in case of trouble.”

“Well, I gave my lad two good double-barrels, not bad weapons in case of a sudden ruction with the natives. I should think that would be the worst danger. My people tell me that there is a great deal of talk, but they do not think anything will

come of it.”

“I hope not, I am sure. It would play the deuce with trade, but I agree with you in thinking that after the lessons we have given the Chinese, and the tremendous thrashings they have had from the Japs, they will not be foolish enough to want to do any more fighting. I do know, though, that they have been buying huge quantities of guns of all sorts, and rifles. Still, I fancy that is only because they don't mean to be caught napping again.”

While the elders were talking, the two lads made their way below. They found a steward, who took them to the cabin, on which their names had already been stuck, and they deposited their light traps there.

“This will be very jolly, Bateman,” Chambers said, “especially as we are going to the same place. I have been at home for the past ten years, so it will be all new to me.”

“I have only been at home for four,” Rex said. “I dare say, however, I shall feel it strange when I go out again.”

“Who is the Chinese fellow who came off with you?”

“He is one of the boys from my father's place. He was my special boy till I came home, so they sent him over with me, and he has been at my uncle's ever since.”

“It seems rum keeping him over here all this time.”

“Well, he was kept over here for my sake. I had leave out of school twice a week, and spent it with him in order to keep up my Chinese.”

“You mean to say you can talk it?”

“Yes, as well as English.”

“By Jove, that is splendid! I wish they had done the same with me. I suppose I talked it when I came over, though I don’t know a word of it now, and shall have all the beastly grind of learning it.”

“Well, anyhow, it will be easier for you than if you had never known it. They say if anyone has once known a language and then forgotten it, it is much easier for him to pick it up again. Well, we had better go upstairs now and look after our baggage.”

In a few minutes they picked out their boxes and saw them taken down to their cabin. Then they rejoined their friends until the bell rang. The partings were made with at least a show of cheerfulness.

“I am awfully obliged to you for all your kindness to me, uncle,” Rex said. “I have had a jolly time, thanks to you, and shall always look back upon it.”

“I have been glad to have you, Rex, and shall feel like a fish out of water without you. Give my love to them out there. I hope you will find things all quiet and comfortable.”

They stood at the rail until the tender steamed away up the river, and then stood watching the passengers, many of whom were still hunting for missing boxes. Then they went down and tidied up their cabin, and afterwards walked on deck until the bell rang for dinner.

Dick Chambers had been educated at Marlborough, had played in the eleven, and had represented the school at rackets. He had also been lieutenant in the school corps, and had shot in

their Bisley team. He was a pleasant young fellow, though he put on airs on the strength of his two years' seniority.

"Well, are you glad you are going home?" he said, when they went forward together to speak to the Chinaman.

"Glad some ways, not other ways," Ah Lo said. "Velly nice summer time, too much rainee winter time."

"But it is not very cheerful weather always in Tientsin, Ah Lo," Rex said.

"I want to get home to see palents. Sent home money to them, but dat not likee seeing them. Good piecee people here."

"You haven't got to talk English very well," Dick laughed, "considering you have been four years over here."

"Always talk China—talk with Massa Rex. Talk with Master Robert same in China. Never let me talk English to Massa Rex. Talk lillie English to girls in kitchen. Dey always make fun of Ah Lo. Laugh at him face. Didn't talk much with them. Just talk pidgin English."

"No, I have never talked to him in English from the time when he first took charge of me until now. My father and uncle always talked to him in Chinese, so he really has had very little chance."

"Not want very much learn English," Ah Lo said; "if learn English, people in house say 'Ah Lo don't do this,' 'Ah Lo do that,' keep him always at work."

"You are like the monkeys who could talk well enough if they liked, but didn't do so lest they were made to work."

Ah Lo grinned, and then said in Chinese to Rex, "Ah Lo can

work hard for his master, but not care to work hard for women who only make fun of him.”

“I don’t think the women meant to make fun of you, Ah Lo. My uncle told me that his housekeeper always spoke very well of you, and said that they all liked you.”

“Always laughed at Chinaman’s English.”

“Well, of course it was curious to English servants. Pidgin English is very curious to people who are unaccustomed to it, with your funny way of sticking in ‘piecee’ at every other word, and ‘number one first chop,’ and things of that sort. At any rate there were never any quarrels between them and you. Are you pretty comfortable down below?”

“Not bad. Ah Lo expects that he will have to hit three or four of those men who pretend to turn up their noses at him. Ah Lo very peaceable, not want to fight, but not to be treated like poor common Chinaman. Ah Lo hit very hard.”

“Yes, I know you do, Ah Lo,” said Rex, “and I have no doubt that you will astonish them in that way if you begin. Still, it is better not to do it unless they provoke you a great deal.”

He then walked aft again with Dick.

Three days later a serious complaint was brought before the captain, that three men had been grievously assaulted and battered by a Chinaman.

The captain was speaking to Rex when the complaint was made.

“That is my servant, no doubt,” Rex said. “He is a very quiet

and peaceable man, and no doubt some of the men forward must have been playing tricks on him.”

The captain ordered the three complainants and the Chinaman to be brought aft. The faces of the former bore the signs of violent treatment, while the Chinaman was evidently none the worse of the conflict, and wore the usual placid air of his race.

“Now, let us hear your story,” the captain said.

The three men each repeated the story, how without the smallest reason the Chinees had suddenly sprung upon them and beaten them.

“But how came you,” said the captain, “three of you, to let this man assault you in the way you describe. Does your man speak English, Mr. Bateman?”

“He understands it perfectly, sir, but only speaks pidgin English. If, however, you will question him in English I will translate his replies to you.”

“Well, sir, what do you mean by beating these men in this style?”

“These men make fun of me,” Ah Lo said. “Ah Lo is a very quiet man, no want to have row. Men always keep on saying things against him. Ah Lo pretended not to understand, then they get worse. Presently one man push against Ah Lo one side, and then take off his hat and say, ‘Beg pardon,’ Then another push other side and say just the same. Then another man tumble against Ah Lo, then they all laugh very loud. Then Ah Lo say better look out, then they laugh again and push Ah Lo still more.

That not proper treatment, so Ah Lo take two of them by scruff of neck and knock their faces together. Then other man run in, and Ah Lo think it is about time to begin and hit him on nose, quite a little hit, but made blood run very hard. Then the other men try again, and Ah Lo slap them, and they tumble down. That is all. Ah Lo very gentle and quiet, but not proper for men to go too far with him.”

The captain laughed when Rex translated this.

He said: “Well, my men, it seems to me that what you have got serves you right. You thought because this Chinaman was quiet and inoffensive that you could play any tricks you liked with him. You have made a bad mistake. It is evident that he is an uncommonly strong fellow, and he has given you what you deserved. I should say it would be wise for you to leave him alone in future, because if this is his way of being very quiet and gentle it might be serious if he lost his temper with you.”

“Ah Lo is quiet and good-tempered,” Rex said, as the others went forward. “One day when a couple of bargees upset a boat with some of our fellows in, Ah Lo took one of them and chucked him right out into the river. You never saw a fellow so astonished. But even then you would not have said that he was out of temper, for he looked as placid as possible, and only smiled when the fellow stood in the river and hurled bad language at him. He has been with me since I was a child, and I have never once seen him put out about anything.”

From that time there were no more complaints of Ah Lo. The

voyage passed, as most voyages do pass, without any particular incident. They had one gale in the China seas, but no serious damage was done except that a boat was washed away and the bulwarks stove in. Rex and Dick had become great friends by the end of the voyage, and had promised to see a good deal of each other when they landed. They were not sorry, however, when the voyage came to an end, for Rex was looking forward to seeing his father and mother after their long separation, and Dick to reviving his very faint recollections of the country, and to making the acquaintance of the other young fellows of the establishment, and to entering upon serious work. They went ashore for a few hours at Hong Kong, and at Shanghai were transhipped to a comparatively small steamer, in which they made the journey to Taku. As soon as the vessel dropped anchor Mr. Bateman came on board. He had known the date at which she was due, and had come down by rail on the previous day.

“Well, you are grown a big fellow,” he exclaimed, after the first greeting. “Of course, I knew that you would have grown, but I did not expect to see such a big fellow as you are. Ah, Ah Lo, so there you are! I have heard capital accounts of you from my brother, and Rex has never failed to give news of you in every letter he wrote.”

As soon as the first questions had been asked and answered on both sides, Rex said, “This is Dick Chambers, father. We have been great chums on the voyage. He is coming out to Runciman’s house.”

“Oh yes, of course! I know your father very well. I am glad you came out together. It must have been more pleasant for both of you. One of the clerks of your house is somewhere about. He came down here to meet you, but I suppose he has not yet identified you.”

An hour later all their belongings were got on shore, and a short time afterwards the train started. There was a great deal for father and son to talk about, and although the journey across the low flat country would have been considered very slow in England, it seemed to pass rapidly. It was not until the next morning that Rex had time to talk of anything but England, and to ask about local matters.

“Things are very unsettled,” said his father. “There are reports of massacres of missionaries at several places, but these reports must be received with a great deal of suspicion. For myself I am not very much inclined to believe them; and they always have to pay so heavily for indulging in freaks of this sort that I should hardly think they would be so foolish as to repeat them. You see, the last murder of two German missionaries gave Germany an excuse for seizing the port of Kiaochow. That action has been in all respects unfortunate. The province is considered a sort of Holy Land by the Chinese, and they have consequently resented the seizure of that port very bitterly. Besides, naturally it seems an altogether preposterous price to pay for the murder of two foreigners. I am wholly with them there. Suppose two Chinese had been killed in Germany, what do you think the

Germans would say if China were to demand as compensation Bremerhaven? You only have to look at it in that light to see the monstrosity of the affair. Why, after defeating China and taking Pekin and expending some millions of money, all that the Allies demanded was that five ports should be open for commerce, and yet Germany takes as her own a port, with the surrounding country, for the death of two missionaries. Still, even that gross act of spoliation would, one might think, hardly excite the people to rise against missionaries in general. I cannot believe that at the worst these are anything more than isolated outbreaks, and I believe they will be very severely punished by the authorities. Still, it may safely be said that there is not an Englishman alive, not even Mr. Hart, who really understands the Chinese, or who can predict what they will do in any given circumstances. They are very like children: they will bear desperate oppression and tyranny with passive submission, and they will then break out furiously at some fancied wrong.

“We never really get near the Chinese. They live in their native city; we live in our own settlement. We draw what labour we require from them, it comes and it goes again; but as far as the people are concerned, their ways, their talk, and their manner of life, we know no more of them than if the native town were situated in the moon. Their whole existence differs in almost every respect from ours. A Chinaman, if he is aggrieved by another, will go to the house of the man he has quarrelled with, and will cut his own throat at the door, and public opinion

demands that the other man shall also cut his. If a man commits a crime and bolts, they don't trouble greatly to catch him. They simply inflict the punishment due to him on his nearest relative. I don't say that the system doesn't act well, for the ties of family are tremendously strong, and few Chinamen, indeed, would so utterly disgrace themselves as to allow their fathers to be executed in their place.

“As to religion, it can scarcely be said that they have any except worship of ancestors. They have superstitions, but no real religion. They look at everything, in fact, in a light that differs directly from that in which we regard it. Every Chinaman will cheat in a bargain if he can, and only laugh if he is found out, for he has no shame whatever in conduct which he considers natural if not meritorious. But they have not the slightest fear of death. I do not know that they have the same fatalism as the Mohammedans, but practically it comes to the same thing. I don't know whether you have heard in England about the Boxers?”

“Yes, I have heard something about them, but not much.”

“The sect has existed some two hundred years. It doesn't seem originally to have had any very positive aims. Its members performed certain rites and certain exercises in a secret sort of way, but I fancy that is pretty well all that is known of them. It is really only lately that they have become at all prominent, and have gone in for recruiting their numbers to any extent. The whole basis of the association has been changed. It was formerly an association apparently without any political

aims, and to some extent resembling our own freemasonry; and it has become an active, militant, and in a certain sense a national movement, directed principally against foreigners, but also against the corruption of the Chinese Court and the terrible condition of the people in general.

“In one of their early proclamations they say the whole populace is sunk in wretchedness, and that all the officials are spoilers of their food. The condition of the Yamen is unspeakable. In every market and in every guild nothing can be done unless the officials are bribed. All sorts of exactions are made. They are all alike; ill-gotten wealth is their one object; right has disappeared from the world, and sins are unnumbered. In the Yamens it is of no avail to have a clear case; unless you bribe, you will lose the day. All this is unquestionably true. After reciting these things the proclamation then turns to foreigners. It says: ‘Greater calamities have overtaken the nation. Foreigners, devils come with their teaching, and converts to Christianity, Roman Catholics and Protestants, have become numerous. These are without human relations, but being most cunning they have attracted all the greedy and covetous as converts, and to an unlimited degree they have practised oppression.’

“The great impulse was given in Shan Tung in the north, but the movement spread like wildfire. At first the authorities at Peking were altogether hostile to it, but, seeing its increasing power, there can be little doubt that the Empress has secretly encouraged it, with the object, no doubt, of diverting it from

internal reform to hostility to foreigners. On the other hand, the more enlightened of the Chinese see the danger of the association. Several of the viceroys have taken measures against them, and General Nieh is preparing to attack them. The nine Yangtze viceroys are strongly opposed to the association. At present there has been no overt movement. It seems, as I said, true enough that some small missions in the interior have been attacked, but even this is unconfirmed. The cloud may blow over, or it may burst. I hope that in any case it will be confined to Northern China. If it extends over the whole country there can be little doubt that every missionary settlement in China will be wiped out, and the European settlements in all the mission towns will be attacked and their position become precarious in the extreme.

“As long as the movement is confined to the North it will be manageable. I do not say that the position of the European inhabits of Peking will not become one of terrible peril, and we here may get our share of trouble; but Peking is comparatively close to the sea, and although for a time the movement may have its own way, it will be only a repetition of the last troubles. A fleet of the Allied Powers could batter down the Taku forts and an army march to Peking. They would have a battle or two to fight on the way, but they would defeat the Chinese with great slaughter, capture Peking, and force the Empress to make terms. This will, to my mind, be almost assuredly the way things will go, unless the Empress takes firm ground, issues a proclamation

denouncing the Boxers in the strongest terms, and orders all viceroys and generals to take prompt and energetic steps against them. I may tell you, however, that a considerable number of the British colony here do not share my views, and believe that the thing will die out.

“At any rate, for the present there is nothing to do but go on with our regular work, and see what comes of it. Your work will not be very heavy, for trade is nearly at a stand-still, and no one is getting fresh goods up from Shanghai. So you will have an easy breaking-in to work, which will give you an opportunity of looking up the few young fellows you knew before you left. There are, I think, only five or six who have not been home, but there are others who, being a few years older than you, went home before you and have since returned. There are, of course, some pleasant families here, and these I will give you an opportunity of knowing by having some of them to dinner every night this week. In that way you will speedily get to feel at home in the place. I shall, of course, take you up to the club. You used to do a good deal of drilling with Ah Lo before you went away, and as you would no doubt like to keep up your rowing, you will have plenty of opportunities of doing so on the river.”

For the next three weeks Rex had a very pleasant time. He spent the morning always in his father's office, where he was instructed in the method of book-keeping employed, and in the general work of the house. Of an afternoon he either went with Ah Lo for a ramble in the native city or for a sail on the river,

and sometimes played at cricket. Of an evening he either dined at home or at other houses, and at the end of the three weeks had made the acquaintance of almost all the British families in the settlement. Dick Chambers was generally at liberty in the afternoon and shared in the amusements.

“Stick to your amusements, Rex,” said his father. “The great thing in this country is to take to outdoor exercise as much as possible, and to make life go pleasantly when your work is done. I consider that for the next two or three years it will be quite sufficient for you to work here from nine till one, except on mail days, when you will find it necessary to stick at it all day. The more amusement you get out of your life the better I shall be pleased.”

So Rex joined in all that was going on. He and Dick were at once enrolled in the volunteer corps that had recently been formed, and of which all the clerks and younger members of the firms there had become members as soon as there were signs of possible trouble. As the news from without became daily more serious, cricket was given up and the evenings were devoted to drilling and shooting. The latter was specially attended to. It was evident that so small a body of men could have small occasion for manœuvres of any kind, but that individual shooting might be of extreme importance. Dick Chambers had been elected captain of the corps, as he had learned his work at Marlborough and was the best marksman of his year.

“It isn’t much of a place for defence,” he said to Rex, “but of

course we shall have troops up from the ships; and at any rate five-and-twenty of us, if we shoot straight, can do a good deal; and of course all the heads will join if necessary, though they may not think it worth while to do so now. There is no doubt that the news gets worse every day, and that there are large numbers of these Boxers all over the country. I think the Chinese general is really, as he says, hostile to them, but of course what he does when the time comes will depend upon what orders he gets from the Empress, who is in every sense an unknown quantity in the problem. If he fights the Boxers, we sha'n't have to; if he joins them, we shall all have our work cut out for us. In case of a row we may take it as certain that the population of the native town will all join in, partly because, like the rest of them, they hate us, partly to get a share in the loot. I hear that some of the traders are getting alarmed, and are sending their goods down to the port to be shipped back to Shanghai by the first steamer that comes along. I don't think that our people are going to do so."

"I am sure my father will not," Rex said. "He thinks there is no doubt that we shall be able to defend ourselves with the aid of the force they will send up, and I believe he expects that they will send some troops up from Shanghai very shortly. Things may hang on as they are for some time. He rather calculates that a good many of the coolies who have been in the employ of the various houses for the past ten or twelve years will stand by us. I don't think that any strong national feeling exists among them, and I believe they will stick to those who have paid and treated

them well. I don't mean that he thinks that they will fight, but they will throw up barricades and strengthen the godowns. In that way they would be of immense use."

"It all depends, from what I hear," Dick said, "upon whether they have families in the town. Those that have will be obliged to leave us whatever their own feelings may be, otherwise their families would be massacred at once. Of course if a man has come from a distance with a wife and a child or two he will probably bring them in here, but those born and bred here who have lots of relations would have no option in the matter, poor beggars!"

More alarming reports from up country continued to arrive, and the greatest anxiety began to prevail as to the fate of the missionaries. One morning when Rex went in to breakfast he found his mother in tears and his father looking very grave.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"There is a report in the town that there has been a riot at Chafui. The mission-house has been attacked, and certainly some of the missionaries have been killed. Others, it is said, were taken to the governor's Yamen. What has been their fate no one knows. It is certain that what troops there were in the town did not in any way interfere with the Boxers, and whether the governor had the power or the will to resist them is not known. Robson had no right to keep his wife and girls there. I wrote him again and again begging him to send them down here, but he is one of the most obstinate men I ever knew. If he liked to risk martyrdom,

of course he was at liberty to do so, but he had no right to expose them to such a fate. However, it is useless to talk of that now. It is maddening to think that Kate and the two girls should be in the power of these fiendish scoundrels.”

“Can nothing be done, father?”

“What can be done?” Mr. Bateman said bitterly. “It will be as much as we are able to do to hold our own here. The whole country round is in their hands, and it is very doubtful whether Admiral Seymour can, with every man that possibly can be spared, fight his way to Peking, which is two hundred miles away. Certainly no force can be spared to rescue people who fall into the hands of the Boxers so far away.”

Rex stood in silent consternation. He had not seen his uncle or any of the family since his return, but his aunt and the two girls had been staying some weeks at the house before he went away. “It is awful!” he said at last; “and Uncle must have been mad not to have sent them down when the troubles began.”

“I think so, too, Rex. As for his staying himself it is different. He has a large number of converts there, and no doubt he hoped that his presence there would be some protection. You see, one of the principal causes of the Chinese dislike for us is the missionary question. It is a religious question as much as a political one. The Chinese are in some things very superstitious. They worship to some extent the spirits of their ancestors, but for other religion they care but little. There is no ill-feeling between men of different religion here. No resistance was offered to the spread

of Buddhism; the Taoists do not quarrel with those who are practically Confucians. But with Christianity it is different. The converts come under the protection of the missionaries, who have behind them the European powers, and consequently they are, to a great extent, independent of the local officials. The feeling has been greatly aggravated by France insisting that her bishops should have the rank of mandarins, and be judges over their native converts. All this has been a great mistake, for which we are paying now. I believe that our own missions have striven hard to avoid giving offence, and all missionaries in the up-country stations dress in native costume, for the Chinese regard dress as a serious matter.”

While this conversation had been going on, Mrs. Bateman had left the room.

“You had better sit down and eat your breakfast, Rex. You can give me a cup of tea; I could not eat anything now. Kate is very dear to me, and so are the girls. They were here twice while you were away, and stayed with us each time for some weeks.”

“I don’t remember much about the girls, father. The elder was three years younger than I, and was quite a child, and Mabel was two years younger still.”

“They were growing up very nice girls,” Mr. Bateman said sadly. “Jenny is now nearly fifteen and Mabel thirteen. Of course they had not the freshness of girls brought up at home, and I spoke to their mother when she was up here, and wrote to your uncle, urging that they should go home for a couple of years, and

offering to pay all their expenses. He said that in another year he would take the matter into consideration.”

Rex ate a few mouthfuls, and then went out into the courtyard. Ah Lo was sitting there. By his serious face Rex saw that he had heard the news.

“This is a terrible business,” Rex began.

“A very bad business, master.”

“Is there anything to be done, do you think?”

The Chinaman knit his eyebrows. “What could be done?” he asked.

“That I don’t know; but it is horrible to sit here and do nothing when my aunt and cousins are, if they are alive, prisoners, and may be put to horrible tortures before they are killed.”

Ah Lo was silent.

“Do you think you and I could get there and try to rescue them?”

The Chinaman’s eyes opened wide. “Do you really mean that, young master?”

“Yes; I do not see why we should not get there all right, though I don’t say that we could rescue them. We could both dress up as villagers, or as Boxers if you like, and as I speak Chinese as well as you do, I don’t see why we should not both make our way through. I could stain my skin just a little so as to get it just the right colour, and shave my head and put on a pigtail. Many Chinese wear spectacles, great things with thick rims.”

“Villagers do not often wear them, master, though the literati

who wear their eyes out in staring at a book often do. You could not go as one of them, for you do not speak the same language.”

“Well, I should think that you might paint a little line in each corner of my eyes so as to make them look a little up and down like the Chinese eyes.”

“Ah Lo had better go alone,” the Chinaman said quietly.

“Not at all,” Rex said. “My aunt and cousins are a great deal to me, they are nothing to you, and I certainly won’t let you go alone.”

“The master would never let you go,” Ah Lo said positively.

“I don’t suppose he would; but he would not know anything about it until I had gone. I should leave a letter behind telling him why I had gone, and that I was so disguised that I could pass for a Chinaman anywhere. I should say also that I know my chance of succeeding is not great, but that I consider the risk of being found out is still less. I should, of course, promise to take every precaution.”

“The master would never forgive me,” Ah Lo said.

“Oh, yes! he would. I should say further that I had made up my mind to go, and that I told you that if you did not go with me I should go alone, which I mean to do. I am some months past sixteen now, and I think I can take care of myself, though I should feel a great deal more comfortable having you with me.”

CHAPTER III IN DISGUISE

“Well, what do you think of it, Ah Lo?”

“If you have quite made up your mind, young master, I will go with you,” Ah Lo said quietly; “if I return with you the master will not say much, and certainly if you do not return I shall not.”

“Thank you, Ah Lo! Now, let us settle at once how we shall go, for every hour is of importance. Which do you think would be best, to go as villagers or as Boxers?”

“I think as villagers, master. We can go from village to village with the tale that we have been coolies working here, and that now there is no trade and no employment we are going to visit our family, who live near Chafui. We can carry with us clothes such as the Boxers wear, either red or yellow, so that when we get to Chafui we can put them on if we like. Of course we shall take swords and long knives.”

“I have the two revolvers my uncle gave me when I came away,” Rex said; “we can each carry one of them. As we shall say that we come from Tientsin, the fact that we have revolvers would excite no suspicion. If we are questioned we could easily say that we took them secretly from our employer’s house when we came away from here. I have got a good stock of cartridges. Of course many of the Boxers are armed with good rifles, but

would a villager be carrying them?”

“No, but a coolie from here might do so. Numbers of the Boxers have been killed near Tientsin, and there would be nothing improbable in the statement that as we left the town we had picked up two rifles. A good many rifles are still lying in the suburbs where the fighting went on; if you go out there this morning you might find a couple, for the streets are quite deserted, and then you might put them in a doorway where we could find them as we went along. You would also have to find some packets of cartridges. When shall we start, master?”

“If we can be ready to start to-night all the better.”

“There can be no difficulty about that. I know many native shops where I can get the clothes, and there are plenty of dead Boxers from whom I could take red suits. You could not get your head shaved here, but I will carry a razor and soap with me, and in the morning, first thing, will shave your head. I can buy a pigtail in the town, as many people who have not much hair use false pigtails, and I have no doubt that plenty of them are to be found in the empty shops in the native town.”

“Shall we require to take any food with us?”

“We can take enough rice for our journey, master, and we can get tea anywhere; but you will have to do without anything else.”

“That makes no difference at all; I can do very well on rice, and I can take some of the condiments we use with it. Even if we are searched, these will be as natural as the rice.”

“Is there anything else that you can think of, master?”

“No, I cannot think of anything else at present, but I shall see you again later, and can then fix on the hour for starting.”

During the time when the danger was at its greatest the house had never been so silent, or the face of Mr. Bateman so grave. His wife was absolutely prostrated. This added to the resolution the lad had taken. At whatever risk he might incur, his aunt and cousins must be rescued if they were alive when he reached Chafui, and it were within the limits of possibility to do so. He did not think that the journey in itself really involved any risk, and should he find that all had been massacred he had but to return. He knew how precious his life was in the eyes of his parents, and he resolved to take every means possible to avoid risk. Even if the news he brought back were of the worst, it would be better for his mother than the terrible anxiety that she was now suffering as to the fate of his aunt and cousins.

In the course of the day he wrote a letter to his father, which ran as follows: —

“My Dear Father,

“When you receive this I shall be miles away. As you know, as far as talking goes, I can pass anywhere as a native; and as I shall be thoroughly disguised, I feel sure that with Ah Lo I could go right through China without being suspected. Seeing how terribly anxious my mother and you are about the safety of Aunt and the girls, I have made up my mind to go to Chafui to gather news of them. I am sure that it would be better for Mother to know even the worst than to suffer this terrible anxiety. I do not think I shall run

any risk whatever.

“I must tell you that though Ah Lo is going with me it is very much against his will, because he thought that you would blame him if things went wrong, and it was only when I told him that if he did not go with me I should go alone that he consented to accompany me. It was not that he thought of the danger, but that he feared you would be displeased with him for undertaking this journey without your permission. I don't think that I should have carried out the threat. Although I know the language well enough I do not know anything of the customs and the religion, and I felt that it would really be a hazardous enterprise if Ah Lo did not go with me. Now, however, that at last he has consented to accompany me, I have no fear whatever.

“I should have asked your permission to undertake this expedition, but I was afraid that you would refuse, and I felt so sure of being able to accomplish my purpose without difficulty that I decided to go without telling you of my intention. You see, Father, it is evident that after what is going on every white man in China will be in peril for a long time to come, and as it is settled that I am going to stay here for at any rate a good many years, I shall have to run risks, and those risks will be greater than any I am likely to meet with now that I am going in disguise. I am quite prepared for emergencies, so I hope that you will not be angry, though I know you will be anxious until I return.

“Ah Lo's native village is only a few miles from Chafui, and his story that, as there was no longer work to be done in Tientsin, he was going for a time to see his friends is

plausible. Indeed, we shall probably stay there among his friends and learn all that has taken place in the town, so that everything will be easy sailing. You must not expect me back for about a month. It will take us ten days to walk to Chafui, ten days to stay at Ah Lo's village and get full information, and ten to return. That is as near as I can tell at present. There may be unexpected delays, but anyhow we shall not be back in less than a month. Should I find that I am likely to be much longer away, I shall, if possible, send one of Ah Lo's people down with a message to you.

"Of course, Father, you can, if you think best, tell Mother where I have gone, and why, or lead her to believe that I have gone down to the coast to make arrangements with ships that have arrived with goods for you, or to act as an interpreter to the troops as they come up.

"I believe that if I had never gone to England I should not have thought of carrying out such a plan as this, but one gets to think for one's self when one is at school. I feel sure that there was scarcely a fellow of my age there who, if he had the advantages in the way of speaking languages that I have, would not willingly have undertaken the job. Certainly I feel that the amount of risk to be run is very small compared with the importance of relieving Mother's mind and yours, and, of course, though it is some years since I have seen my aunt and cousins, I, too, am very anxious."

That evening he felt even more than before that the proposed expedition was excusable, for his father said: "I am terribly anxious, Rex. Your mother has been delirious all the afternoon,

and the doctors are both feeling very anxious about her mind. You see, we have all gone through the strain of the last two months, and this blow coming on the top of it has had a very much greater effect than it would have had in ordinary circumstances. They think that if she had known for certain that her sister and the girls had been killed, the shock would have had less disastrous effects than this terrible uncertainty. It may be weeks, it may even be months, before the truth can be known and her mind relieved of the strain. They fear that when the present paroxysms have passed away she may settle down into a state of fixed melancholia, and if bad news came then it might simply deepen this melancholia, which would in that case become permanent.”

“It is indeed terrible, Father, but I hope that the doctors’ view is a mistaken one.”

Mr. Bateman shook his head and passed his handkerchief across his eyes, and if up to that time Rex had had any doubt that he was going to act wisely, he felt now that, even apart from his own anxiety about his aunt and cousins, he was fully justified by his mother’s state in carrying out his plan.

At eleven o’clock that night he crept out of the house. He had dyed his skin with a mixture which Ah Lo had brought him, dressed himself in the native clothes, and put the sword, knife, and pistol in his belt. In a bundle he had three boxes of ammunition and the Boxer clothes, together with a pair of light boots to put on when there were no villages near, in case the

Chinese shoes should gall his feet. Ah Lo was at the gate of the courtyard. He wore no disguise, but had put on coarse coolie clothes instead of those he wore as a trusted servant in the house.

“Have you got everything, Ah Lo?”

“Everything; ten pounds of rice, the box of clothes, the ammunition for the pistols, another bottle of the dye for your skin, some black dye for your eyebrows and eyelashes, and a little brown for the corners of your eyes. I have changed the piece of gold you gave me for dollars in cash, and I have got a pigtail and the razor and soap.”

“I have bought a small compass,” Rex said. “It may be useful to us going across the country, for I know that the roads are mostly tracks between the villages and cross each other in all directions.”

On leaving the premises they picked up Rex’s rifle and bag of ammunition, and the rifle that Ah Lo had bought during the day and had hidden away outside the settlement. Then they made a detour to avoid the native town, and, when once fairly beyond this, struck out across the fields. They made a long detour to avoid the encampment of Chinese soldiers, and then struck into a steady walk.

When a few miles from the town they saw fires burning, and made another detour to avoid these, knowing that they marked the position of parties of Boxers. They walked steadily all night, and in the morning reached a village, having made, as they calculated, at least thirty miles. Few people were about. Burnt cottages showed that the Boxers had passed that way and, as

usual, had looted and destroyed everything they could lay hands on. Indeed, not being a regularly-organized body, they were forced to depend upon what they could take for subsistence, and were the scourge of the districts through which they passed.

“So you are going to Chafui!” said an old man whom they had asked if there were any Boxers in the neighbourhood. “You will have to be very careful. Those who have been attacking Tientsin are still in that neighbourhood, but you may come across other parties marching down to join them. They are terrible people. If anyone refuses to give them all that they ask for, they will kill everyone in the house and burn it afterwards. They make most of the young men go with them to fight the whites in Tientsin. It is a terrible time. I can remember the Taiping rebellion, and this seems to me to be quite as bad. They all say that the Empress is in their favour, but I cannot believe it. They tell terrible tales about the missionaries; but I lived for some time at Chafui, and it seemed to me that they were good and peaceful people, and although I stay so near Tientsin I have not till of late heard a word against the merchants there. They have indeed done much good for the town; they pay those who work for them well and do no harm to anyone. A son of mine worked for them for ten years, and came back with enough money to live comfortably all his life. He was a good son, and helped me as a son should do, but the Boxers killed him a month ago because he ventured to say that so far from doing harm the foreigners enriched the town and brought much trade into it.”

“I shall take care to keep my mouth shut when I get home,” Ah Lo said. “I too have worked for them and found them good masters and just people, but after what you have told me I shall take care not to say a word in their favour.”

“You will be wise not to do so. And now you say you wish to sleep, as you have walked all night. You can lie down in the room upstairs; no one will disturb you. We used to be glad to question strangers who came along, for further news, but now our own troubles are quite as much as we can think of. I fear that this will continue until the last of the sea-pirates is killed; after that who can say what will happen!”

After cooking the rice they had bought, and eating a meal, they went upstairs and slept for many hours. As soon as night fell they continued their journey, and on the seventh morning after starting they arrived within a few miles of Chafui. They had met with no adventures on the way. Several times they went into the fields and hid among growing grain to avoid a party of the enemy, and once, just as they had arrived in a village, a band of Boxers came in, but they managed to slip out of the house unobserved and spent the night in the fields.

They had agreed that they would not enter Chafui until they had first paid a visit to Ah Lo's native village, where they would be able to learn the state of things in the town. They could then decide whether it would be best to put on their Boxer dresses or not. They had scarcely entered the village when Ah Lo was recognized. As one of his old friends shouted his name and a

welcome, people ran out from all the houses to greet them, and by the time he reached his father's door he was surrounded by a crowd of friends and neighbours, and Rex understood for the first time how very close was the family bond in China.

It was five years since Ah Lo had been there, and he was greeted as a wanderer returning to his parents, and bringing, no doubt, some of the proceeds of his labours. Indeed, the villagers had already benefited, for while he was in England he regularly forwarded a portion of his wages to his parents. Thus he bore a good name. He had never brought any trouble upon the village; he had never been called upon to pay a fine for his misdeeds; and his father and mother were considered fortunate people in having such a son. They too had come to the door, attracted by the loud talking outside, and their delight at his return was touching.

When at last they had entered the house and closed the door the old man said: "We have been uneasy about you. The message telling us of your return, and your welcome present, gave us at first great joy; but when, two days later, the disturbances began we trembled for your safety, and have offered up many prayers to Buddha to preserve you for us. But I see that things have gone wrong with you. Last time you came you were well clad, and all said truly, 'Ah Lo is making his fortune'; but now your clothes are those of a common man."

"I have so clad myself, Father, in order to escape plunder on my way with my friend here. He too belongs to the white merchant for whom I have worked so long. Like myself he

wanted to escape from the city where there was such fierce fighting, and as trade was at a stand-still we had no difficulty in getting away.”

“He is welcome for your sake,” the old man said. “If he is your friend, assuredly he is our friend also, and he shall share with us all we have, which, indeed, we owe chiefly to you. And have you come to stay with us for good, Ah Lo?”

“No, Father, I have come to gather news, and that partly on business; so my pay is still going on. As you know, the missionary at Chafui is the brother of my patron – at least his wife is sister of my patron’s wife. News has reached him that there were bad doings at Chafui, and consequently he and his wife are greatly disturbed; so I said that I would come here and learn the truth of the reports that we had heard.”

“It is true,” his father said. “The Boxers came to Chafui and stirred up the people of the town, and they ran together and attacked the praying-house and the people who have taken to the strange religion. The missionary fought hard when they attacked his house, but what could he and a handful of his followers do against many hundreds? The soldiers did not move to help him, and the house was taken and he was killed. The women of the family were carried to the governor’s yamen. It was reported that his wife has died from grief and terror, but I cannot say whether that is true; of her daughters I have not heard.”

This confirmation of his worst fears was a terrible blow to Rex, who with difficulty restrained himself from bursting into

tears.

“That is bad news indeed,” Ah Lo said gravely. “It will be a heavy blow to my patron and his wife, and I myself am sorely grieved, as is also Shen Yo, my companion; for we have both seen the lady and her children when they have been staying at our patron’s house. They were good people and kindly, and assuredly never did anyone any harm.”

“They were well spoken of,” Ah Lo’s father said: “no one had any harm to say of them. It was not until the Boxers stirred up the rabble of the town against these Christians that there was any disturbance here. It was always said that the governor was unfavourable to the Christians, but as they gave no cause of complaint things have always gone on quietly enough, as the orders from Peking always have been that they should not be molested. But for some weeks past we have heard reports that the Empress had turned her face against them, and that her counsellors were of opinion that these foreign people should be destroyed or driven from the country. We even heard that men were being drilled in Peking; but people in general did not think much of these things until the Boxers grew numerous and began to create disturbances. Many of us were grieved, for the white people had shown much kindness and had given good medicines to people who were ill, and in other ways had done much good. But, of course, when the Empress and her counsellors had given the word to kill, no one would venture to withstand the Boxers and the rabble of the town. The governor knew the will of those

in high places, and when word was sent to him of what was being done, he remained in his yamen and kept the soldiers quiet, so that no one dared to lift a finger to aid the whites. Many tales were told of their ill doings; how they stole little children and sacrificed them to their gods; but for myself I did not believe these things. We have always heard from you that the whites were good people, that they treated all natives well, and assuredly if you had heard of such doings as this you would not have remained with them. Therefore we did not believe these tales to their disadvantage, but we should only have thrown away our lives if we had ventured to express our feelings. Even in the village most people believed the tales, and said it was good that the foreign devils should be destroyed, so now that you have come back you must not speak in favour of these people or you will assuredly lose your life.”

“I shall hold my tongue, Father. Who am I that I should disobey the orders of the Empress? Nevertheless, I tell you that these white people are good. Have I not lived among them for nearly four years? They are good people. Among them no one is ill-treated, or beaten, or put to death. None carry weapons; everyone respects the others. Although I was a stranger and a foreigner, no one molested me; I went and came as I chose. As to their offering sacrifices and killing children, the thing is absurd. They are anxious to do good to foreigners, and subscribe great sums to send their priests abroad that they may teach other people their religion. All these stories that are told about them are lies,

and they have been told for the purpose of rousing ill-feeling against them. I am grieved that this trouble has come about, but assuredly it is no business of mine, except in so far as it concerns the friends of my patron. The ladies have stayed at his house, and they have spoken kindly to me and have given me money. I would do much for them for their own sake, as well as for that of my patron, who, as I have always told you, is the best man I have ever met. But I see that I can do nothing, and I can only grieve over the misfortunes that have befallen him. Of course I shall say nothing here as to my feelings, and shall even join in the cry against the foreigners. I have no wish to throw away my life and to bring disgrace and death upon you and my mother.”

“That is right, Ah Lo. It would assuredly bring terrible misfortune upon you were you to say a word in favour of the Christians. There are many who share your feelings, but they dare not open their lips, and you too must hide your real sentiments. The order has come that the Christians must be destroyed, and that order must be obeyed. Most of the young men of the village have joined the Boxers, fearing that unless they did so evil would befall them. Now tell me something about the country where you have been living, and about these strange people, who are not content to live in their own island, but come here to turn the minds of the people against their god and to bring trouble on the land. Are there many of them?”

“Very many; not so many as there are in China, but they are brave soldiers, and have arms altogether superior to ours. That,

together with the way in which they are trained, gives them a great advantage over us. But though they can fight well, they do not wish to fight. They are great traders, and it is only when their trade is interfered with, or their people ill-treated, that they go to war. They have no enmity against people of other religions, and all the time that I was in England no one ever tried to turn me from my faith. No one said a word against Buddha, or interfered with me in any way. They think that their religion is right, just as we believe in ours, and they try to convert others, just as the Buddhists came to China and converted large numbers of our people. They think that they are doing good, and spend much money in trying to do so. It is strange to me that they cannot leave things alone, but it is their way, and certainly I have no ill-will towards them on that account. When my mother has got our meal ready, and we have eaten, I will tell you much about them and of the life that I led there; but the tale is so long that I dare not begin it fasting.”

For two or three hours Ah Lo talked with his parents, and then went out into the village with Rex and chatted with the villagers. He learned a good deal as to the state of the town, and arranged to buy some vegetables, saying that he wanted to go in and see for himself what had taken place, and that he did not like going in empty-handed, as he might be ill-treated by the Boxers were he walking about idly.

The great topic of conversation, however, was with regard to the fighting at Tientsin. Few particulars of this had been

heard, and the villagers were astonished when they heard that the white devils had resisted all attacks upon them and had repulsed the Boxers with great slaughter, although the latter were no doubt much more numerous and had succeeded in destroying the greater portion of the town. Ah Lo, however, told his friends that the Boxers were still excited, and would no doubt renew their attacks with greater success, although some of the sailors from the ships were coming up to aid the whites.

“I was glad to get away,” he continued, “for there was always shooting going on, and I feared that if the Boxers came in they would kill those who were in the employment of the whites. Most of these men managed to escape before I did, but I took the opportunity of the lull in fighting to escape at night.”

It was not until the old people had retired for the night that Ah Lo and Rex sat down to talk with each other. It had been a long and painful day for the lad; he had been compelled to appear at his ease, to answer innumerable questions, and to support Ah Lo in his various statements. But when at last he found himself alone with his faithful servant he exclaimed; “Thank God, Ah Lo, we can now talk and decide what is to be done! I feel almost mad at the news. It is bad enough to know that my aunt has died, but to think of my cousin in the hands of these fiends is enough to drive me out of my mind. Of course we must try to rescue them. How it is to be accomplished I have not the faintest idea at present, but I am quite resolved that if it is in any way possible it must be done.”

"I am ready to do what I can, master, but if they are in the governor's yamen I do not see how we can manage to release them."

"No, nor do I; but there must be some way. There is always some way, Ah Lo, if one can but hit on it. I suppose the governor's yamen will be guarded by soldiers?"

"It is certain to be," Ah Lo said. "It would be in ordinary times, but now the watch is probably more strict than ever, because, although the governor has sided with the Boxers, it is probable that he is still afraid that they may attack him."

"Well, to-morrow we must have a good look at the place. It is certain that there is no time to be lost, for these two poor girls may at any moment be murdered. We may take it as certain that there is no possibility of releasing them by force. The people here are evidently so completely cowed by the Boxers that it would be hopeless to get any of them to aid us in that way. We can do nothing until we see the place. I suppose you know it?"

"Yes, there is a large courtyard in front of it, with a guard-house at the gate, and a wall runs across the courtyard just about the middle of the house. In the front part are the public offices, in the back the governor's private apartments. Behind the building there is a large garden."

"And it is probable that the prisoners are kept at the back of the house?"

"It may be so, master, but one cannot say. It is possible that the public may be permitted to stare at them, and in that case

they might be in the front part of the house.”

“That doesn’t matter much. When we are in the town tomorrow we will go into the courtyard if the gates are open and the public are admitted; if not, we must try some other means to find them. Now, from what you say, I should think that it is by the garden that we must effect an entrance. Though there may be sentries in front of the house, it is hardly likely that any will be placed in the garden. But if sentries are there we ought to have no difficulty in settling them. Once into the garden, we ought easily to effect an entrance by a door or a window. Then, of course, we should have to be guided by circumstances, for there will doubtless be a number of servants sleeping in the passages, and possibly some soldiers. You are going to help me, aren’t you, Ah Lo?”

“Certainly, master; I have come here to do so. My life is of little consequence to me. If it is my fate to die now I must die. Tell me what you want done and I will do it.”

“Thank you, Ah Lo! I knew that I could rely upon you. If I could manage it by myself I would do so, but certainly I shall require assistance. We have to consider not only how to get the girls out, but also how we are to escape pursuit. Of course we shall need disguises, for there is sure to be a hot search, and the whole country will be scoured.”

“Well, master, we may as well sleep now. We can talk matters over when we go to the town in the morning. A couple of great baskets of vegetables will be ready for us in the morning, and we

shall have plenty of time to talk over our plans as we go along.”

CHAPTER IV

A RESCUE

An hour after dawn they started. Early as it was the vegetables had been cut and packed in three large baskets, and after paying for them they put the straps of the baskets across their foreheads and started. The loads were fairly heavy and although Ah Lo carried his without difficulty, Rex found the strap press very heavily on his forehead.

“I was thinking it over in the night, master,” Ah Lo said, when they had gone a short distance.

“Don’t call me master, Ah Lo; you know that we agreed that you should always call me Shen Yo.”

“I will try to do so. Well, I have been thinking it over, and I consider that if we succeed in getting the ladies away, we should at first go north. The search will be made for us chiefly on the roads to Tientsin and Peking. The distance is about the same to both towns. They will scarcely suspect that we have gone north, and if we travel all night, hide in a rice-field during the day, and then again travel all night, we should be beyond the reach of searchers, and could then travel round to Peking, which would, I think, be safer than Tientsin, where the Boxers will always be in numbers. Of course we must have disguises for the ladies. Their best plan would be to dress as boys. Chinese women do not travel

about, and their doing so would at once give rise to suspicion. We must, of course, get some stain to give them the proper native colour. When we have turned our faces towards Peking we must state that you and I are going to enlist in the Chinese army, that we have friends in Peking, and that the boys are going with us to get any work they can. We can account for our guns by saying that we have obtained them from some of the Boxers who had brought them from Tientsin."

"Yes, we must stick to them if we can," Rex agreed. "As they are magazine rifles we ought to be a match for any twenty of these villagers or a dozen Boxers; and at any rate, if the worst came to the worst, we could be killed fighting and not be put to death by slow torture."

"I have been thinking too," Rex added, "that the best thing to do will be to set the house on fire. If we take in with us a large can of spirit, sprinkle it over everything in one of the rooms, and then spill a lot in the passage and set it all alight, the sudden alarm will create such a tremendous confusion and panic that we may be able to seize the girls and carry them off without being noticed."

"That would be a very good plan," Ah Lo agreed. "We shall have to carry a heavy sledge-hammer with us to break in the door of their prison, for they are sure to be locked up. A sentry will probably be stationed at their door, and of course we must stab him. If we set fire to the house, as you propose, we had better carry thick clothes with us to throw round them, as, in order to carry them off, we may have to run through the flames."

The wrappings will protect them, and besides people won't notice what we are carrying and will think that we are rescuing valuables from the flames. It will be well also, if possible, to seize porcelain jars or other valuables. I can carry the elder girl; and you can take the younger on one shoulder, and carry a jar or some other valuable on the other. We had better have cloaks and broad hats, like those of the soldiers. There would be no fear, in the confusion, of anyone noticing our faces.

"I really think, Shen Yo, that we may be able to succeed. It did not seem possible at first, but I think now that with the aid of fire we may be successful."

"I certainly don't see why we shouldn't," Rex said. "In such wild confusion as there would be, no one would notice anyone else. The great thing is to be quite sure where the girls are kept, and that we must find out to-day if possible. We will get rid of our vegetables as soon as we can, and then wander about with the empty baskets on our shoulders. We shall then see if people go in and out of the yamen. It is most likely that they will. Many will have petitions to make and some complaints to lay before the governor. Some, perhaps, will only go in to stare about. Possibly a little cash may induce one of the soldiers to point out the door of the room where the girls are confined, and that will be all that we shall want. When we have found that out we shall have to buy two suits of clothes for the girls, two cloaks and hats like those worn by the military, long lengths of rope for climbing the wall and getting down, a hook of some sort for catching the top of the

wall, a sledge-hammer, a chisel for opening a door or a window, and a bottle holding a couple of gallons of spirit. Can you think of anything else?"

"We must get some provisions and leave them at the bottom of the wall before we climb up, for we must not go anywhere to buy food for the first day or two after we start."

"Yes, that will certainly be a good plan."

When they approached Chafui they overtook some other peasants also carrying in vegetables, and, joining them, they entered the town together. Numbers of Boxers in their red jackets were in the streets, and a good many of the regular soldiers. The townspeople were moving about; some were laughing and chatting with the soldiers, others moved quietly about, evidently feeling by no means sure that the Boxers would not, before they left the town, plunder the houses.

Rex and Ah Lo were not long in disposing of the contents of their baskets, and they moved nearer and nearer to the yamen as they did so, getting rid of a large number of their goods within a short distance of the gate. They sat down for a while near the gate of the yamen and watched the people go in and out of the courtyard. Then, approaching the gate, they laid their blankets down a short distance from the soldiers standing at the gate, and entered. No questions were asked, and, crossing the courtyard, they entered the house. They saw two soldiers standing at a door and went up to them.

"What do you want?" one of them asked.

“Can we see the little white devils? We have come a long way to have a look at them.” And he slipped a few coins into the man’s hands.

“No, you can’t see them,” the man said; “the orders of the governor are strict. They won’t be here much longer; the governor expects a message from the viceroy to-morrow, and then we shall put an end to them. It might just as well have been done at first. If it had, we should have been saved the trouble of keeping sentry over them for the past week.”

This was serious news, but they had seen all they required. There was a door between the private apartment and the public rooms. This was closed, and the room occupied by the prisoners was next to it. Having ascertained this important fact, Rex and his follower left the house, took up their baskets, and walked off.

“I think that is as well as we could expect,” Rex said. “We may take it for certain that no sentries will be placed in the private part of the house; so that if we enter on that side we can make our preparations and light our fire without fear of being disturbed. Now we had better take a turn round the place behind, to choose the spot where we will climb over, and see if any sentries are placed on that side.”

The wall was about fourteen feet high, and there was a door at the back. All was quiet, and there was a piece of waste ground behind the garden. They examined the door carefully.

“I think, Ah Lo,” said Rex, “it will be better to cut round this lock, if we cannot force it, instead of climbing over the wall. That

would take us time; while if the door could be opened at once we should run straight down the garden, close the door behind us, and make off without a moment's delay."

"It would certainly be much better," Ah Lo agreed. "We should have plenty of time to cut through the door after it gets dark. If we decide to do that we shall have to buy a saw and a tool for cutting a hole through which to thrust it. It would certainly be a relief to get rid of the ropes. We may as well get the other things at once, and then we can sit down in some quiet place, eat our food, and talk matters over."

When Ah Lo had bought all the various things they required, they sat down with their backs against a wall. All their purchases were stowed in the bottom of one of their baskets, the other being put into it so that no one might see what they were carrying.

"Of course," said Rex when they were seated, "it won't be an easy job. In the first place, we have to make an entrance; I don't think that there will be much difficulty about that. Then, you see, we shall have to light a fire in two rooms, one on each side, and as the flames rush out of the doors, we must open the door of communication. Probably it is fastened with a bar. There must be a sufficient blaze to cause a panic among the sentries. For a moment there will, no doubt, be a tremendous uproar, and anyone in the passage or rooms will rush out. Then we must seize the moment to break in the door. If the sentries should keep their place, which I should think is very doubtful, we must throw ourselves upon them at once. The door once open, the rest will

be easy; we shall have but to wrap the girls in the blankets and run through the fire with them. The critical moment will be that at which we open the door; we must make perfectly sure that the two sentries are taken by surprise. I have every hope that the place will be burnt down, and in that case it is likely enough that they will never give the captives a thought beyond concluding that they have been burnt to death. I think it would be a good thing to take the hangings from some of the rooms, roll them up into a bundle, and soak them with the spirit. Then, when we have taken down the bar and have the door ready for opening, we will light that bundle, so that when we open the door there will be a great blaze close to the men and at the same time they will see the flames from the rooms farther down the passage. The scare is almost certain to make them bolt, and we can then break in the other door. The noise will merely sound to them as if something on fire had fallen down, and we shall have got the girls out through the door before they can open the gate of the yard and call the sentries from the guard-house.”

“I think it ought all to go right,” Ah Lo agreed. “Now, master, I think that I will go back again. I must see my father and mother and tell them that I have to go away on urgent business, for that I hear the Boxers are coming to our village in the morning to search for every able-bodied man, and that, therefore, I must leave at once. What will you do?”

“Can we return to the back of this yamen without passing through the town?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will go with you. We need not bring our baskets back with us; we can make the things up into a bundle. I would rather walk home with you and return than hang about here where I might be questioned.”

Accordingly they again took their baskets on their backs and returned to the village, hiding their parcels before they entered. Hearing the news they brought, several young men, who had managed to escape the last search of the Boxers, at once made off into the country. Ah Lo and Rex remained with the two old people until dusk. The old people were much distressed to hear that their son had to leave them so soon. He promised to pay them a longer visit as soon as it was safe to do so, and having left a sufficient supply of money to last them for some time, he took a tender farewell of them and started once more with his companion.

They arrived without adventure at the back of the yamen, and at once set to work on the lock, as it was now perfectly dark and the streets were already deserted except by parties of Boxers. In an hour they had cut round the lock, but then they found that the door was also held by bolts. It did not take them long, however, to enlarge the hole sufficiently for Rex to get his arm through and unfasten the bolts. They now waited until the lights in the house gradually disappeared, and then moved quietly up to it. They found, as they hoped would be the case, that the door of the house was unfastened.

Having ascertained this, they waited another hour until they were sure that everyone was asleep. Then they entered, lit a lamp that they had bought for the purpose, and set to work. They soon piled mats and curtains near the doors of the rooms on both sides of the passage, and poured oil and spirit over them. When this was done they made up a roll six feet high and six feet long, and, saturating this with oil, carried it to the door. They then set a light to the great piles of inflammable materials in the two rooms. These flashed up instantly, and the flames came rushing through the doors. When they saw that the blaze had taken a good hold of the material they set fire to the bundle in the passage.

As this blazed up they removed the bar and flung the door open. The two sentries gave a loud cry as they saw the flames rushing out at the end of the passage, and made a simultaneous rush for the front door. Running in, Rex and his companion found that the door of the girls' prison was held by bars only. These they undid, and found to their satisfaction that the door opened, and that there was no occasion to break it down.

The light of the flames was amply sufficient to enable them to see. The two girls lay in each other's arms in one corner.

"It is all right, girls!" Rex cried. "I am Rex, and I have come here to save you!"

Then, lifting the girls to their feet, they wrapped the blankets round them. Each lifted one and sprang through the flames rising from the roll, and then through the sheet of fire at the end of the passage. When they reached the open air they released the girls

from the wrappings, and, snatching up their rifles, which they had left leaning against the wall outside, ran down the garden. Once outside they felt that they were for the present safe.

Already a babel of noises was arising from the yamen – shrieks of women and shouts of men.

“I hope the women won’t be burned,” Rex said.

“If they cannot get down the staircase they can jump from the windows,” said Ah Lo.

“Thank God, girls, that we have got you out! We have some native clothes for you, but we must run for some little distance first; the fire will bring all the town out.”

“Are we dreaming?” Jenny said. “Can it be really you, Rex?”

“It is, dear; you can seize me and shake me, to make sure that you are awake. Are you strong enough to walk?”

“Yes, if I am really awake.”

The younger sister, however, could scarcely stand, and Ah Lo caught her up and they at once started, Jenny pouring question after question into Rex’s ear as he hurried her along. When they were two or three hundred yards away they broke into a walk.

“Now we can go on steadily,” Rex said. “We are absolutely safe till the morning, and by that time I hope we shall be a good many miles away.”

When they had gone another mile Rex said: “We had better stop here and eat something, for we shall want all our strength for the journey.”

“But how did you come to be here, Rex?”

“Well, dear, we heard such terrible news of what was going on throughout the country that Ah Lo and I determined to come out in disguise to see if we could be of any assistance to you. Of course we have heard all that has happened, so do not pain yourselves by talking about it at present. We have got stain for you to colour your skin, and the dresses of Chinese boys in which you must disguise yourselves. It would not do for you to be travelling as girls. We shall try to make our way to Peking. Of course we shall have difficulties, but I trust that we shall get through all right. We intend to give out that we are going to enlist in the army, and we shall have to invent some story to account for your going with us. We have got rifles, so that if we should be interfered with by any small party we shall be able to give a good account of them. We have got you out more easily than we had expected, and no one is likely to notice that you have escaped. They will have more than enough to do if they wish to save the house, and I doubt whether they will succeed in putting out the fire, for I think we set the place pretty well alight.”

Indeed, it was already evident that the fire had got a great hold, for, from the point that they had now gained, the flames could be seen leaping out of all the windows on the ground floor at the back of the house. The fugitives went almost at a run for another mile, and when they stopped and looked round, the yamen was in a blaze from top to bottom. Ah Lo now set Mabel on her feet, and the two girls threw themselves into each other's arms and burst into tears.

“Now you had better eat something,” Rex said, after he allowed them a short time to recover themselves. “Did the brutes feed you well?”

“We had enough to eat till to-day; they have given us nothing to-day, and we thought that that was a sign that the end had very nearly come.”

“No doubt it was so. Now in the first place you must each eat and drink something.”

“I don’t feel as if I wanted anything.”

“Never mind, it is absolutely necessary that you should eat. We must get as far away as we can before morning, and unless you eat you won’t be able to walk.”

The girls ate slowly at first, but as their appetites came back they managed to eat a hearty meal. While they did so Rex told them about the fighting at Tientsin, and the way in which they had made their way into the yamen and set it on fire.

“I can only just see the outline of your figure, Rex,” Jenny said, “but you seem to have grown tremendously since I saw you last.”

“Yes, I have grown a good deal. Four years make a great difference at my age. You have grown a good deal too, Jenny; you were quite a small girl when I saw you last. How pleased my father and mother will be to see you both again!”

“Did they send any messages?”

“No, Jenny, and for a very good reason. They did not know that we were coming. We stole off quietly in the night, for I

was not at all sure that they would let me try if I asked their permission. I left a letter for them saying where I had gone, and that, as I had Ah Lo with me, I felt pretty sure that it would come out all right. You see, I speak Chinese nearly as well as he does, and there was no real reason why anyone should suspect that we were not what we looked. Now, dear, if you have finished we will go on.”

They went for some ten miles before the day began to break. Ah Lo carried Mabel for the last five, for both girls were weakened by the scenes they had gone through, the grief at the loss of their parents, and the fear as to their own fate. As day approached they went into a large field of standing corn, which rose some feet above their heads.

“Now, girls, you go on a few yards and then change your clothes. Here is the stain. You must dye your whole skin and darken your eyebrows, eyelashes, and hair. You know a great deal better than I do how your hair must be plaited into pigtailed and wound up under these hats. I think you will find the clothes all right; they are just jackets buttoning up in front, and loose trousers. You can put on your own boots as long as we are walking in an open country and there is no one about, but when we are likely to meet anyone you must put on these Chinese shoes. After you have dressed yourselves you had better lie down and have a long sleep. We shall keep a look-out; but as we entered the field in single file, and raised the stalks after us, it is not likely that, even if the owner comes along, he will suspect

that anyone is in hiding here. Before you try to go off to sleep you had better eat another meal.”

“Are we on our way to Peking, Rex?”

“No, we have come north so far; for if a search is made it will be in the direction of Peking or Tientsin. I do not think it at all likely, however, that they will trouble to look for us. They will not give you a thought at first; and when they do think of you the place will be in such a blaze that they won't be able to get at your room, and will certainly conclude that you have perished in the flames. The only possible ground for suspicion will be that the door at the end of the garden may be found open; but no one may think of going round there for some days, and at the worst they will but fancy that robbers broke in there, and, while plundering the rooms, accidentally set the house on fire. At any rate, long before the idea can occur to them that it was an attempt to rescue you, we shall be a hundred miles away.”

The day passed quietly. Ah Lo and Rex in turn slept and watched near the edge of the corn. Men could be seen working in some of the fields, but no one approached the edge of the field in which they were hidden. Late in the afternoon the girls joined them, looking their character so well that even Ah Lo said that he would not have suspected them of being anything but what they seemed. A hearty meal was then eaten, and an hour after dark they started again, this time making towards the east. They passed through many small villages during the night, and walked, they calculated, over twenty miles, Ah Lo, as before, carrying

Mabel the last seven or eight miles. Again they hid during the day, and in the evening turned their faces towards Peking. Their stock of provisions was now exhausted, and the next day Ah Lo went into a village and brought a fresh supply.

They met with no adventure until they were half-way on their journey, when one evening as they were passing through a village, the door of one of the houses opened and three men whose dress showed them to be Boxers came out.

“Hello!” one of them said, “who are you?”

“We the travellers,” Ah Lo replied.

“What makes you travel so late?”

“We are anxious to push on to the next village.”

“Come in here and let us have a look at you,” one of them said.

“Shall we go in, master?” Ah Lo said in a whisper.

“Yes, you had better; there is a large party of them. You go on, girls; stop by the side of the last house in the village on the right-hand side.”

Rex and Lo then followed the men into the house. Inside were nine others, several of them smoking. “Now where are you going to?” demanded the Boxer who had before spoken, and who was apparently the leader of the party.

“We are going to enlist in the army.”

“You had better join us. I see you have a good gun; where did you get it from?”

“I got it from some men who were fighting at Tientsin and returned home wounded.”

“Well, you will get others there,” the man said; “you had better hand them over to us. You must stop here for the night and go on with us. It appears to me that there is something suspicious about you. Where are the two boys who were with you?”

“They have gone on. I told them to.”

“Two of you run after them and fetch them back,” the man said angrily.

Ah Lo and Rex both unslung their guns from their shoulders as if to hand them over. They were still standing in the doorway, and Ah Lo shoved one of the Boxers, who tried to pass him, and sent him staggering backwards. The captain, with an exclamation of fury, drew his sword. Ah Lo dropped his rifle against the man’s chest and fired. The others at once sprang to their feet.

“Don’t throw away a shot!” Rex exclaimed. “Now it is begun we must finish them,” and he shot down the man next him. “Step back outside the door, then only one can get at us at a time.”

The rifles rang out again, and three more of the Boxers fell. The others, seizing their arms, rushed in a mass towards them.

“Fire by turns, Ah Lo,” Rex said as he fired, and then drove the muzzle of his rifle with all his force into the chest of the next man coming at him; the man fell as instantaneously as though he had been shot. Two or three of the Boxers were armed with guns, and these attempted to press forward so as to be able to use them. Rex’s thrust had cleared the crowd a little back, and Ah Lo shot one of the men with a gun as he pressed forward. Almost at the same moment one of the others fired, and the ball passed along

Rex's arm and came out in the shoulder. With a howl the man rushed forward again. Rex and Ah Lo fired at the same moment. There were now but four Boxers left, and these charged before they were ready to fire again. Ah Lo clubbed his musket; Rex, as before, used his gun as a spear, and as a Boxer rushed at him with uplifted sword, caught him full in the chest.

"Hold the door while I load, Ah Lo," he said.

It took but a couple of seconds to discharge the cartridge and reload and close the breech, and then Rex shot one assailant just when Ah Lo struck down another. The last man threw down his weapon, but Ah Lo's blood was up, and knowing that none of the party must be allowed to get away, he brought the butt of his musket down with all his strength upon the man's head.

"That has been sharp work, Ah Lo," Rex panted. "Now, we must be off."

"I don't think they are all killed," Ah Lo said.

"Well, most of them must be, and certainly none of the others can be in a position to take up the pursuit. We had better not wait another moment, or we shall have the villagers out on us." So saying he started to run.

"I will run," Ah Lo said, "but there is no fear that the villagers will come out. When they hear the firing they will think that the Boxers are quarrelling among themselves, and certainly no one will venture out to see about it."

They found the girls waiting at the appointed place, and they gave a cry of joy as Rex ran up.

“What has happened?” they asked together.

“The Boxers were nasty and were sending two men off to catch you, so we stopped them, and we had a tough fight, but none of them got away.”

“How many were there?”

“Twelve.”

“And you killed them all?”

“We shot eight of them. Ah Lo broke the skulls of two, and I knocked the wind out of the other two. Whether I killed them or not I do not know, but it is quite certain that they cannot be in a fit condition to take up the pursuit. We can now go on again; only for the rest of the journey we must avoid villages.

“You needn’t grieve for the Boxers,” he said, as the girls uttered an exclamation of horror at what he had said. “As likely as not they have come from Chafui; but if not, no doubt they have taken part in some of these massacres and were making for Tientsin to join their fellows there.”

“Oh, how could you do it, Rex? I am not sorry for the Boxers a bit, but it is wonderful that you two should have killed twelve of them in two minutes; I am sure the firing did not last longer than that.”

“It was quick work certainly, Jenny; but with these breech-loaders one can fire all the shots in a magazine in less than a minute, and at such close quarters there was no possibility of missing one’s aim. If there had been a few more of them we should probably not have succeeded so well, for our magazines

were nearly empty when we had finished. Still, holding the door as we did, so that only one man could really get at us at once, I think we should have given a good account of ourselves even if there had been five or six more.”

They made an unusually long journey that night; the girls would not hear of stopping, although Rex assured them that there was no chance of being overtaken. When day dawned they were more than usually careful in hiding themselves among some very high grass. Rex and Ah Lo took turns to watch all day, but to their satisfaction they saw no one hurrying along the road as if carrying a message of importance.

“I did not expect to see one,” Ah Lo said; “the villagers will be frightened out of their lives when they venture out in the morning and see what has happened. I think it likely that they will at once bury all the bodies, for they will be afraid that should a party of Boxers come along and see what has taken place, they would plunder and burn the village and kill all the inhabitants. No, I do not think there is any fear that the alarm will be given.”

They continued their journey thus till they were within fifteen miles of Peking. Here the road was no longer unfrequented during the day, bands of armed men and Boxers frequently passing along. The next day they made ten miles and then lay down to sleep. Soon after daybreak natives in carts, with vegetables and grain, came along. As soon as they had passed, the fugitives issued out, and presently overtaking one of the parties journeyed on in company with them until they reached the gates of the

city. They wandered about for some hours before they found the quarter where the Legations were situated, for they did not like to ask directions, as that would have shown that they were strangers in the city. They came at last to a building where two marines were keeping guard. From these they heard that the British Legation was in the next street, and soon they were gladdened by the sight of an English uniform.

They were stopped by the sentries, but on Rex saying in English that they were fugitives from one of the missions that had been destroyed they were allowed to enter.

The Legation stood in a very large enclosure which had at one time been a palace belonging to a member of the imperial family. The gardens were charmingly laid out, and it contained several courtyards, each surrounded by buildings.

They were conducted by one of the servants of the Legation to the house of the minister, Sir Claude Macdonald, and upon Rex sending in their names they were at once admitted.

“We have made our escape, sir,” Rex said, “from Chafui, where the mission has been destroyed and all save these two young ladies, daughters of the missionary in charge, murdered. I myself am the son of Mr. Bateman of Tientsin. These young ladies are my cousins, and with the aid of this faithful Chinaman, who has for many years been in my father’s service, I have succeeded in rescuing them from the hands of the Boxers.”

“I congratulate you indeed, sir. A considerable number of fugitives have already arrived here. I will hand the ladies over at

once into the charge of Lady Macdonald, who will see that they are well cared for.”

He rang a bell and told a servant to take the girls to Lady Macdonald, and then turned again to Rex:

“We had heard reports of the massacre at Chafui, and were afraid that all had perished. I shall be glad to know how you and these young ladies escaped?”

Rex gave a brief account of the incident.

“I congratulate you most warmly on the success of your enterprise, and on the courage you displayed in undertaking it and carrying it out. It certainly seemed, on the face of it, to be a most mad-brained attempt, but it has been amply justified by the success that has attended it.

“Our position here is very precarious, and although the court continue to give us assurances of the most friendly intentions, we have the best grounds for believing that the Empress and her advisers are bent upon our destruction. However, we are making every preparation for defence, and believe that we shall be able to hold out until assistance arrives. What are your own intentions?”

“My intentions, sir, are to make my way at once down to Tientsin. My parents cannot but feel the most lively anxiety as to my safety, and my first duty is to go back to relieve their suspense. If any expedition is sent up here to your relief, I shall hope to accompany it in some capacity. I can speak Chinese like a native, and may be useful as an interpreter. I shall, of course, leave my cousins here if you will kindly permit them to stay, for

although with my Chinese follower I might make my way without difficulty through any bodies of the Chinese who may be on the road, I could hardly do so if I were accompanied by two girls, however well they might be disguised.”

“Certainly not,” the envoy said; “that would be quite impossible. There are, we know, a considerable number of the Chinese between us and Tientsin. They have already torn up the railway, and although my messengers do get through, direct communications are entirely interrupted. Still, as you have made the journey from Chafui here without difficulty, I should think that you might manage to accomplish the journey to Tientsin safely. Of course you will remain here a day or two. One of the members of my staff will lend you a suit of clothes.” He touched the bell. “Send Mr. Sandwich here. He is one of the student interpreters,” he said, turning again to Rex, “and is about your own height; and I have no doubt that his things will fit you well. I shall be glad if you will dine with me and afterwards give me more detailed accounts of your adventures.”

In a few minutes the young man made his appearance. “Mr. Sandwich,” Sir Claude said, “I will hand over this gentleman, who has just arrived from Chafui, to your charge. He will only be staying here for a day or two, for he is going to try to make his way down to Tientsin. I shall be obliged if you will lend him a suit of clothes while he stays here.”

“Certainly, I will do all I can to make him comfortable.”

“I should be obliged, sir,” Rex said, “if you would allow a

surgeon to dress my arm. A bullet entered just above the wrist and ran up to my shoulder. I think the wound is going on all right, but it is rather painful, and I should be glad to have it dressed properly.”

“Certainly, I will send our doctor to the college at once. He will be there almost as soon as you. You did not tell me that you had been hit.”

“It is not a serious wound, sir; the bullet only just went under the skin, and I fancy that when it has once been properly dressed it will give me no more trouble.”

“You are well disguised,” Sandwich said as he left the room with Rex. “I am sure that I should not have had any suspicions, however closely I inspected you. How did you manage to get here from Chafui?”

“I speak Chinese like a native. I was born in Tientsin, and was sent home to England four years ago; but as my father was most anxious that I should keep up Chinese, he sent with me one of the coolies who had always been my special servant, and so I came back speaking it as well as when I went.”

“We heard that there had been a massacre at Chafui.”

“Yes, I managed, with the aid of my man, to rescue my two cousins, who are the daughters of the missionary there. I was just in time, for they were to have been murdered on the following day.”

“But how was it that you were not murdered yourself?”

“For the simple reason that I was not there when the massacre

took place. The news of the massacre came to us at Tientsin, and I set off with my man to see if any of them had survived and if possible to rescue them. This we effected by setting fire to the governor's yamen, where the girls were confined, and carrying them off in the confusion that ensued. The only adventure we met with on the road was that we were interfered with by a party of a dozen Boxers. We had a fight with them; but as we had breech-loaders, and they were jammed up in a room, we had no difficulty in disposing of them all."

"By Jove, that was a plucky thing," Sandwich said; "and so you are going off again?"

"Yes, I am in a hurry to get back to my people, who must be in great anxiety about me."

"Well, this is our college," the young man said, stopping before a building of some size. "We are all trained here for the Chinese Consulate service. I will take you to my room first and rig you out. We shall be having a meal directly, and then I can introduce you to the fellows, when I promise you a hearty reception."

Half an hour later Rex went down in a suit of white clothes to the dining-room. He had already asked Sandwich to hand over Ah Lo to the proper quarter, where he could get rations and lodging. He was introduced to eight or ten young men who were studying at the college, and, after the meal was over, related the story of the rescue of his cousins. The narrative excited great interest, and he was warmly praised.

CHAPTER V

WITH SEYMOUR'S COLUMN

That evening after dinner Rex told the envoy in full the story of his adventures. The chiefs of two or three other Legations were present, and all expressed great surprise that a mere lad should have carried out so desperate an undertaking.

The next morning the doctor called to see Rex.

“You are thinking of going down at once, are you not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, I have come in to tell you that your cousins cannot possibly go with you. Their recent experiences have been a terrible strain on them, and as a result of the reaction, both are completely prostrated. The younger one is very feverish, and is, I expect, in for a sharp illness.”

“I am very sorry to hear that, sir, though I cannot say that I am surprised. They have held on very well, but they were weak when they started, and throughout the journey they have had no chance of picking up strength. I was afraid that they would break down before they got here. At any rate I shall run down to Tientsin to see my father and mother, who are no doubt suffering great anxiety, and shall then, I hope, be able to arrange to come back for them. I suppose I can see them before I start?”

“Certainly, but the shorter your visit the better. You may be

quite sure that they will have every attention here. I don't think there is any reason for being uneasy about them. It is the natural reaction after the strain, and I hope that in another fortnight or so they will be able to travel. I will go across with you to their room now."

Rex at once went over.

"I have come to say good-bye, Jenny," he said, as he entered the shaded room in which his cousins were lying. "The doctor says that you won't be fit to travel for another fortnight, and you know I must run down to see my father and mother, who will by this time be in a great state of alarm about you. I shall be back for you, and I hope if I come at the end of a fortnight I shall find you both in a fit state to go. If you are not, I shall wait till you are. Good-bye, dear!"

"Good-bye, Rex! Of course you ought to go to Tientsin, and we shall look forward to your return. Thank you a thousand times for all that you have done for us, and thank Ah Lo too!"

Mabel was lying with her eyes half-closed and her cheeks flushed with fever, and Rex, seeing that it was of no use trying to rouse her to say good-bye, kissed Jenny and went quietly out of the room.

"I shall keep your clothes until I come back again, Sandwich," Rex said when he was taking leave of his friend.

"You are perfectly welcome to them if you don't bring them back," the other laughed. "I have any number of suits, and if trouble comes on we shall not be particular about washing."

"I expect I shall be back before long, for if there is a row here I should like to be in it."

Rex and Ah Lo went to the railway-station in time for the train which started at ten o'clock. Several merchants and others were going down also. The journey was a tedious one, for the train travelled slowly and stopped frequently. It was just breakfast-time next morning when they arrived. Rex walked in unannounced just as his father and mother were sitting down to breakfast. They leapt to their feet with cries of surprise and delight.

"I cannot blow you up now, Rex," his father said after the first joy of the meeting had passed, "but it was the maddest thing that I ever heard of. I am too glad, however, at your safe return to scold you. We were beginning to lose all hope of your return. We thought you might get to Chafui, and of course it was a great satisfaction that you had Ah Lo with you; but when you found that everyone had been massacred, what prevented you from returning at once?"

"The fact, Father, that I found that they were not all massacred. My uncle and aunt had both fallen, but the girls were prisoners in the governor's yamen. It was a close affair, for they were to have been given to the Boxers to be massacred the very next day. We got them out, however, and took them safely to Peking, and they are at present staying at the Legation."

"You have saved the dear girls!" his mother exclaimed; "that is indeed good news. But where are they?"

“They are at Pekin, Mother. They bore up splendidly until they got there, and then they broke down, and the doctor said that they would need careful treatment and rest before they could be moved. So I ran down here to tell you of my safety, and am going back again in a few days to bring them home. I will give you full particulars when I have got into my own clothes and had some breakfast. We brought a good stock of provisions with us, but finished the last morsel yesterday afternoon. It has been a tremendously long journey, and, as you may imagine, I am pretty peckish. Before sitting down, however, I will run upstairs and change, for I must have a wash before eating. I shall be down again in ten minutes.”

He soon returned, and his father and mother asked no questions until he had finished breakfast, except that his mother asked how he had left the girls.

“I think they will both be better for a rest, Mother,” he said. “They both look fagged, which is not to be wondered at, considering all they have come through, but they are a good deal better than when I first saw them.”

As soon as breakfast was over, and before he questioned Rex further, Mr. Bateman sent for Ah Lo.

“Ah Lo,” he said, when the Chinaman came in, “you did wrong to aid my son to carry out this enterprise. However, as it succeeded so well I cannot blame you, and indeed must thank you heartily for having carried Rex safely through the matter.”

The Chinaman smiled. “I think it is the other way. Mr. Rex

carried me through the affair. He always told me what to do; I did just so and it came out all right.”

“Well, I shall not forget the great service you have rendered us.” Ah Lo bowed and went off.

“Now then, Rex, give us an account of your doings, for at present I cannot imagine how you managed to get the girls out from the governor’s yamen.”

It took Rex more than an hour to relate his adventures, for he was very frequently interrupted by exclamations and questions from his father and mother.

“It was a wonderful rescue,” his father said, when he had brought that part of the story to a close. “It seems simple enough as you tell it, but I really can hardly imagine how the plan occurred to you. There the girls were shut up in the strong house of a governor, with sentries over them and a guard but a few yards away. It was a problem that might have puzzled the sharpest brain, and it was carried out without the slightest hitch. It does you extreme credit, Rex, and I feel proud of you. Well, go on with your story.”

There was a fresh outburst of surprise when Rex related the fight with the twelve Boxers.

“Well, my boy,” Mr. Bateman said when Rex brought his story to an end, “after that you can be trusted to go anywhere, and I don’t think your mother or I will in future feel anything like the same anxiety concerning you as we have experienced this time.”

“And now, Father, how do matters stand here at present?”

“Things are quiet. A good many sailors have come up, and although a large number of the rebels are still round the town, we have no fear whatever that they will be able to take the place.”

“I think the fighting will be pretty hard work, Father, if, as I think there is little doubt, the Boxers attack in earnest. But what are the regular Chinese troops going to do?”

“I think the envoys still hope that they will stand aloof; but as far as I have learned, the general opinion is just the other way. The Empress and her ministers profess that the Boxers are a peaceable people who only desire well for the empire. They have issued a few shilly-shallying edicts, which can be read both ways, but it is generally believed that the Boxers have been put in the foreground because the Empress thinks they are more than sufficiently strong to destroy the Legations and kill every white and native Christian in the country. She doesn't want the responsibility. Before Europeans she can, if she chooses, disavow their actions, while at the same time professing her inability to control them, and declaring that as the will of the people is that no white men shall henceforth live or trade in China she must bow to their wishes. Many think, therefore, that if the Boxers can do the work alone they will be allowed to do it; if not, the Imperial troops will join them.

“It is quite certain that an enormous number of native Christians have been massacred in various parts of China, and I have heard that some have been murdered in Peking itself. I hope that enough troops will be collected to go up before long. Troops

have come in from all directions, but I am afraid it will be at least a couple of months before anything like an army can be moved forward. From the ships now here probably only two thousand men could be spared for the purpose.”

“I doubt whether that would be enough, Father. There are hordes of Chinese between this and Peking, and a large number of them are armed with the best rifles. They have breech-loaders of all sorts, and you know we must do them the justice to say that they fought bravely enough round here. I fancy they will fight even better to prevent us from getting to Peking.”

“It is by no means certain, Rex, that in the first place we shall not have to fight on for our own existence. Great numbers of Boxers and other ruffians throng the town, and if they know their own business they will not be fools enough to allow an army to gather here at all. As to the Taku Forts, I believe they will be taken just as easily as they were last time. Still, the larger vessels cannot come up the river, and the smaller ones will probably have to be escorted up by troops. They will doubtless be opposed fiercely, and not improbably we shall be attacked here at the same time, in which case we may have to fight hard.”

“All right, Father! I should like it all the better. Knowing, as we do, how they have massacred hundreds of missionaries and their families and many thousands of native Christians, we shall feel a real satisfaction in fighting these fiends.”

“And yet, Rex, a good deal of allowance must be made for them. You must remember that China has always been

an exclusive country, and that the Chinese appear to have an ingrained hatred of foreigners. To begin with, we come here because they don't want to buy our opium, and we fight them and compel them to open Chinese ports to trade. Well, the Chinese are not fools, and as long as it was only a question of trade they might put up with us, seeing that they obtained as much advantage from trade as we do. This, however, was not enough. We invade them with a vast crowd of missionaries, who settle themselves in all parts of the country, build themselves houses and churches, and set to work to convert the Chinese. Naturally the Chinese don't like it. Certainly we should not like it ourselves if hundreds of Chinamen were to settle down in all our towns, open joss-houses, hold out all sorts of advantages to proselytes, and convert the lowest and most ignorant class of the population to Confucianism or Buddhism. But this is not all. Missionaries take the converts under their protection, set up a little imperium, demand the right to judge and punish their own people, and generally to set the local authorities pretty well at defiance; and the Catholic bishops have actually insisted upon having the title, rank, and power of Chinese viceroys.

“All these things are odious to the mass of the people, and when, as at present, they find the whole of the European powers engaged in a general grab of fresh ports, they say this thing must stop. I need not say that I hold these massacres in abhorrence, but if they had simply brought down all the missionaries to the treaty ports and said to them, ‘If you come outside these walls you will

be at once put to death,' I should say that they were acting just as most European powers would act in similar circumstances, and that from their own point of view they were acting wisely. It would be necessary, of course, for us to retain ambassadors at Peking to protect our treaty rights and to settle any disputes that might arise, but beyond that I would, if I were the Emperor of China, forbid any foreigner from going beyond the treaty ports, which would be all so strongly fortified that they could defy any attack. Of course, foreigners might be allowed to enter the Chinese service if invited to do so, drill their troops, manage their dockyards, build their railways, and conduct their mines.

“To my mind, the game of grab that has been going on of late has been shocking. The Russians who stepped in to prevent the Japanese from obtaining any benefit from their defeat of China were the first to begin by their enormous appropriation of territory. We seized a port opposite to them, and the Germans, Italians, and French all seized ports and territories. Can one wonder that China was moved to the core, that this sect of Boxers, which has existed for a very long time, suddenly became a violent political association, and that the Empress has gladly availed herself of their assistance? It would be strange indeed if it were not so. You must remember that the Chinese as a race are extremely intelligent. Owing to the denseness of the population and the poverty of the people the weakly die off in childhood, and the struggle for life is so severe that the wits of the people become sharpened. They are the cleverest bargainers in the world. Every

transaction is a battle in which purchaser and seller try to get the better of one another. Physically they are fine men; and their lives being for the most part hard, they have little or no fear of death.

“When you take all these things into consideration, you can see that there is a great deal to be said for the action of the Chinese. They have perpetrated horrible cruelties upon the missionaries and native Christians, but they have lived under a cruel régime. Capital punishment under the most atrocious conditions is very frequent among them, and they have become habituated and hardened to it. You must remember that at home as late as the reign of Queen Elizabeth any persons found begging were executed, or, as a mild punishment for a first offence, had their hands or ears cut off.

“Of course, if we are attacked, I shall aid in the defence; but although I have lost my sister—in-law and her husband, I shall feel no personal animosity towards the Chinese, for I consider that we have, from their point of view, given them ample grounds for endeavouring to get rid of us.”

“Well, I don’t think that I ever thought of it in that light, Father, but it certainly does seem rough on them that we should seize port after port on the smallest pretext, and send our people interfering with their customs and religions all over the country. Certainly at ordinary times they have always seemed to me an inoffensive set of people, placid and good-tempered, which makes it all the more extraordinary that they should go in for such hideous massacres. However, Father, whatever excuse they have, it is

quite certain that we must not let them take Tientsin if we can keep them out of it.”

“We shall certainly do our best,” Mr. Bateman laughed, “and I have no doubt that we shall succeed. Still, we may have some tough work before us.

“We have received a despatch from Macdonald urgently asking that troops should be sent up at once,” Mr. Bateman said to Rex two days after his return.

“Well, Father, if things really do look bad I should like to go back again. I told the girls that I would, and I certainly should like to be there on my own account if there is any fighting.”

“Probably there will be fighting here also, Rex.”

“Yes, Father, but there is no doubt that you will be able to beat them off here. Marines and blue-jackets will be sent up from the ships to take the place of those who are going forward now. Besides, no doubt an attack will be made on the Taku Forts, and you know they are not formidable. I don't think, however, that it is anything like so certain that they will be able to hold out in Peking. The Legations cover a big extent of ground, and what with the Boxers, the lower classes of the city, and the Chinese army, there will be a tremendous pressure upon them. Now, as Ah Lo and I managed to get the girls away from Chafui, it seems to me possible that, if the worst comes to the worst, we may manage to rescue them again. At any rate I know it would be a big comfort to them if I were there.”

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