

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription, \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, March 1, 1899, by Frank Tousey.

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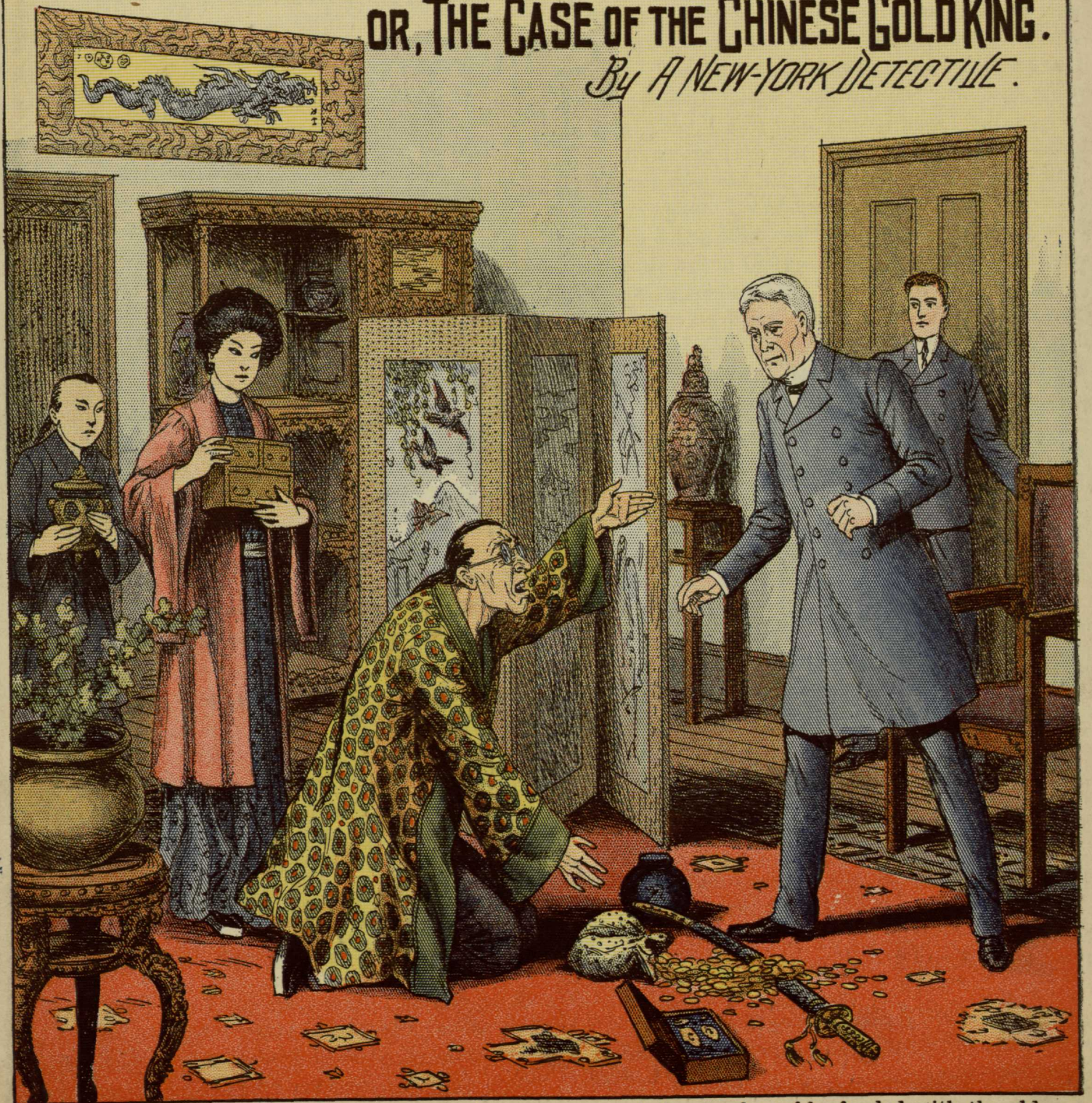
NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 24, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS IN "LITTLE PEKIN";

OR, THE CASE OF THE CHINESE GOLD KING.

By A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.



Fang Wang now kneeled at Old King Brady's feet, and pointing to the gold, pleaded with the old detective. Just then a Chinese woman entered, bearing a richly inlaid cabinet. A young Chinaman followed, carrying a handsome vase. Harry held the door.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BRADYS TAKE A CHINESE CASE.

"Did you get it?" asked Old King Brady, the detective, as Harry—Young King Brady—his partner and pupil, came hurriedly into the shabby little office on Park Row one November afternoon.

"Of course I got it," was the reply. "I never doubted that I would."

"And what is it about?"

"A call to a case."

"You don't say."

"That's what it is."

"How about the draft?"

"Perfectly good. Dek Foon, the Chinese banker on Mott street, to whom I applied for the translation, told me what the paper meant, and said we could have the money any time we wanted it."

"Did you write out the translation?"

"One of Dek Foon's clerks did."

"Well, and what does it say?"

"There it is; read it for yourself. The Chinaman writes a beautiful hand; it is as plain as print."

It was a case of a Chinese letter turning up in the Brady's morning mail.

The envelope was addressed to the detectives in a bold, round hand in plain English, but when they opened it they found inside a long strip of paper covered with Chinese characters, accompanied by another which Old King Brady, whose experience with the Chinese has been a wide one, at once suspected was a draft on some Chinese banker on Mott street.

As the detectives were very busy that morning, nothing had been done about the matter until after lunch, when Harry was sent with the documents to Dek Foon, the noted Chinese banker, with the result mentioned in the conversation just quoted.

The Bradys receive many strange letters in course of their business, but this was about as odd a one as ever came their way.

Old King Brady took the paper handed to him by his partner and read aloud as follows:

"Sirs: I am only a poor Chinese man, but hear my prayer. When twenty-five years ago I married a white woman we had one son, who grew up to be the smartest man on earth. Sirs, my son and I are one (or in partnership).

We grow to be enormous rich, so they call him the Gold King of Little Peking. By this you see that we own mines. Yes, it is true. Mines that are very rich in gold. Sirs, when we get much gold with it must come many enemies and false friends. It is ever so. Someone has betrayed us. Now since two weeks my dear son is missing. Envy, jealousy, the thought to steal from us our rich possessions is the cause. But who has done this evil thing? Who has stolen my son away? Ah, sir, I know not, but now comes to me more trouble, for with my son has disappeared the valued papers by which we hold our mine. Wicked men demand the property at our hands, saying it is not yours, but ours. They lie. We bought and paid for it, but now that my son he is missing, and with him the proof, what can I do? Sirs, I need help, and for help I will pay any price. To me you have been highly recommended as bold, shrewd men who can help me in my trouble if you will. This is my plea. I send herewith a draft for \$1,000 on Dek Foon & Co., Mott street, New York. This with my letter I make all in Chinese, for I am being watched and spied upon, my letters have been opened again and again. I write this in the dialect of my native Chinese province of Quei Chow, which is known to but few in America, but I believe so in your keen shrewdness that I doubt not you will get it read to you. Sirs, if you will take my case consider this draft but the beginning. So much more money as you demand will I give. Sirs, if you take my case send by telegraph just one word—it is 'gold.' I understand, and shall then expect to see you. Address Fang Wang, 1508 Stockton Street, San Francisco, Cal. May health and success follow you forever."

"Well," exclaimed Old King Brady, laying down the letter. "This is a most extraordinary document."

"And yet the Chink puts it very plainly, Governor," Harry replied.

"So he does, but in many words. Have you the envelope his letter came in?"

"Yes; it has been steamed open, ironed out and resealed."

"Ha! The old fellow is right. His enemies are hot after him. It's a wonder they let the thing come through. But he made the mistake of a lifetime in addressing us direct in English."

"That's what he did, of course. What are you going to do about it?"

"Would you like to go to California, Harry?"

"I should like to first-rate. It is some time now since we have been out there."

"All right. We will go."

"When?"

"To-morrow night."

"Shall I wire this Fang Dang?"

"Fang Wang, isn't it?"

"Yes, I believe it is."

"Get the name straight. Yes, you may wire him. But don't sign the despatch."

"And the draft?"

"You may cash it."

"Do you know anything of the man?"

"No, I never heard of him. But then there are hundreds of rich Chinks in Frisco who are unknown to the general public. I am going down on the Mining Exchange now. Perhaps I can find out something about this Little Pekin. The case is plain enough. These Chinks have come up against some big mining company who want to freeze them out. Chances are the mischief is already done. The wires may be manipulated right here on Wall street, for all we can tell."

"That's what's the matter. Well, I guess you will find it out if it is so."

Young King Brady's confidence in his partner was by no means misplaced.

Old King Brady's acquaintance is enormous and exceedingly widespread.

The shrewd old Chinaman had made no mistake in employing these keen detectives.

He had struck at the top, for to-day the Bradys stand foremost in their profession in America, if not in the world.

Old King Brady now hurried down Broadway to the Mining Exchange.

Many turned to look back at him as he passed.

This was natural.

Old King Brady at all times when not in disguise invariably appears in a costume well calculated to attract the attention even of those who do not know him.

He wears a long blue coat with a double row of brass buttons down the front, with an old-fashioned "stock" about his neck, and a high, pointed, standing collar, style of 1840.

Add to this a big white felt hat with an extraordinarily broad brim, and you have Old King Brady's appearance in public pretty accurately described.

Reaching the Exchange Old King Brady found himself just one minute too late. The place was closed.

He stood on the sidewalk watching the brokers as they came flocking out.

Many nodded to him, and presently he grabbed one.

"Hello, Joe!" he exclaimed. "Give me half a minute, please."

"It's just about all I can spare, Mr. Brady," said the broker. "What is it you want?"

"Ever hear of Little Pekin, California?"

"Is it a place or a mine?"

"Don't know."

"I never did."

"All right. You can't help me in that, then."

"Sorry."

"It's all right. Don't let me detain you."

A moment after the broker departed Old King Brady caught hold of another.

"Duffell, how do you do!" he exclaimed.

The greeting was cordially returned, and the same question put.

"Do you know Henry H. Barker?" asked the broker.

"I do. Very well. I had a case for him once."

"He represents a good many California mining properties. You had better see him. Personally I never heard of Little Pekin."

"I'll interview Barker. It is a good suggestion."

Old King Brady hurried to an adjoining skyscraper and ascended to the 20th floor.

Here he entered the elegant offices of Barker & Brown, and readily obtained admission to the presence of his man.

Mr. Barker was rather a stiff proposition, but Old King Brady knew how to make him unbend.

"Yes," he said. "I have heard of Little Pekin, but I don't remember in what connection. I can easily refresh my memory, though."

"How so?" inquired the detective.

"By reference to my indexed note-books. You know, perhaps, that I have personally visited nearly every mine in California. I have kept very careful notes, and my books are all indexed. It will only take a moment."

He touched a bell, and a young woman appeared.

"Miss Mulligan, look up Little Pekin in my notebook index, please," he said. "Bring me the book."

Miss Mulligan was back inside of ten minutes. Mr. Barker took the books, which had been opened at the proper page, and read as follows:

"Early this morning we started from Alturas and rode over to Cedarville, through the Black Rock Pass. On the way we stopped at a Chinese settlement, where a half-breed Chinaman by the name of Charley Wangman is running a most successful gold claim. He employs only Chinamen on the work, with the exception of his assayer, superintendent, teamsters, etc. The man works the claim entirely at his own expense, and simply for the gold in it. There is no company, and no stock. He is a very intelligent person. I had a long talk with him. In this section he is known as the Chinese Gold King. This settlement is locally called Little Pekin. From here I passed on to Col. Narraway's 'Four Kings', and—but that is all, Mr. Brady: I remember the place perfectly now. I have seen so much in this line that details sometimes slip my mind."

"Thank you," said Old King Brady. "You have told me exactly what I wish to know."

"I am very glad of it."

"May I ask a question or two?"

"Certainly."

"You have no interest in the Narraway properties?"

"None whatever. Col. Narraway has several times so-

licited me to represent him in New York, but I have invariably refused."

"And why?"

"Don't like the man."

"What about him?"

"He is a scoundrel, that's all."

"Rich?"

"They say forty millions. He's a land-grabber and a mine wrecker. These are the mildest of his faults."

"I see. Does Little Pekin adjoin his claim?"

"Yes; lies above it on the side of the mountain."

"I see. You have met Col. Narraway personally?"

"No. I never have. I believe he is in Europe now."

"I think that is all."

"May I inquire why you are interested? I may be able to help you out with some suggestion."

"I ought not to tell anyone, but my confidence in you is perfect, Mr. Barker. While I am not quite certain I believe this Chinese gold king has mysteriously disappeared, and a movement is being made to gobble up the Little Pekin property."

"Precisely what I supposed. Well, if you take the case and dig down to the bottom you will find Col. Narraway's hand pulling the wires. It would not be the first time he had resorted to murder to gain his ends, if rumor is correct. Besides that, there is a reason why he would naturally want the Little Pekin property."

"Ah!"

"It controls his water supply."

"I see. They can cut him off?"

"At any time."

"But the law don't allow that."

"Certainly not. Still, it could be done, and if done would surely cause him an immense loss. Aside from the value of the Little Pekin property, it would be a good business move to absorb it on account of the water supply."

Here was valuable information.

Through his influence Old King Brady had learned in a few moments what might have consumed a lot of time after his arrival in California.

The old detective now closed up his New York affairs, and next day, in company with his partner, started for California.

CHAPTER II.

ATTACKED BY HIGHBINDERS.

The Bradys are almost as well known in San Francisco as they are in New York.

Especially is this true in Chinatown, where their work often lies.

After a quick run the detectives turned up at the Lick House, on Montgomery street, where they always stay when in the Golden City.

They reached there shortly before six in the evening,

and immediately after supper went on foot to Stockton street, where they had no trouble in finding Fang Wang.

The house was an old-fashioned frame dwelling, a number of which are occupied by rich Chinaman on that block, people who do not care to mingle with the common herd of Celestials further down the hill.

When Old King Brady rang the bell the call was answered by a young Chinaman dressed all in white, with lumps of gold serving as buttons on his blouse.

"We want to see Fang Wang," said Old King Brady.

"Go way—go way!" cried the Chinaman, holding the door on a chain. "No can. Belly sick. Gottee smallpox. Go way! Go way!"

"Heavens!" muttered Harry. "Have we crossed the continent only to run up against a case of small-pox? We had better light out."

"Nonsense," replied Old King Brady. "Can't you see that it is only bluff?"

"Look here, John," he added aloud. "We are the Bradys from New York."

"Bladys! Oh; gee!" cried the China boy. "Comee in! Allee light. Me tellee Fang Wang."

"But the smallpox."

"No, no! Me lie. Me tink you leporters. Oh, gee! Don' go away. Fang Wang he killee me!"

The Chinese youth was now as anxious to get the Bradys inside as he had been before to keep them out.

He conducted the detectives into the most richly furnished Chinese room they had ever seen.

To describe it would be tedious.

As the Bradys were not without knowledge of the value of Chinese bric-a-brac, they saw at a glance that thousands of dollars were represented by the vases and inlaid cabinets displayed here.

The boy placed two big, clumsy chairs for them, and vanished.

After a long wait an inner door opened, and an aged Chinaman wearing a figured silk blouse and big horn spectacles came tottering into the room.

He bowed low before the detectives.

Tears were flowing down his cheeks when he straightened up. He was clearly much overcome.

"You are Fang Wang?" said the old detective.

"Yair. Dlat me. You Mlister Ole Kling Blady?"

"Yes."

"He your son?"

"My partner."

"So? Good boy! My boy lost. Oh, oh, oh!" Fang Wang began blubbing again.

The old man appeared to be in his dotage, or possibly grief had reduced him to a condition of nervous prostration.

"Come, come!" cried Old King Brady. "You want to control yourself, or we cannot take your case."

The old detective had hit it wrong.

"No takee my case? No takee!" Fang Wang fairly

howled. "Oh, oh! You say yair, now you say no! Oh, oh, oh!"

He rushed from the room wringing his hands.

"Governor, the old fellow has gone daffy," said Harry.

"We have certainly got to be very patient with him," was the reply. "I suspect it is going to take us a long time to get at the facts here."

"Perhaps he don't intend to come back again."

"That is not likely. Chances are he has simply gone away to gain control over himself. We shall see him back in a few minutes. Let us wait."

The wait was not a long one.

In a short time Fang Wang came tottering into the room, loaded down for fair.

He carried in his arms a huge sword with a gold inlaid scabbard, a bag, a box, and a vase of the most exquisite workmanship.

"Looker here!" he cried. "You boy, you holdee door so nobody can comee in. Mr. Old Blady Kling, you listen to me."

The bag dropped from his trembling fingers as he spoke, and dozens of twenty-dollar gold pieces rolled out upon the carpet.

He dropped the sword then, and set down the vase; then, stooping, he opened the box, displaying unset gems of great value.

It was a most remarkable exhibit.

Fang Wang now kneeled at Old King Brady's feet, and pointing to the gold, pleaded with the old detective.

Just then a Chinese woman entered, bearing a richly inlaid cabinet.

A young Chinaman followed, carrying a beautiful vase. Harry held the door.

"See, Mlister Blady Ole Kling!" cried Fang Wang. "All dis I give you so you takee my case! Dlat sword is two tousan' year ole. It vas vort oh, so much! Den dose jewelries—ha! Dat vase vas vort a tousan' dollar. Dis odder, for it I pay flive thousand dollar. So I give you all dese tings if you findee my son."

It was really quite an affecting scene.

Old King Brady now changed his tactics.

Addressing Fang Wang in gentle words, as he would a child, he made the old man understand that he had not had any intention of refusing his case, and that he would do the best he could to help him find his son.

He succeeded at last in this, but it was only with the greatest difficulty that he was able to make the old man understand that he did not want his treasures.

Neither the woman nor the young man could speak English, and much time was lost before the detectives could get the stuff cleared away and bring Fang Wang down to business.

Still the old man remained so excited that it was almost impossible for him to make himself understood.

He rambled on about his son, and how much money he had spent in educating him, how wonderfully smart he was, etc.

The case looked hopeless when suddenly the woman who had been closely watching them said something in Chinese.

Fang Wang replied, and they held quite a discussion. He then turned to Old King Brady and said:

"You no can lunderstand me? Me spikee Melican no good?"

"It is rather hard to understand you, Wang," the old detective replied.

"Yair, dlat so. Me gettee feller dlat spikee good. You wait."

The Chinaboy now vanished, as did the woman, who presently returned with sweetmeats and tea on a silver tray.

Wang pottered about and served his guests.

The woman now brought in rice brandy, or "samschow," as the Chinese call it, together with a box of excellent cigars.

The subject of the missing man was dropped completely.

Fang Wang appeared to be ready to talk of anything and everything but that.

Then, after a little, a young Chinaman dressed American fashion, with his hair cut short, came into the room.

Wang introduced him as Sam Lee.

"Me talkee Chinee, him talkee Melican!" he cried.

He had brought in an interpreter, it seemed.

Sam Lee spoke perfect English.

He called the old man to order also, and kept him to the point.

Great headway was made now, and the Bradys soon had the whole story, which they allowed Wang to tell in his own rambling way.

The one thing Old King Brady particularly noticed was that he mentioned no names, but simply talked of his "enemies" in a general way.

He spoke of these enemies trying to seize the mine, but went into no details.

His son, who went under the name of Charlie Wangman, just as Mr. Barker had said, had disappeared from his own room at the mine during the night, so it appeared.

Here again details were lacking.

Wang declared that he being too old to travel, had not been to Little Pekin personally, but added that he was represented there by a Chinaman, one Ah How.

In short, the information derived from Wang during a good hour, come to boil it down, was but little more than the Bradys already possessed when they entered the place.

The old detective was very patient with it all.

He let Wang talk himself to a finish, and then he took the matter into his own hands.

Through the interpreter the following conversation ensued.

"Who are these enemies you speak of?" Old King Brady demanded.

"It is not right for me to name names unless I have proof," was the reply.

"But you must. Is it the owner of the mine below you called the Four Kings?"

"You know? You have been in Little Peking, then?"

"I have not been in Little Peking, but I know. Is Colonel Narraway the man?"

"He is the man I suspect of being at the bottom of it all. His superintendent, Mr. Tracy, is the man I fear."

"This is better. What has Mr. Tracy done?"

"He has filed a claim on the mine with the government. He says that it is part of the Four Kings property, and that in sixty days we must give it up and go away."

"Have you engaged a lawyer to look after your interests?"

"I went to a lawyer, but he would have nothing to do with me, because I could not produce the papers given my son by the government, which prove that he owns the mine."

"Has any paper been served on you?"

"Yes; but I cannot read them."

"Let me see the paper?"

Wang produced it.

Old King Brady saw at once that it was an order from the court to show cause why one Charles Wangman should not be dispossessed of certain lands described at length.

The order made no allusion to any mine.

It was made returnable in sixty days, twenty of which had already expired.

Old King Brady had grave doubts as to the genuineness of the order, well knowing the tricks which are played on the Chinese.

"Is your son a citizen of the United States?" he asked.

"Yes, he is," replied Wang. "He was born in California. They could not refuse him his papers. He got them several years ago."

"You have them?"

"No."

"Have you any papers belonging to him?"

"None."

"How did he get possession of this land?"

"He bought it and paid for it. \$5,000 was the price."

And so the questions ran.

Except the man who had served the paper, no one had been near old Wang in the matter, it appeared.

The only thing to do was to get to Little Peking as soon as possible, and look the ground over, it seemed to Old King Brady, and he said as much to Wang.

Having then obtained full directions how to reach the place, and promising to go right to work, the Bradys withdrew.

"Rather a blind case, Governor," remarked Harry, when they gained the street.

"Very," was the reply. "On the face of things it certainly looks quite hopeless, but we may be able to do something, after all."

"You still regard Col. Narraway as being at the bottom of this disappearance?"

"His agents surely are. The man himself is probably not personally concerned in it."

"Wang offered pretty good proof that his letters to the superintendent of the mine have been tampered with."

"Yes; there seems to be no doubt on that score."

"What about the legal side of it?"

"Impossible to form any opinion. A lawyer is needed for that work, and we may have to employ one before we are through."

Old King Brady suddenly paused and wheeled about. Two Chinamen were at their heels.

"We are being shadowed all right," he said.

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. Those fellows have been dogging our footsteps ever since we left the house."

They turned into Sacramento street and started down the hill.

In a moment they found themselves in the heart of Chinatown.

It was now ten o'clock, and the street was, as always at that hour of the evening, densely crowded.

Chinamen elbowed them on all sides.

The two men were now lost sight of.

Suddenly there came a rush behind them, and loud shouts were heard.

The crowd broke away, and two Chinamen went dashing past.

"Look out, Harry!" the old detective cried.

As the men flew by each drew a revolver, and both fired point-blank at the Bradys.

But for the old detective's warning the result would have been fatal.

As it was, seeing what was coming, both successfully dodged.

It was an old trick of the Highbinders.

The fellows flew by like the wind, and darting into the alley vanished in an instant.

"Great Scott!" gasped Harry. "Things are getting hot around here."

"Come on! Be quick!" cried Old King Brady.

They turned into Dupont street, and made all haste back to their hotel, but not until they had reached it did Old King Brady feel safe.

"These rascals are playing for a big stake," he then said. "There can be not the least question that they hired a couple of Highbinders to do us up. We have probably been shadowed since the first moment we struck town."

CHAPTER III.

THE BRADYS ARRIVE AT LITTLE PEKIN.

The incident which occurred on Sacramento street made the Bradys very careful.

They did not again show themselves openly on the street.

Next morning they left the Lick House in disguise, and taking the train on the Southern Pacific railroad, rode out a few stations.

Here they left the train, and engaging a team, were driven over to a station on the Oregon line, where they boarded a train and started north.

They left the train at Morley, and taking a stage, crossed the Sierras by the way of Barnwell.

It was a long and tedious ride, but at last they reached Alturas, where they put up at the Eagle House, a wretched hotel.

During all the long ride they encountered nothing to cause them to suspect that they were still being shadowed.

The following morning they bought two bronchos and rode over the hills to Little Pekin, a distance of twenty miles.

The little settlement was located up on the side of the eastern foot-hills of the Sierras, but the land was level all about the place.

When the Bradys came up on the table-land they saw before them a collection of some twenty-five huts, with one or two larger buildings.

Now they met a large ore-wagon, drawn by four mules, on the way to the quartz mill.

The driver was a white man, and he informed the Bradys that the settlement ahead of them was Little Pekin.

"Who is it you wish to see?" he asked.

"We have business with Mr. Wangman, I believe that is the name of your boss," Old King Brady replied.

"That's his name, but you won't see him," was the answer.

"How is that?"

"He is in Frisco. He hasn't been here for several weeks."

"Well, we shall have to deal with Mr. Blackstone, then."

"You'll find him all right," replied the teamster, and he drove on.

Soon the Bradys brought up at the office.

A great many Chinamen were moving about the mine yard.

The detectives saw no white man among them.

It was rather astonishing to Old King Brady.

As everybody knows, the Chinese are pretty extensively engaged in mining in California.

As a rule they only work the abandoned placer claims, and that in the most primitive way.

Here, however, was a case where a full-fledged quartz mine was being operated, and that on quite an extensive scale.

A young Chink came forward to take their horses.

"Is Mr. Blackman here?" asked Old King Brady, naming the American superintendent.

"He down in mine," replied the Chinaman. "Mlister How, he in office."

The Bradys entered.

The office was quite a large one, and there were two Chinese clerks at work on the books.

"Is Mr. How here?" inquired Old King Brady.

One of the clerks touched a bell, and a good-looking Chinaman, very much Americanized, came out from an inner room.

"Gentlemen, whom do you wish to see," he asked, in that perfect English which some of the California Chinese acquire.

"You are Mr. How?" returned Old King Brady.

"I am."

"I have a letter here for you from Fang Wang, of San Francisco."

"Ah! Mr. Wangman's father."

Mr. How expressed no surprise.

He ushered the detectives into a well-furnished private room, and chairs were placed for them.

Ah How then seated himself at his desk, and read the letter, which was in Chinese.

"I am very glad you have come," he said. "I am the Chinese superintendent here, and you find me in full charge of the business. Mr. Blackman, our English superintendent, is actually our mining expert; he has nothing to do with the business end. But may I ask what do you expect to accomplish here in Little Pekin, as we call this place?"

"Does not the letter state?" inquired Old King Brady, in some surprise.

Ah How smiled in a peculiar way.

"I am very much afraid, gentlemen, that you are laboring under a delusion," he said.

"How a delusion?" asked Old King Brady.

"Are you aware that old Mr. Wang is insane?"

"I am not."

"It is so. He imagines that his son has been made way with, when the fact is he has merely gone to Europe to raise capital to work this mine on a more extensive scale."

"Indeed."

"Yes; such is the case."

"Did he not tell his father of his intention?"

"He was called away suddenly. He certainly intended to write his father, and I have no doubt he did. Perhaps the letter was lost. At all events, the old man claims not to have received it. He has got it into his head that Charley has been made way with, and that enemies are trying to get away this property. It is all nonsense, Mr. Brady. I had a letter from Charley Wangman only last week."

Here was a strange turn of affairs.

For the moment Old King Brady was nonplussed. Harry knew not what to think.

"It seems, then, that we have crossed the continent under a delusion," said the old detective.

"You certain have," replied Ah How. "Wang is crazy. I have had to be very patient with him for his son's sake. Charley is not only my employer, but my friend. We

were at the Holmon University together. Of course, I know more about his affairs than anyone."

Old King Brady remained silent.

He was studying his man, and he knew that the man was studying him.

"Did Wang tell you that Col. Narraway was trying to rob him of the mine?" he asked.

"He showed us a paper which had been served upon him."

"Ah!"

"Yes. What about that?"

"I have heard of no such paper. What was its import?"

"It was an order from the court directing one Charles Wangman to show cause why he should not be dispossessed of this property."

"Indeed! You surprise me."

"The paper appeared to be genuine, Mr. How."

"This must be looked into. It is a case for a lawyer, however, and not for a detective."

"From your talk I judge that our services are hardly required here?"

"You can judge for yourself, sir. What has the detective to do in a case where there is nothing to detect?"

"Quite so, Mr. How. But we have come a long distance, and now that we are here I should like to remain a few days. We have never been in this part of the country before."

"You may remain as long as you wish. I shall be glad to entertain you. Everything is open and above board here. Mr. Brady, you have certainly come to Little Peking on a fool's errand, but that is no reason why you should hurry away."

"Very well. Then we will remain. Any objection to our taking a look at the mine?"

"None whatever. Do anything you like. I will call a boy to show you your rooms as soon as they can be prepared for you. In the meantime I must ask you to excuse me, as I have a great deal to do."

This amounted to being bowed out.

The Bradys rose.

"I suppose our horses will be cared for?" asked Old King Brady.

"Certainly; and so will you. Make yourselves entirely at home, gentlemen. As soon as your rooms are ready the boy will notify you, as I said."

The detectives passed out into the yard, Ah How dismissing them with a low bow.

"Upon my word, Governor, this is a great piece of business!" remarked Harry, when they were well away from the office.

Old King Brady looked around very cautiously before replying.

"You want to exercise the greatest care here," he then said.

"Of course that slick Chink is in the deal."

"Harry, I don't know what to think. If it was not for that paper I should be inclined to believe Ah How."

"You think that Fang Wang is crazy, then?"

"I suspect it. I did from the first moment I saw him."

"If his son has actually been made way with, then he has had enough worry to make him so."

"That's what I mean; that the old man's mind is affected—not that he is a lunatic."

"Very likely; and yet what he told us may be true."

"I cannot say. I am like a man groping in the dark. One thing is certain, however. I am not going to be shooed away from Little Peking in a hurry. Let us take it easy and see all there is to be seen."

They walked on to the shaft-house.

Here a hoisting machine was being operated by three Chinamen.

The Bradys stood by and watched the ore come up.

It was as fine gold ore as they had ever seen.

Down in the shaft the sound of hammers was to be heard.

Evidently there was a considerable force at work below ground.

"Can we go down into the mine?" Old King Brady asked one of the Chinks.

"Me no sabe. No speakee English," was the curt reply.

The Bradys now wandered about, looking into the miners' cabins, taking in everything.

There was no boarding-house.

The Chinamen evidently cooked for themselves, after the usual custom of their race.

At last the detectives came to a little house somewhat better than the rest.

The door was closed, but when they looked through the window they saw a young white man working over an assaying furnace inside.

He glanced up at them, and then came and opened the door.

"Good-day, gentlemen," he said. "This is the assay office, and I am Ben Thomas, the assayer. Did you want to see me?"

"We are pleased to see you, Mr. Thomas," the old detective replied, "but we have no business with you. We are merely looking about a bit."

"Come right in if you are at all interested in assaying. It seems good to see a white face about Little Peking."

"Something unusual?" questioned Harry, having received a secret signal from his partner directing him to take up the talk.

"Very," was the reply. "I am surrounded by Chinks here. Except Mr. Blackman, the English super, and a couple of our teamsters, I am the only white man in town."

"If you can call it a town," laughed Harry.

"You see all there is to it," said Thomas. "Of course, I get big pay, or I wouldn't stay here an hour. Don't know how long it is going to last, though."

"How is that?"

"Oh, the boss has gone away, and I don't like those who have taken charge."

"You refer to Mr. Wangman?"

"Yes. Did you come here to see him?"

"Yes."

"Well, you don't see him."

"Apparently not. Mr. How tells us he is in Europe."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Yes. Isn't it so?"

"It must be so if he told you so; I don't know anything about where he has gone. I've got all I can do to attend to my assaying."

Now came the signal for Harry to stop his questioning, and the talk turned upon assaying and the mine.

Old King Brady listened in silence.

He saw that Ben Thomas was eyeing him closely, and he expected what was coming next.

Suddenly the assayer turned to the old detective and said:

"Excuse me for butting in, but ain't you Old King Brady, the celebrated detective?"

"That's who I am."

"I thought so. I've seen your picture many a time."

"Well, you have hit it. Let me introduce Young King Brady, my partner."

"I'm glad to meet you both. I wish I dared to ask your business here."

"You have asked it, and I will tell you. We were hired by parties in San Francisco to come to Little Pekin and find out, if we can, what has become of Charley Wangman."

"I thought as much. It is about time."

"You are interesting me very much, young man. I wish you would speak out plainly," the old detective replied.

"Then if you want my plain opinion, it is that there is something wrong about the boss's absence. I don't believe he has gone to Europe any more than I have."

"What then?"

"I don't know what then."

"Do you believe he's dead?"

"No, I don't."

"Living and held a prisoner?"

"Yes, I do."

"This is most important. You can rely upon your confidence being respected."

"Hush!" breathed Harry. "Someone coming."

Ben Thomas glanced out the window.

"It's Blackman," he breathed. "If you want to get anything more out of me keep your mouths shut. Not another word!"

CHAPTER IV.

BOSS BLACKMAN EXHIBITS HIMSELF TO THE BRADYS IN TWO DIFFERENT WAYS.

Mr. Blackman was a man of most forbidding aspect, a tall, beetle-browed Englishman, whose surly manner was not long in displaying itself.

"We don't allow strangers in our assay office!" he growled as he came in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said Old King Brady.

"You needn't!" broke in Thomas. "I invited these gentlemen in here," he added, turning upon the superintendent.

"Well, you don't want to do it."

"I will do it as often as I please. If you don't like it then get another assayer."

Ben Thomas' tone was most defiant.

Old King Brady, foreseeing a storm, hastened to interfere.

"Mr. Thomas is not altogether to blame," he said. "We have Mr. How's permission to go anywhere we like, and a little later I am going to request you to show me the mine, Mr. Blackman—I believe that is your name."

"You can request and be blowed. You won't see it," was the snarling response.

"We'll see about that."

"Yes, we will. Who are you, anyhow?"

"The name is Brady."

"Ah! Detectives!"

"Exactly."

"Sent here by that crazy old Chink in Frisco?"

"Exactly."

"How did you get into Little Pekin?"

"Rode in on horses. We don't own an automobile."

"Get your horses in a hurry and ride out again, or you will be lucky if you are not ridden out on a rail."

Matters were getting hot.

To this last Old King Brady made no answer, feeling that he had in a measure called forth the threat.

He expected more of it, but to his surprise Mr. Blackman suddenly turned on his heel and left the assay office, slamming the door behind him.

"Now, gentlemen, you see what you are up against!" exclaimed Thomas. "That's Blackman for you!"

"Why did he leave in such a hurry?" asked Old King Brady.

"Because Ah How is the real boss here. He suddenly remembered that, and felt that he was going too far, I suppose."

"We had better get out of here, anyway, don't you think so?" questioned Harry.

"Stay where you are," replied Thomas. "Let them make the next move, if you will take my advice."

"We certainly will take it. Tell me, have you any clew to give us in the matter of the disappearance of this Chinese gold king?"

"Nothing definite. Wait till some time when we can get together without fear of interruption, and I'll tell you all I know. It isn't much, anyhow."

"This mine is a paying institution?"

"Oh, yes. It is one of the richest properties in California; if it was only run right it would pay big."

"How run right?"

"Why, they only work the one shaft. They might easily work three or four."

"Is the Four Kings a good mine?"

"Splendid. It is a continuation of our vein. Lies right at the foot of the hill."

Here the talk was interrupted by the arrival of a young Chinaman.

"Gentlemen, your rooms are all ready," he said in the same perfect English that Ah How had shown himself master of.

"See you later," Harry said to Thomas, as he started to follow Old King Brady out of the assay office.

"Oh, say! I'll just give you that recipe for the stuff you asked about," cried Thomas.

He seized a pad and hastily scrawled a few lines upon it, handing it to Harry.

What he wrote was:

"You want to be very careful of yourselves. My rooms are up overhead here. Call on me in case of trouble."

Harry thrust the paper into his pocket, and they followed the Chinaman to one of the huts. It was the last of the group on the west.

It stood alone among a clump of trees, and could scarcely be seen from the mine, owing to the high chaparral.

"This will do very well," said Old King Brady, as he glanced about the neat interior.

The furnishing was in Chinese style, and there was considerable elegance about it.

"Whose house is this?" Old King Brady asked.

"This the boss's house," was the reply.

"Mr. Wangman?"

"Yes."

"How is it they put us in here?"

"I don't know. Those were Mr. How's orders. In half an hour I will bring your dinner."

"Very good. Will you ask Mr. How when I can see him again?"

The Chinaman bowed and retired.

"This is a queer place, Governor," said Harry, as soon as they were alone. "What do you think of it all?"

"I am inclined to believe in that man Thomas."

"So am I. Are you going to insist upon seeing the mine?"

"Oh, no. That would be foolish."

"How are we ever going to get at the facts in the case?"

"It is hard to see now, Harry; we must be patient, that's all."

Dinner was served in due time.

It was an excellent meal, served in Chinese style. The Bradys were left to wait upon themselves. Later on the Chinaman returned and cleared away the dishes.

He brought word that Mr. How was busy, and could not see the detectives again that day, but that they were to make themselves entirely at home, and that they were at liberty to go wherever they pleased.

As soon as the Chinaman had departed Old King Brady prepared for business.

"Now, look here, Harry," he said, "if we really are in Charley Wangman's rooms, we had better improve the opportunity to examine them thoroughly. Do you know what I suspect?"

"I'm no mind reader, Governor."

"I think we were put here for a purpose."

"Hello!"

"If Charley Wangman is being held a prisoner here, then there is some reason for it, and the reason probably is that these plotters want to make him give up these missing papers."

"And you think they may be concealed in these rooms?"

"Is it not possible?"

"It certainly is."

"Well, then, I am going right at it. Perhaps I may be able to find them. You get outside and watch. Should you see anyone coming near this hut let me know at once."

"All right, Governor. I'm off."

Harry held his place outside for half an hour, while Old King Brady ransacked the hut.

It came to nothing, however.

The old detective was still at it when Harry gave the warning word.

"Blackman is coming, Governor."

"All right," replied Old King Brady. "I'm ready for him."

"Any luck?"

"Not a bit."

Harry darted outside again, and was ready for Mr. Blackman when he came.

"How are you, young fellow!" exclaimed the superintendent. "Came to see if you were getting everything you want."

"We are all right, Mr. Blackman," replied Harry civilly.

"Where's the old man?"

"Inside."

"I'd like to see him a minute."

The man's manner had wholly changed.

There was a sort of rough submission in his tone, which Harry could not at all understand.

He called Old King Brady, who stepped out of the hut.

"If you want to see the mine now you can," said the superintendent.

"I have changed my mind," replied Old King Brady.

"I don't care to see the mine."

"Just as you please."

Blackman sat down on a bench outside the hut.

"Say," he began, "what do you fellows expect to do here, anyhow?"

"I presume you know, Mr. Blackman," Old King Brady replied.

"Of course I can guess. You were told by old Fang Wang that his son had disappeared?"

"We were."

"And Ah How told you that he had gone to Europe?"

"He did."

"Which do you believe?"

"Mr. Blackman, I am not a man to jump at conclusions. I am here to learn the truth."

"Wang is crazy, they say."

"Who are they?"

"His own son, for one."

"Ah How for another?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"Look here, Mr. Brady, I took you up kinder short a while ago."

"You certainly did."

"I apologize."

"That's all right. No more need be said about it."

Blackman scraped the ground with his foot for a few minutes, and seemed to be pondering.

The Bradys left him to his thoughts, wondering what was coming next.

At last he broke out with:

"Say, I'm only a rough fellow, but I'm straight, although you may not think so. I want to deal straight with you. Swear to me that you are not employed by Col. Narraway, or any of his people, and I am ready to talk."

"I do not know Colonel Narraway. I swear to you that I am not employed by anyone representing him. We have engaged with Fang Wang to find his son—that's the whole story."

"All right; I believe you. Now let me tell you I have a lot of responsibility here, and work very hard night and day, and it kinder gets on my nerves, that's all. I owe a lot to Charley Wangman. He and I worked together to develop this claim till we brought it up to where it is now, and he paid me well for it. The most liberal man I ever knew, Mr. Brady. Besides my wages he give me over a hundred thousand dollars, which I have in bank or invested in Frisco. You may think it kinder queer of me to say it about a Chink, but I would have laid down my life for that man."

"I see nothing strange in what you say. I respect you for it, Mr. Blackman, but from the way you say it I judge that you believe Charley Wangman to be dead."

"I do. I believe that he has been murdered by the Narraway people, and that Ah How was at the bottom of the whole business."

"Has Ah How any interest in the mine?"

"None at all. Charley hired him because he liked the fellow. It was hard for me to get along with the Chinks, because I can't control my temper. Ah How was engaged as a go-between. Besides that, he and Charley had other business together in Chinatown, Frisco; I don't know just what it was."

"What were the circumstances of Charley's disappearance?"

"There weren't any, as you might say. He went to bed here one night, and the next morning we couldn't find him. How said he had started for Europe. I believed him at first and let it go at that. Then my suspicions were

aroused, and I took a run down to Frisco, and saw old man Wang. He went on like a lunatic and accused me of murdering his son. He actually came at me with a knife, Mr. Brady. I had to run for my life. Oh, he's crazy, all right, but he loves his son."

"Why should he have suspected you of making way with his son?"

"I suppose it was something How told him."

"How is it that you remained here?"

"Why not? How couldn't discharge me. I wouldn't take my discharge from him."

"I suppose they would find it hard to replace you?"

"They couldn't do it in a hurry. I am making big money for them."

"What is done with the money which comes in?"

"How has full charge of the financial end. I don't know anything about that."

"You think the Narraway people want the property?"

"Of course they do. I understand that they claim Charley had no right to it, and have served papers on Wang."

"That is true."

"They can't prove it. Charley was born in Frisco and took out his citizen papers. He bought this property outright from the government. It ain't a claim located under the mining law."

"This is all very interesting, Mr. Blackman. You have made no mistake in coming to us as you have."

"Know what I thought first off?"

"No."

"That you had been sent here by Narraway's people to trump up evidence that Charley was dead."

"The truth is far from that."

"Yes, I believe you now, although I didn't at first."

"How about Ben Thomas?"

"Don't you trust him. Now, Mr. Brady, I have said my say. Will you do something for me?"

"Surely."

"Then be on hand at midnight and you and I will do a little detective business together. It may amount to nothing, but something seems to tell me that it will work out just the other way."

"I'll do it."

"All right. So-long."

Thus abruptly ending his talk, Boss Blackman got up and walked away.

CHAPTER V.

THE BRADYS MAKE A MIDNIGHT START.

"What do you think of that fellow, Governor?" asked Harry, after Boss Blackman had taken his departure.

"He's an honest man," replied Old King Brady, "and it may somewhat surprise you when I add that I thought as much from the first."

"No, it doesn't surprise me. A rough diamond."

"That's it. He's sincere, all right."

"What do you suppose the idea of this midnight meeting is?"

"Give it up."

"Shall you go down in the mine now?"

"I think not. Let us walk back to the Four Kings and have a look at the place. That will occupy the afternoon. It is not more than a four-mile walk for the round trip."

This plan was carried out.

The Four Kings proved to be a very extensive affair.

Here there were several hundred hands employed in the mine and the extensive stamp mill in connection with it.

The Bradys made no secret about their movements.

They applied at the office for permission to inspect the mine.

They were received very pleasantly by Mr. Tom Tracy, the superintendent, who personally showed them through the mill and sent them with a competent guide through the main tunnel.

There was no shaft here, tunnels having been run directly into the hillside, where they tapped the Little Pekin vein.

Mr. Tracy did not ask them their business nor attempt to question them in any way.

Old King Brady's explanation that they were the guests of Mr. Blackman at the Little Pekin was quite enough.

"Call again, gentlemen, if you happen to be passing," the man said when he parted from them. "We shall be very happy to show you anything we have here."

"It is strange that man did not say something about Charley Wangman," remarked Harry, after they left the Four Kings and started back up the hill.

"It is suspicious," replied Old King Brady, "and that is just why I went there. He never even mentioned the Little Pekin mine, and yet he must have known who we were."

The Bradys went to the office and inquired for Ah How on their return.

One of the Chinese clerks blandly informed them that Mr. How was upstairs, and had given orders not to be disturbed.

"But if there is anything you wish, gentlemen," said the clerk, "you have only to name it. Mr. How will see you in the morning, no doubt."

Like Ah How himself and the rest of his Chinese assistants, this man spoke perfect English.

That Little Pekin possessed some very peculiar Chinamen the Bradys were bound to admit.

Supper was served to the detectives at the hut just as dinner had been.

Before the Bradys had finished the Chinaman returned with two quart bottles of champagne and a box of cigars, which he presented with the compliments of Mr. How.

The Bradys had no use for the champagne, but Harry smoked a couple of the cigars.

He pronounced them excellent at first, but the second

he threw away half smoked, saying that it made his head ache.

Old King Brady, who preferred his own cigars, did not sample the box.

About nine o'clock Ben Thomas strolled in.

Harry was still troubled with a slight headache and seemed dull and depressed.

"Well, how have you been making out?" demanded the assayer, flinging himself into a chair.

"We haven't done anything, and I don't see what we can do," replied Old King Brady.

"But something ought to be done. You know what I told you."

"If you could only give us a clew now," said Old King Brady.

"I wish to goodness I could. The only thing I can say to you is watch Joe Blackman. If there is anything in my suspicion he is at the bottom of the whole business. Believe it or not, as you please."

"He seems a very rough man."

"He's a perfect tartar. Sometimes it seems to me as if I couldn't stand him another hour."

"How do you like your Chinese boss?"

"I never have any trouble with him, but then you may say I don't know him. No white man can ever get into the confidence of a Chink."

Old King Brady pumped Ben Thomas for all he was worth.

Not very much came of it, however.

Although the young man was perfectly frank in his answers, he told nothing, and stated plainly that he had nothing to tell that he had not already told.

At last he rose to go, and invited the Bradys to come to his rooms over the assay office, where he said he had some fine samples of gold ore to show them.

"I don't care to go," replied Old King Brady. "I intend to stay right here to-night."

"Then do you know I believe I will, Governor," said Harry; "my headache is gone, but I feel nervous and upset for some unexplained reason. The fresh air will do me good."

Old King Brady made no objections.

For several days Harry had not been quite up to the mark.

"Don't stay late," he said. "If you do I shall come after you."

They departed, and in about an hour Harry returned.

"He's a nice fellow," he said. "I don't believe there can be anything wrong about that man. He has got some splendid ore samples up there."

"I daresay you are right," replied Old King Brady, "but how are you feeling now?"

"First rate, except that I am terribly sleepy. My headache is all gone."

"Lie down and take a nap. I'll stand guard here."

Young King Brady flung himself on the bed and was asleep in an instant.

The old detective lighted one of his own cigars and sat down to read the paper.

It was his intention to arouse Harry at midnight in case Mr. Blackman came, as promised.

Several times he looked at his partner, who seemed to be breathing natural enough.

Twelve o'clock came and the superintendent had not put in an appearance.

Old King Brady now walked outside.

He pushed on among the Chinese huts.

All the evening he had been listening to the strains of various "moon" banjos, which were anything but harmonious.

Even these had quieted down now.

In one hut a group of Chinamen were playing fantan, but most of them were dark.

Old King Brady did not go far.

Either Boss Blackman had changed his mind or something had prevented his coming.

The old detective turned back and sat down on the bench outside the hut enjoying the bracing air, that glorious air of "alta" California which can be only appreciated by those who know it.

Here he lighted another cigar and had about half smoked it when he heard footsteps approaching among the trees.

"Is that you, Mr. Blackman?" called the old detective, in a low voice.

"Yes," was the reply, and the superintendent emerged from among the trees.

"I'm sorry you have so little confidence in me as to neglect my warning, Mr. Brady," he said, gruffly. "Perhaps we had better give this business up."

"My dear man, I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about," replied the old detective. "I have been sitting quietly here waiting for you."

"But your partner?"

"He is asleep inside. I will call him now."

"But he isn't, all the same. He has gone off with Ben Thomas. I warned you against that man!"

Old King Brady sprang up and entered the hut.

Certainly on this occasion he had not displayed his usual shrewdness.

The bed was vacant.

Harry had vanished and the open window showed the road by which he might have gone.

"Still, it may be all right," he thought. "The boy is amply able to take care of himself."

Blackman was in after him.

"Where did you get that champagne?" he demanded, picking up one of the bottles which stood upon the table.

"It was sent here by Ah How."

"And these cigars?"

"Came with it."

"You have not touched either, I hope?"

"My partner smoked a couple of the cigars. Why?"

"Why, man, I would not want to accuse anyone wrongfully, but I believe Ah How quite equal to poisoning you.

He is an expert chemist, and knows his business right down to the ground. Thomas is another. The pair are as thick as bugs in a rug."

"You believe the cigars were drugged!"

"It is only my idea. I have nothing to base it upon. It would not surprise me a bit if this was part of a plot to down you both."

Old King Brady set his jaws firmly.

"If they have played tricks on the boy let them beware!" he said. "All the same I don't think there is anything in this. Harry was up in Thomas' room early in the evening. I stepped out for a few minutes just now. The boy may have had reason of his own for going there again."

Blackman looked disgusted.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am that this has happened," he said. "I wanted you both; it may spoil all. Still, I propose to go ahead."

"I'm ready. Let us go to Thomas' office first and see if the boy is there."

"We had better," replied Blackman, dryly. "All the same if we find him there it will spoil the pie. There will be nothing doing after Ben Thomas once sees us together at this hour of the night. But come on."

Old King Brady, feeling like a man who had made a bad break, followed the superintendent through the one street of Little Pekin.

The houses were all closed up now.

Not a light was to be seen, save at the mine, where the watchmen were.

They came to the assay office in a few minutes, but only to find the door locked.

"He isn't here," said Blackman.

"Which way were they going when you saw them together?" the old detective inquired.

"Toward this place."

"Did they see you?"

"No; I was in among the trees."

"What! Was it just before you reached the hut?"

"Yes; just a couple of minutes before you spoke to me."

Old King Brady said nothing, but his fears for Harry had now increased.

"Why," he said to himself, "the boy must have got up and climbed out through that window while I was sitting there on the bench. What can it mean?"

The old detective was now seriously alarmed, but before he had time even to think what ought to be done, Blackman suddenly caught him by the arm and drew him around behind the assay office.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Don't breathe—don't make a sound! He is coming now!"

There was a clump of bushes behind the assay office and the watchers were thus well concealed.

Blackman, pointing to the side door of the mine office, Old King Brady saw Ah How come out.

While the Chinese superintendent had been dressed in an ordinary business suit before, he now wore the Chinese garb.

But for the fact that the watchman's light at the mine shone full in his face, Old King Brady could not have recognized him.

It was, however, Ah How, all right, as he now plainly saw.

"Is he our game?" he asked.

"Sure," replied Blackman, "if you are game to follow him. I did twice. You will be surprised."

"Where is he going?"

"Down by the Four Kings, if he goes where he went that night."

"All right. Shadowing is my business. Let's get right after him."

"Wait," said Blackman. "Give him a minute. It won't do for us to be seen."

Turning his back on Little Pekin, Ah How hurried down the trail which led to the Four Kings.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY OF AH HOW.

Postponing the explanation of Harry's singular conduct, we propose to follow Old King Brady and Boss Blackman on their shadowing tour.

"We must keep to the bushes," said Blackman, when they gained the trail. "There will be nothing doing if he sees us. Oh, he's a slick card!"

"I'd like to know where he is going," replied the old detective. "What is the object of keeping me in the dark?"

"Mystery. I want to see how it strikes you. In a minute you will see this man disappear off the face of the earth if he repeats the performance I saw him go through with the other night."

"All right. Have it your own way. Do you imagine my partner is ahead of him on this trip?"

"Like as not. It's up to you to solve the problem. I can't."

They pushed on, keeping in the chaparral.

When about halfway down the steep hill, at the base of which lay the Four Kings mine, Ah How suddenly stepped aside and plunged into the chaparral.

"Good! He's going to do the act again," said Blackman. "Follow me, Mr. Brady. We must not lose an instant, or you will be too late to see it. Here we go."

Blackman turned aside then and plunged into the thick growth.

A moment's walk brought them to a place where the trees and bushes on the hillside had all been cleared away.

Here there was a rocky ledge where some prospecting had evidently been done.

About forty feet below them the ledge ended in a precipice.

A thousand feet or more lower down could be seen the lights of the Four Kings.

Ah How, who had evidently been in no hurry, was not yet in sight.

"Have we lost him?" whispered Old King Brady.

"Don't think so," replied Blackman. "He hasn't come along yet, that's all. Keep still now and watch. If you see what I saw you will say it's the blamest thing ever. Ha! There he comes!"

Ah How had just emerged from the chaparral.

He walked along slowly with his hands thrust into his sleeves, Chinese fashion.

He pushed on until he came out upon the edge of the precipice, and there paused and seemed to be looking down at the Four Kings.

"How much of a drop is there at that place?" questioned Old King Brady.

"A thousand feet," was the dry response. "It's just a straight fall."

"Yes. I saw it when we were down at the Four Kings this afternoon. A tremendous wall of rock rises behind the mine."

"Watch him! Don't talk or you'll miss the cream of the thing."

Ah How now raised his hands above his head and began making various peculiar gestures.

His eyes were turned upward toward the moon, which was now at her full.

Presently he bent his body half double and leaned far out over the precipice.

"For heaven sake! The man will surely fall over there!" the old detective murmured.

"Will he?" growled Blackman. "Just you wait and see!"

Now the Chinaman straightened up again and began singing.

Whoever has ever heard a Chinaman sing knows full well what strange, weird sounds must have reached Old King Brady's ears then.

Louder and louder the man's voice was raised.

At last came the echo, as Old King Brady thought.

It sounded as if a hundred Ah Hows were giving out that weird chant.

Then all at once the Chinaman, with a loud cry, threw up his hands and leaped over the edge of the precipice.

The man had vanished, the music had ceased and a puzzled detective remained on the rocks above.

"Do you mean to tell me that he has not committed suicide? That you have seen him do that before?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Sure," was the reply. "I've seen him do it twice before."

"Well!"

"He'll turn up to-morrow all right. Now you begin to understand what sort of a jigger you have to deal with. Oh, I tell you he's a bird."

"He would need to be a bird to make that jump and

survive it, then," said Old King Brady. "But tell me, is this the end of the show?"

"This is the end. I wanted you to see it. Of course, I couldn't tell whether he would do it again to-night or not, but it seems that I made no mistake in taking chances on it."

"Evidently not. Is there a cave down there opening on the side of those rocks?"

"No, sir! I've looked over and I've taken it in from below. Nothing of the sort. It beats the band."

"But how does he get back? Did you ever see him come?"

"No; I watched the office, all night last time, but he had not shown up by daybreak. When I went in at seven o'clock to see if he had any orders to give me there was his giblets sitting at the desk as sleek and proper as any Chink you ever laid eyes on. I thought you ought to know it, Mr. Brady; that's why I brought you here."

"How did you come to find out about it in the first place?"

"Why, I seen him come out at midnight and start down the hill two or three times before I undertook to follow him. Then I took it into my head to see where he went to, and I followed and saw what you have just seen now."

"We must get right down to it," said Old King Brady. "It is some plot of the Narraway people, I suppose."

"Don't know. That's what I imagined first off, as I told you. All the same I've never seen Colonel Narraway in my life, and as for Tom Tracy, he's a quiet man what always minds his own business. I don't know what to think."

"Let us go down there on that ledge and see what we can find," said Old King Brady.

Blackman assented and they made the best of their way to the spot from which the Chinaman had disappeared.

Here Old King Brady threw himself flat and, directing Blackman to hold his legs, he leaned far over the edge of the precipice.

"Well?" demanded the superintendent when at last he pulled back.

"A light shows down there on the side of the wall about thirty feet below here. You can see it plainly."

"The deuce! Yet I did just what you have done last time I seen this show."

"You had no one to hold you down. Perhaps you did not look far enough over the edge."

"Well, mebbe that was it. Give me a show now."

"All right, take it."

They changed places and Mr. Blackman looked over the edge.

"Yes, there must be a cave there," he announced when he pulled back. "You are entirely right, Mr. Brady; but how the deuce does that blamed Chink get into it by jumping over the ledge?"

"My dear Mr. Blackman, did you never see a trapeze performer drop into a net?"

"Well!"

"What is to hinder some contrivance of that sort from being thrust out from the ledge to catch that man?"

"Even so, I wouldn't want to take the chances."

"Probably not."

"Then why does he do it?"

"There I confess you have me. There is no fathoming the motives of a Chinaman."

"You bet there isn't. If you knew them as well as I do you would know there was no discounting that opinion."

"I know them pretty well, too. Now, Mr. Blackman, as there is no chance to get a closer view of the face of that cliff till daylight, I think we might as well pull out of here and get back to Little Pekin. After what you tell me I have grave fears for my partner's safety."

"And well you may have. Look here, Mr. Brady! Because I went at you rough at first you doubted me and started in to tie to Ben Thomas. I tell you, he's a dangerous man. He and Charley Wangman and Ah How were all at the university together and have been as thick as brothers. Did Thomas tell you that he did not like Ah How?"

"He certainly did."

"And he certainly lied to you, and for a purpose. Let me tell you something else, the fellow is an opium smoker."

"I suspected as much."

"And here is something else, he believes in the Chinese religion. I know for a fact that he goes to the joss houses in Frisco. Charley Wangman told me so himself; what's more, he is a regular attendant at the little joss house which the Chinks run here in Little Pekin on the quiet."

"Is it possible!"

"That's right. He is a dangerous man."

Old King Brady began to think so himself.

His anxiety on Harry's account had now greatly increased.

"We had better get back," he said. "We will break into the assay office if we can't get in any other way."

"Let's go, then. I admit to you, Mr. Brady, that I am all in the dark in this matter, but I feel as though your coming here was going to bring matters to a head. There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, and it is up to us to find him out."

They started to return and soon found themselves on the Little Pekin trail.

Blackman kept talking about the mystery as they continued to ascend the hill, but Old King Brady scarcely listened to him, as he was puzzling his brains over the case.

They had just reached a place where the chaparral was particularly dense and there was a turn in the road, when all at once the report of a rifle burst upon them and a bullet went whizzing past Old King Brady's head.

"Gee whiz!" cried Blackman.

Bang!

Another shot!

Without a sound Old King Brady dropped in his tracks.

"Merciful heaven! Are you shot?" gasped Blackman, dropping at the old detective's side.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG KING BRADY.

When Harry smoked Ah How's cigars he got a headache, it will be recalled.

When he went with Ben Thomas to the latter's rooms over the assay office he was foolish enough to accept a cigar from the assayer and to smoke that on top of the other.

Thomas on this occasion made himself particularly agreeable, and Harry might have stayed longer listening to his chat but for an intolerable sleepiness which seemed to have come upon him all at once.

Not only that, but his brain felt dull and heavy, and he could not think with his accustomed clearness.

At any other time Harry might have thought of drugged cigars and guessed that he had been smoking them, as was indeed the case.

There are times when the shrewdest of us miss the mark, and the Bradys certainly did so in this visit to Little Pekin.

When Harry complained of feeling sleepy Ben Thomas kindly suggested that he lie down on his bed and take a nap.

But the offer was refused, for a suspicion of the truth had forced itself upon Young King Brady's mind in a dull, uncertain way, and he got on his feet declaring that he was going to return to the hut.

"All right," replied the assayer. "I'll walk along with you part of the way at least."

Harry was too dazed to refuse him and they started out together.

The open air revived Harry to that extent that he forgot his fears.

Thomas left him before they reached the hut, and when he came in he merely complained of feeling sleepy and, as will be remembered, threw himself down upon the bed, only to be missed by Old King Brady when the latter looked into the hut later on.

Now, what happened to Harry after that comes to us from his own lips, but he remembered it only as a man remembers his dreams.

Harry went to sleep instantly, but only to be awakened in what seemed to him an instant later by the shrill blast of a bugle.

It was but a mental impression, of course, for Old King Brady, who sat outside on the bench, heard no such sound.

Harry, however, heard it distinctly. It rang out sharp and clear.

Again and again it sounded, and Young King Brady sat upon the bed facing the window in the rear of the hut.

Outside the window, which was now open, stood Ben Thomas whistling so softly that Old King Brady never heard him.

This was the "bugle."

The assayer held his watch in his hand. He knew that the drug in the cigar had had time to do its work.

And we may as well mention right now what Harry learned later, that this drug was a compound tincture of Chang, hasheesh, or Indian hemp—it is known under all three names.

One of the peculiarities of this powerful drug is that its full effects are not felt for some time after taking. At least an hour usually elapses.

Another peculiarity is that it so works on the brain that everything seen and heard is wonderfully distorted, horribly exaggerated.

Thus Ben Thomas' low whistle to Harry's ears sounded like the fanfare of a trumpet, the open window seemed to him like the entrance to some vast interminable tunnel, and far, far in the distance he could see the assayer beckoning to him.

"Come! Come and follow me!" Thomas seemed to say.

To Young King Brady it seemed then that he had absolutely no alternative, that he must follow the young man whether he would or not.

He got up off the bed, climbed out of the window and started off into the night, and did it so noiselessly that Old King Brady outside on the bench never heard a sound.

Once outside the window it seemed to Harry that he had lost himself in immeasurable space.

He seemed to have slipped off the earth entirely, to be surrounded by utter darkness.

He ran along over the ground, but he could not feel it beneath his feet. He fancied that he had suddenly become possessed of some power to walk on air, and that he was climbing up, up, up, ever upward toward the stars, which he could now see shining far above him.

He thought that he was doomed to keep on so climbing to all eternity.

The thought was horrible, and Harry gave a gasping cry.

It was low enough—too low to reach Old King Brady's ears—but to Harry it seemed to echo and re-echo until the whole universe was filled with the fearful sound.

"Heaven help me! I am lost!" he thought. "Oh, for light! If I only had light!"

That these were thoughts projected into Young King Brady's brain by Ben Thomas himself, there can be no doubt.

The young man was but just ahead of him walking backward.

And as he walked he lighted a miner's lamp and, turning, held it over his shoulder and started at a rapid pace.

When Young King Brady's eyes caught the light he thought that his prayer had been answered.

It seemed to his distorted brain that the sun had suddenly burst out upon that hopeless darkness, and that it rolled above him distended to an enormous size.

It seemed also as if he was climbing up to it. He could feel its fearful heat and he wondered what he would do when he got there.

Now he abandoned all hope.

Of course, long before he could reach the sun he must be reduced to ashes. it seemed to him.

He would have given everything he possessed to be able to turn and flee, but this was impossible.

Some mysterious power seemed to hold him captive, and he could do nothing but go on climbing up, up, up, ever upward toward that awful ball of fire.

So much for the effects of hasheesh.

It was only Ben Thomas with his little lamp.

Instead of following the light up into space, Harry was hurrying down the Four Kings trail.

But these awful sensations did not change as long as the light remained in view.

Thomas led him to the very place where, later on, Old King Brady and Joe Blackman were to witness Ah How's wonderful aerial leap.

Nor did he stop here, but kept right on along the ridge until, coming to a well-defined path leading down into the valley at the side of this foothill, he began to descend.

Every now and then he would look back to see if Harry was following him, and, always seeing him, he appeared to be satisfied.

At last having come down to a point considerable below the jumping-off place, he halted and gave a peculiar cry.

This to Harry sounded like a voice of thunder. It seemed to him that some mysterious being was calling to him out of the sun.

He rushed forward, imagining that he was still climbing up into space.

Suddenly directly in his path two gigantic forms were seen.

They appeared to tower above him higher than the big trees of California.

Both were dressed in Chinese garb.

Leaning down from their towering height, they seized hold of Harry with their enormous hands and a thunderous voice cried:

"Take him in! You see that the god has provided a sacrifice. In with him, quick!"

To Harry it seemed as if he was being dragged down into the bottomless pit.

Now the exaggeration of the light took the opposite form.

It seemed a mere speck in the darkness of that horrible place.

On, on they went, those mighty arms pulling Harry forward until light was seen gathering in the distance and the strains of vanishing music reached his ears.

Suddenly they emerged into what appeared to be a vast cavern.

The walls were sparkling with diamonds and gems of many colors.

Coming toward him was a tall Chinaman dressed in white, with outstretched hands to greet him.

The giants let go their hold and vanished.

The newcomer seized his hand and shook it warmly, and then Ben Thomas appeared at his side.

The assayer was now reduced to pigmy size.

He seemed but a speck on the floor of the cave, but when he spoke his voice rang out like a clap of thunder.

"Here is one of the detectives!" he cried. "The prophecy has been fulfilled."

"It is well," was the reply of the tall Chinaman. "He comes just in time. To-morrow the start must be made. And how about the other?"

"We shall have to kill him. It will be done to-night."

"And thus again the prophecy will be fulfilled."

"Yes, and our friend restored to life again."

"Perhaps. It is as the god wills it."

"I have brought him here. What is to be done?"

"Let him taste of the cup. His brain needs rest, for the ordeal through which he has to go is a severe one."

"Has Ah How come?"

"Not yet. The watchers are ready."

"He will do that act once too often some of these nights."

"Possibly. It is his will to have it so."

"I know that, of course; but let us finish with this fellow now."

"At once."

All this came to Harry's ears in thunderous tones.

The voices confused him.

He seemed more dull and dazed than ever.

Now the tall, white figure clapped its hands and one of the giant forms appeared again bearing what to Harry seemed to be a crystal goblet containing some foaming mixture.

"Drink!" cried the white figure.

To have refused him would have been impossible.

Young King Brady seized the goblet and tossed off the mixture.

It had a sweetish taste.

At once his brain seemed to go on fire.

There were strange ringing sounds in his ears; it seemed as if his head would burst.

Then he thought it did burst with a loud explosion and with such force that the floor of the cavern trembled and the roof came crashing down upon his head.

And that ended it.

From that moment Young King Brady knew no more.

Of course, it was not straight hasheesh with which Young King Brady was drugged.

If it had been he would have come out of his peculiar condition by degrees, and things would soon have assumed a natural appearance once more.

To the Chinese many powerful vegetable poisons are known of which we in the West know next to nothing.

Which one of these Harry got, it is impossible to say, but when consciousness came back to him at last he was in a very different condition.

His state of mind now may be summed up in a few brief words.

Every sense was horribly dulled.

He knew who he was, he could hear and see; but only in a dull, dim fashion.

He had no pain and very little sensibility of any sort. He was just dull, inert, dead. The world could move about him for all he cared, it did not concern him a pin's weight. He was neither hungry nor thirsty, sleepy nor wakeful. It seemed to him that he was himself, yet somebody else. If a cannon had gone off under his nose it would not have disturbed him, and yet in the same dim, dull way he could have heard a pin's fall.

It was morning now and the light came dimly through an opening in the rocks in front of where he lay stretched upon a blanket which had been spread over the stone floor of the cave.

And only a cave it was, and not the vast cavern which he had fancied the night before.

He could follow the walls all around him; twenty by forty would perhaps represent the whole enclosure.

There were two openings, one directly in front of him, the other leading off into the darkness.

Beside him upon another blanket lay Ben Thomas half undressed and sound asleep.

Harry had no desire to move, but he turned and looked at the young man.

The handsome face—and it was a handsome face—seemed to possess a horrible fascination for him.

Without being told he knew that whatever this sleeping man ordered him to do he must do, but why it was so he found himself entirely unable to imagine.

It was just impressed upon his mind that it was so, and that was all.

He closed his eyes and slept again.

It was the dreamless sleep of oblivion, and from it he was aroused by hearing Thomas' voice say:

"Get up, Brady! Stand on your feet!"

Harry arose and stood like a soldier before the assayer.

"How do you feel now?" asked Thomas.

"All right."

"Are you in pain?"

"No."

"Are you hungry?"

"No."

"Thirsty?"

"No."

"What do you want?"

"I have no wants. I am here to obey you."

And these answers came mechanically.

Harry made them, and he knew that he was a fool for speaking so, yet he could not have answered otherwise if he had tried.

Thomas laughed.

"You're all right," he said. "Don't you worry yourself."

"Sam!" he shouted. "Oh, Sam Lee!"

A young Chinaman dressed in white blouse and drawers appeared.

"Is breakfast ready, Sam?" asked Thomas.

"All leddy."

"Let's have it then."

The man retreated, presently returning from a distant corner of the cave where a fire burned, bringing with him a table.

He placed this in front of Ben Thomas and then came back with two chairs.

Upon the table he now placed a large bowl of chicken stewed with rice, a knife, fork, a pair of chopsticks and a pitcher of milk.

This was the breakfast, and, ordered by Thomas, Harry sat down and ate heartily.

Thomas worked his end with the chopsticks, Harry used the knife and fork.

He now had an opportunity to study his surroundings a bit, which he did in the same dull way.

There was little to be seen, however.

In the visible part of the cave there were only themselves, Sam Lee and his fire, over which an iron pot hung suspended.

Fully half the cave was cut off from view by a red curtain suspended by a running string.

What lay behind the curtain Young King Brady could not see.

While they were at breakfast another Chinaman came into the cave through the dark passage.

"Hello! So you have come at last!" said Thomas. "I thought you never would."

"I am here, boss."

"Is the team ready?"

"All ready, boss."

"Very good. Get the clothes. We will go now."

The Chinaman glided behind the curtain and presently reappeared carrying over his arm two black robes.

They were the dresses of Sisters of Charity—two complete outfits.

Ordered by Thomas to put on one of these, Harry did so, and the strangest part of it all was that he seemed to know just how to rig himself up in this attire.

In a few moments he stood as completely disguised as he ever had been at any time in his professional career.

His costume was perfect, even to the poke bonnet, the heavy rosary and the thick black veil.

The Chinaman who had brought out these costumes now proceeded to don the other.

Thomas then retired behind the curtain and in a moment returned dressed in a stiff black suit, his face disguised by a false beard.

Through the meshes of his veil Harry stared at him dully.

In a dim, misty way, he wondered what it was all about.

He felt that he neither knew nor cared, and when Thomas ordered him to follow him he did so unquestioningly, and they passed through a low, dark passage, coming out on the side of the hill, where they started to follow a path which led them to the valley below.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD KING BRADY BEGINS TO "CATCH ON" AT LAST.

"Hush! Keep down where you are and don't make a sound," breathed Old King Brady in the ear of Boss Blackman, when the latter kneeled by his side.

The old detective was merely playing 'possum.

To face a concealed enemy with a rifle is dangerous business, and he wanted no more of it.

"Lie down flat!" he whispered. "It's our only chance."

Blackman gave a dismal groan and keeled over.

Then came moments of fearful suspense.

They could hear a rustling among the chaparral.

It was an even chance if their concealed enemy did not fire again and finish them up.

So near did he come that Old King Brady could hear his breathing.

Then footsteps were heard retreating and the sounds died away in the distance.

"The fool has gone, whoever he is," breathed Blackman.

"Wait a minute," replied the detective. "We must make sure."

They waited fully five minutes, but no further sounds were heard.

"All over," said the old detective, rising then. "I think the coast is clear now, Mr. Blackman, and the sooner we get back to Little Pekin the better it will be for us. We have had a very narrow escape."

"Well, I should say we had!" growled the superintendent. "It beats the band what we have come to here in Little Pekin. So much for working for Chinks."

"I'm afraid it is all up with my partner."

"Let us hope for the best."

"I have about given up hope. Still there is vengeance to be thought of. If poor Harry has been made way with, then somebody has to suffer for it. You didn't see anyone, I suppose?"

"No; I think it was a Chinaman, though."

"No doubt of it."

"I could hear his felt shoes. There is no mistaking the sound."

"It is not easily mistaken. I have no doubt you are right."

"Mr. Brady, it looks as if every move we have made has been watched."

"It certainly does."

"You must not think of going back to Charley Wangman's hut to-night. It is entirely too dangerous."

"It would be a risk."

"Altogether too big a one. You must come to my house. They can hardly want to kill me off, yet you can't even tell about that."

"We examine Thomas' quarters first, happen what may, but I am free to confess that I have very little hope of finding Harry there."

They pushed on to the mine.

Blackman was for interviewing the watchman and trying to find out who among the Chinese workmen had been seen moving about, but Old King Brady advised him against it.

They went to the assay office, where the old detective, by the aid of his skeleton keys, easily obtained an entrance.

It amounted to nothing, of course.

Ben Thomas' bed upstairs was found undisturbed and no trace of Harry was to be discovered.

They then went to the hut which Blackman occupied alone and put in the remainder of the night there.

Neither attempted to sleep, but they might both have gone to bed, for nothing occurred.

Blackman was out early and busied himself about his usual work.

At seven o'clock after the whistle blew Old King Brady started for the office prepared to have it out with Ah How.

Here he met Blackman just coming out of the door.

"It's no use, Mr. Brady," said the superintendent, "you won't find the man there."

"How is that?"

"Read this."

Blackman handed Old King Brady a letter which was addressed to the superintendent and read as follows:

"Mr. Blackman: I am called away on business to San Francisco and shall not be back for a week at least. During my absence everything is in your charge. Be particular to allow the two detectives sent here by Mr. Wang to go and come as they please. Mr. Thomas accompanies me, but it is not likely that he will be gone later than the last of this week. "AH HOW."

"What do you make of that?" demanded Blackman.

"It only adds to the mystery," was the reply.

"What shall you do now?"

"I am not prepared to say for the moment. I think I will start on an exploring tour this morning. I want to solve the mystery of that crag if I can."

"I would like very much to go with you, but I really have work which must be attended to if I am going to remain here."

"Of course you have, and I don't expect you to go with me. I'll push about alone and do the best I can."

"You will be back?"

"That depends. I shall take my horse. If I find any reason to believe that my partner has gone to San Francisco, and I may, I shall follow on without returning."

And it was thus that Old King Brady left Little Pekin. Mounting his horse a few minutes later, he rode off down the trail.

Old King Brady had done a lot of thinking during the night.

He did not for an instant doubt the existence of a cave in the hillside, and that there must be some other way of

getting into it besides jumping over the crag he felt certain, of course.

Making sure that he was not being followed, he turned off at the place where he and Blackman had been fired at and, forcing his way through the chaparral, soon came upon a path which was clearly defined.

He had not gone far when he spied a handkerchief with a colored border lying in the road.

Instantly he recognized it as Harry's, and he alighted and recovered it.

"The boy went this way," he muttered. "What can it mean?"

He pushed on, descending the hill where the trail ran down the side and soon came upon the entrance to the cave.

Another might easily have passed it, as the narrow opening was almost perfectly concealed by the chaparral.

But Old King Brady's sharp eyes were good for it, and, tying his horse, he pushed in under the hill.

It was so dark that he produced his lantern, and at the same time drawing his revolver, crept on.

"This is surely what I am looking for," he thought. "That opening on the bluff would strike right in under here."

In a moment he reached a point where he could look directly into the cave.

It was light enough, owing to the opening out to the bluff.

Old King Brady saw all there was to be seen at a glance and his eyes rested first upon a young Chinaman who lay by the side of a dying fire all huddled up and fast asleep.

"This is the place to which they brought the boy," the detective said to himself. "That fellow seems to be asleep. I'll improve the opportunity to look about a bit."

He pushed aside the curtain and looked into the niche which it concealed.

Here, standing against the wall, was a huge image representing a great serpent entwined about a tree.

It was carved out of a solid block of wood and was an admirable piece of work.

Before the figure was a little altar, upon which had been placed various offerings, bits of rich gold ore, Chinese coins, little images of the snake, queer little idols and other things, all in the style of a joss house.

Although Old King Brady had never seen a snake image in a Chinese joss house, this was clearly one of those strange establishments, the full significance of which no white man knows or ever will know.

And now the whole case assumed a different aspect.

It was clear that some deep religious motive lay beneath all these strange doings in Little Pekin.

There was nothing else inside the curtain except a handsome rug thrown down before the altar, evidently for the accommodation of those who wished to pray there.

Old King Brady now tiptoed out and went to the opening on the face of the cliff.

Here he found just what he expected to find, an ingeniously contrived net attached to a heavy iron frame and

so arranged that when pushed out over the abyss it was perfectly supported behind.

For an agile jumper it would be safe to spring down from the crag overhead and land in this net.

The iron frame worked on well-oiled rollers, and Old King Brady saw how easy it would be to pull it in by the aid of a guy-rope, even when the net was encumbered by a man.

All this having been studied into, Old King Brady now turned his attention to the sleeper.

It was Sam Lee, the man who had served the breakfast to Harry and Ben Thomas.

Covering the fellow with his revolver, Old King Brady gave him a smart kick on the thigh.

Sam Lee gave a yell and started to spring to his feet.

"Stay as you are. I have made up my mind to shoot you!" the old detective cried.

"No, no! No killee me!" howled the Chink, getting on his knees and raising his hands pleadingly.

"Yes, I shall shoot," said Old King Brady, sternly. "You know me?"

"Yair! Yair! You detlective! No shootee me!"

"John," said Old King Brady, planking the revolver against the fellow's head, "there is no use talking, I'm going to kill you. Your snake god can't save you now—only one thing can."

"Me tellee! Me tellee!" cried the Chinaman, "only you no shootee—see?"

"Will you tell all you know about this place if I let you live?"

"Yair, yair! Me tellee!"

"All about my partner?"

"You mean your son?"

"Yes, yes! My son."

"Oh, me tellee."

"About Charley Wangman?"

"Yair, yair! Me tellee! Only no killee me."

It seemed as if Old King Brady had the fellow about where he wanted him.

He lowered his revolver and ordered him to get on his feet.

CHAPTER IX.

BACK TO SAN FRANCISCO.

As Sam Lee crouched before Old King Brady the latter learned the secret of his cowardly submission.

All Chinamen are not cowards, as some suppose, but all opium users of any race are. The use of the fatal drug seems to take every bit of courage out of a man.

Old King Brady recognized a victim here; the yellow, shriveled skin told the story, and, furthermore, in the height of his terror, Sam Lee slyly slipped a pill into his mouth and Old King Brady saw that, too.

He withdrew the revolver, but still kept it in sight.

"Speak! Answer my questions!" he exclaimed. "Is my son still alive?"

"Yair, he libe."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone away Flisco."

"Who with?"

"Mlister Thomas."

"Why have they taken him to San Francisco?"

"Me no know."

"Ah How has gone too?"

"Plaps; mebbe so; me no know."

Sam Lee was getting sleepy. The pill was beginning to take effect; probably it was not the first he had taken since Thomas left.

Old King Brady pulled out a roll of bills.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Sam Lee."

Sam was beginning to nod.

Old King Brady saw that if anything was to be got out of the fellow it must be done at once.

He skinned a twenty off the roll and held it up, while at the same instant he thrust the revolver against the Chinaman's forehead.

"Quick, now!" he cried. "You tell me why they have taken that boy to Frisco and you get this bill; keep on saying 'me no know' and you get the bullet. Which shall it be?"

Sam Lee fairly howled with fear.

"Takee way! Takee way!" he cried. "Me tell you now!"

"Tell, then!"

"Dley takee him joss house, boss; dley feed him to big snake."

Old King Brady's heart seemed to stand still.

"And Charley Wangman?" he demanded. "Do they feed him to the snake, too?"

"Say, boss, you no lunderstand. Boss Wang he gibbe himself to snake less dley gettee somebody takee him place. Dlat it."

Light was beginning to dawn at last.

Old King Brady pressed his inquiries further.

It was a slow, tedious process drawing information out of Sam Lee, even now that he was disposed to give it.

Three or four times the wretched opium fiend fell asleep while Old King Brady was pumping him.

But it all came out at last.

Sam Lee told what he knew, or part of it at least.

Boiled down it amounted to this:

Disguised as a Sister of Charity, Harry had been taken to San Francisco by Ben Thomas.

Ah How had gone alone and was to join them.

Both Charley Wangman, Ah How and Ben Thomas belonged to a secret religious order which even the Chinese themselves know very little about.

Its chief object appeared to be the ancient serpent worship.

That there existed a place in San Francisco where a real

serpent was kept, of which the representation in the cave was but the image, seemed clear.

He also made it plain that Charley Wangman was the head and front of this serpent worshipping sect, and that he was then in their secret temple in San Francisco ready to sacrifice himself to the serpent, unless a victim was found to take his place.

That Harry was to be that victim was made plain.

Old King Brady went even further.

He questioned Sam Lee as to the reason why Ah How jumped off the cliff into the net instead of entering the cave in the ordinary way.

The answer to these questions were so sleepily made that it was difficult for Old King Brady to follow them.

By piecing one and another together, however, he learned that some sort of prophecy had been uttered by the priest of the snake to the effect that Ah How would lose his life in the narrow entrance to the temple of the serpent.

Hence he never used the passage, but being an athletic fellow had adopted the custom of jumping into the net instead.

This was the sum and substance of Sam Lee's revelations, and by the time he had got through making them it became plain that there would be nothing further doing in that line.

Indeed, the fellow sank off into a deep sleep, with Old King Brady still trying to pump him.

The opium had done its work, and even the fear of the detective's revolver could not keep the Chinaman awake.

Old King Brady left him where he was and, mounting his horse, rode with all speed back to the mine.

Blackman was down the shaft when he arrived there, but he at once responded when the old detective sent word that he wanted to see him.

"Well, have you found out anything?" he demanded.

"I have found out everything, I fancy," replied Old King Brady, and he went on to tell what he had learned.

The result was just as he expected.

Boss Blackman pooh-poohed it all.

"Why, that fellow is the biggest liar ever!" he exclaimed.

"He has been fooling you, Mr. Brady. I bounced him out of this two months ago and I haven't seen him since. I thought he had gone back to Frisco, but it seems I was mistaken in that."

"I believe every word of it," said Old King Brady, "and so would you believe if you had been there to hear what I heard."

"Well, probably you know best. What do you intend to do?"

"To start after Thomas at once. I may have to follow him through to Frisco or I may be lucky enough to over-haul them on the road."

"You never will. They'll be too slick for you—mark my words."

"Perhaps. I'm making the try."

"Did you find out the address of this wonderful snake temple?"

"Yes; it is on Sacramento street between Dupont and Kearney."

"I don't believe one word of it. He has fooled you sure. They are hiding around here somewhere. Why, man, where would they get the dresses of nuns? Come, I put it up to you."

"Nonsense, Mr. Blackman. A nun's dress is a common disguise for a Chinaman to adopt. Hundreds of them have been smuggled over the Canadian border so rigged up."

"I see you are bound to go. I can only wish you good luck."

"You won't accompany me then? I came back on purpose to see if you would."

"I should be glad to do so if it was possible, but my duty lies here, Mr. Brady. No; I can't go. These Chinks would waltz off with the last ounce of gold in sight if I was to go away and leave them here alone."

Old King Brady urged him no further, for he plainly saw that it was of no use.

Bidding the honest fellow good-by, he mounted his horse and started on his long ride over the mountains for the nearest station on the Oregon line, the way by which he had come.

But there was more than one way of reaching the railroad from Little Pekin.

Old King Brady had not gone far before he became convinced that he was not following the road taken by Harry and his captors.

No one of whom he inquired had seen two Sisters of Charity pass that way.

Still, it was not feasible to turn back.

This could only have been done by a great sacrifice of time, which might prove fatal.

Firm in the conviction that he was on the right track, the old detective resolved to put it through.

There was still a chance that he might encounter the party on the train, he thought.

But even this hope was not realized.

When the train reached Barnwell, the station at which they would have to get on if they had taken the other train from Little Pekin, Old King Brady was out watching, but they did not appear.

It was now that the old detective began almost to lose the courage of his convictions and to think of turning back.

The decision had to be made on the spur of the moment, and he resolved to proceed.

He took the station agent partially into his confidence and arranged that he should be wired in case two Sisters of Charity appeared in time for the next train.

He did not ask that they be detained, for he felt that such a course would only complicate matters and that he could better overhaul them at Sacramento.

No dispatch reached him, however, and he arrived at San Francisco no wiser than when he had left Little Pekin.

And now it was that the old detective's courage began to fail him.

Had he deserted Harry in the hour of his need?

He heartily wished that he had remained at Little Pekin.

No time was wasted in vain regrets, however.

Hurrying to the chief of police, with whom he was well acquainted, Old King Brady told him the whole story and asked his help.

"Why, Mr. Brady," replied the chief, "to any help I can give you surely you are most welcome, but I am very much afraid you are on the wrong track."

"You never heard of these serpent-worshiping Chinese, then?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Never. Excuse me if I doubt their existence, but I do."

"Give me a couple of good men and let me overhaul that Sacramento street place."

"I'll go myself, for one," was the reply.

And the visit was made.

The place proved to be a Chinese butcher's shop with lodging-rooms upstairs.

Every room was visited by the detectives and the chief, but with no success.

Even the cellar was thoroughly searched and the adjoining houses were also taken in.

It all went for nothing. Old King Brady parted from the chief of police in despair.

"I must begin again," he thought. "Now for Fang Wang. Perhaps he can throw some light on this mystery, dark as it seems at the present moment."

A little later Old King Brady found himself up on Stockton street pulling the old Chinaman's bell.

He was at once recognized by the same servant who had admitted him upon the occasion of his previous visit and promptly shown into the presence of old Wang.

"Ha! You comee back?" cried Wang. "You findee my son. Tellee me, quick."

"Wang, I am sorry to disappoint you, but I have not found your son, yet I have reason to believe that he is in San Francisco and alive," was the reply. "Call your interpreter and we will talk it over. I need your help here."

The interpreter was not in the house, it appeared; but Fang Wang promptly sent for him.

To this young Chink Old King Brady told the whole story. Fang Wang listened through to the end without comment.

"It may be true," he said then, "there is such a religion in China. It is called the worship of the dragon, or serpent; it is the oldest of all the Chinese religions, but I never knew anyone who belonged to it; if there are any of these people in San Francisco I never heard of them; still, I am inclined to believe that what you saw is true."

Old King Brady, encouraged, asked why, and Fang Wang, through the interpreter, went on to explain that for a long time Charley, his son, had not attended at the regular joss house, and that whenever he had been in San

Francisco he had mysteriously absented himself from his father's house, sometimes for days together.

Fang further went on to state that his son had been a deep student of some of the oldest of Chinese books, and that among them were several which treated of the ancient serpent worship.

These and other things inclined the old man to believe that the detective's theory might be the correct one.

They continued to discuss the matter for over an hour and when Old King Brady finally left, his hopes were raised, and he also had Fang Wang's assurance that he would at once start inquiry among his friends for this mysterious house of the snake.

CHAPTER X.

YOUNG KING BRADY SEES CHARLEY WANGMAN AT LAST.

In spite of all Old King Brady's fears, he was entirely right in believing Sam Lee's singular story, as the reader knows.

In the garb of a nun, Harry had been taken to San Francisco.

Ah How went alone and ahead of Ben Thomas and his companions.

They took the train at the second station below Barnwell.

That Thomas drove the extra distance for the express purpose of dodging the old detective in case he should undertake to follow them up, there can be no doubt.

Of all that happened during this remarkable journey Harry remembered very little.

From time to time Ben Thomas forced him to take a capsule which doubtless contained the drug.

They arrived in San Francisco at night and Thomas hustled them into a cab.

The ride was a long one, and where it terminated Young King Brady had not the faintest idea.

All he remembered was being aroused at last by Ben Thomas and then being led by his companion through an alley down many stairs and into a darkened room.

Here the Chinaman, stripping off his own disguise, proceeded to do the same thing for Young King Brady.

There was a bed in the room and Harry was glad to throw himself upon it.

In a moment he was off in a deep, dreamless sleep.

He must have slept for many hours, but he awoke at last with a clear head and full of consciousness of his surroundings.

But his memory was about gone.

Not until later was Harry able to piece together dim recollections and to straighten out in his mind the events we have described.

"Where in the world am I?" he asked himself, as he stared about.

He was lying on an iron bed in a neatly-furnished room, the walls of which were hung all around with the red cloth which one sees used for curtains in Chinese laundries.

Upon the walls against this stuff hung sundry scrolls, some with Chinese characters upon them, others with pictures of a huge snake in various positions.

The largest represented the creature twined about a tree, another twined about two trees, another still with its head protruding from under the lid of a half-open chest.

Harry was puzzled.

He racked his brains in vain to remember what had occurred to him.

Up to this time he never questioned that he was in Little Peking still.

But he knew he had been drugged.

"It was those infernal cigars," he said to himself. "They have fixed me in most beautiful shape. If I had drank the wine I suppose I would be dead now."

A strange languor was upon him.

He did not realize that it spelled weakness until he got upon his feet, when his legs promptly gave way from under him and he tumbled on the floor.

"Heavens! Something has taken all my strength," he thought.

By the aid of a chair he managed to get up and, pulling himself together as best he could, he took a more careful look about the room, which was lighted by a large hanging-lamp suspended from the ceiling.

And now Harry made the unpleasant discovery that there was neither window nor door to his room, ventilation being had from a pipe which pierced the ceiling.

He pulled the hangings aside.

Everywhere there was just rough stone, excepting on one side, where it was boarded up.

"I'm in some miserable secret cellar, all right," thought Harry. "It beats the band how the Governor and I always seem to land in such places. Well, I suppose I shall just have to bide my time and wait until Ben Thomas shows up. I suppose there is no doubt that all this is his work."

He dropped upon the bed again and lay there in his clothes, for only the nun's disguise had been removed.

And now some shreds of memory began to dawn upon him.

The first thing that came was a recollection of the cave.

He thought then that he must be still in it; that this was one of its secret recesses fitted up as a room, and he was pondering upon this when suddenly the curtains were brushed aside and there stood Ah How and Ben Thomas.

The Chinaman made an exclamation in his own language, but young Thomas came forward and sat down by the table.

"Well, Brady, how are you feeling now?" he demanded. "Everything all right?"

"Everything is about as near wrong as it can be," replied Harry, calmly enough.

"Ha! And how do you make that out?"

"Why do you ask me? Come to the point. You have

gone back on me in most beautiful shape. Explain what all this means."

"Now look here," cried Thomas, "it is just all nonsense for you to talk that way. How have I gone back on you? Why should I ever go forward? What are you to me, anyhow? Just a rascally little detective from the States who comes out to California poking your nose into other people's business. You can't deny that you deserve to get yourself into all kinds of trouble, and so you have."

"You can put it that way if it pleases you. I've been following the line of my duty, just the same."

"Duty be blowed. You did what you did expecting to get a big stake out of Fang Wang. You know that well enough."

"Well!"

"It is well. As it happens you have served our purpose well, and that's the main point. I suppose your head has cleared up a bit by this time."

"You had me drugged?"

"Of course I did. What do you remember of it all? Speak me fair, Brady. I warn you that it will pay you best."

"I don't remember much, and that's a fact."

"Then I suppose you fancy yourself still in Little Pekin?"

"I did till you spoke."

"Well, you are not."

"Where then?"

"In Frisco."

"And where is Old King Brady?"

"If he is anywhere I presume he is still in Little Pekin, but I'm hoping that he is dead."

Harry's heart began to fail him.

Could this vicious fellow be the pleasant young assayer they had met at the mine and to whom he had really taken a liking?

It seemed impossible to believe it.

Thomas' next words confirmed his fears.

"I am hoping that the old fraud is dead because we arranged for his killing," he said, "but we were too busy with you to make sure that the order was carried out. Anyhow, there is no more chance of his coming to your rescue than there is of the sky falling, so you need not build any hope on that."

"And what is to be my fate?" Harry asked.

"Well, I am here to tell you, but there is time enough. Take my advice and don't press that question now."

"I do press it. I want to know."

"All right; then you shall. You came to California to try and find Charley Wangman, the gold king, I believe."

"You know that perfectly well."

"And to save his life if it was in danger?"

"Of course that was part of the programme."

"And that part is destined to be carried out. You shall save Charley Wangman's life, and if you are so anxious to know how you are going to do it get up and follow me."

Harry staggered to his feet.

Thomas led the way to the boarded wall.

Here he pressed a secret spring and a sliding panel moved to one side.

"Come on, Brady," he said. "Keep close behind me and don't be scared at what you see. The hour of your finish has not come yet. You shall be duly warned before it does come. I promise you that."

Harry followed on through a passage, down half a dozen steps and through another secret door.

This brought him into one of the most remarkable rooms he had ever seen.

It was a long, narrow apartment lighted by many colored lamps which hung suspended from the ceiling.

The floor was a mosaic pavement of tiny tiles of every hue, beautifully worked out into pictures; men, animals, houses, trees, etc., were all over it, but the meaning of the intricate design was not so easy to grasp.

The ceiling was a mass of complicated fresco; sun, moon, stars, comets were represented, while among them a huge serpent was entwined.

The creature was done in the most gorgeous colors, and wherever the eye encountered the convolutions of its body the color shading seemed to differ from every other point.

At the end of the room there was a gilded grating closely woven and behind that a sort of stage upon which stood a tall, upright pole reaching up through an opening in the floor so that its top was lost to view.

Behind this pole stood a little Chinese pagoda with gilded bells hanging all over it.

There was nothing else to be seen behind the grating then.

In front of it was a low altar made of several stages upon which were placed many strange objects, just as Old King Brady had seen in the cave.

Among these were tiny cups, some containing Chinese "cash," brass coins with a square hole through the middle, rice, tea, etc. Also little ivory images representing men and animals, prominent among which were many carved in the forms of a snake climbing a pole, climbing two poles close together, coming out of a tiny chest, all just as Old King Brady had seen it in the cave.

Around the walls of this singular temple, or shrine, silk cushions were thrown down here and there and upon them several Chinamen with scarcely any clothes on lay stretched.

Beside each of these figures was an opium layout.

It was a new sort of opium joint to Young King Brady, but the sickening smell of the deadly drug, with which he was so familiar, told the story.

A temple it might be, but it was an opium joint just the same.

Ben Thomas led on to where one emaciated form lay in a deep sleep.

He was a young man with features but little resembling those of a Chinaman.

"There you are, Brady," said Ben Thomas. "You

wanted to see Charley Wangman. You see him now. You have come up with your man at last."

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT WORSHIPERS.

For Old King Brady the day which followed his arrival in San Francisco could truthfully have been written down a day of failure.

From the police and the San Francisco detectives he could get no help whatever.

Not that all hands would not have done anything for the old man they could, but none of them had any information to give.

The most of Old King Brady's time was put in looking for one Ching Deck, a Chinese detective, a halfbreed, and a very intelligent fellow whom he knew very well.

It seemed impossible to locate him, however, and Old King Brady came to the conclusion that he must be out of town.

Toward evening he called on Fang Wang again.

The old man had met with no success. He had worked himself up to a terrible pitch of excitement.

About all he did was to beg and implore Old King Brady to find his son.

Thus matters stood when Old King Brady went to supper.

At seven o'clock he started out again determined to search every hole and corner of Chinatown if necessary, and to find Ching Deck if he was to be found.

As he walked down Kearney street, Old King Brady got to thinking of the snake image in the cave.

He was passing a taxidermist's shop when the thought struck him.

The name "Hagenheim" was upon the sign over the door and the man had a cage full of little birds and another with two monkeys in the window.

Old King Brady entered and made his business known.

"My friend, I am a detective," he said, displaying his shield. "My work just now is on a peculiar case which would take too long to explain, but I find myself at a point where it is necessary for me to find out if anywhere in Chinatown there is a python, boa constrictor, or any other species of large snake concealed. I thought perhaps you might be able to help me out, and if you can you shall be well paid."

Hagenheim, who proved to be an intelligent old German, got up out of his chair with a display of interest which seemed to indicate that Old King Brady had made no mistake in coming into his shop.

"Are you connected with the police?" he asked.

"I am not. I am a private detective. To the profession I am known as Old King Brady. You may possibly have heard of me."

"I have heard of you a great many times, Mr. Brady. I am willing to talk. Indeed, I have been expecting for over six months to be visited by somebody like you. There is, or was, a python concealed in Chinatown. I imported the creature from Java six months ago at the request of a halfbreed Chinaman named Charles Wangman. The snake was imported at his request and he paid me a large price for it. I have felt all along that trouble was bound to come out of this business, and I made up my mind that in case the police applied to me I would at once tell all I know."

Old King Brady was jubilant.

"You came to a very wise conclusion then," he replied. "Trouble has come of it. This man Wangman, as he calls himself, is missing and I am searching for him. Probably you have given me the clew. Where was this snake delivered?"

"He took it from here on a truck and carried it away, helped by three Chinamen. I had him in a cage and the cage in a packing-box. I haven't the least idea where they took the creature to. I have told you all I know except that a Chinaman, whose name I don't know, occasionally comes here to buy rabbits and live fowls to feed the creature with."

"Ha! Then that isn't so bad. When was this man here last?"

"Three days ago. He usually comes in the evening, and it is seldom that he lets more than three days go by without showing up."

"Then he is liable to come here to-night?"

"He is very likely to. I have rabbits ready for him."

"Has anybody else ever come to talk to you about this business?"

"Nobody. Wangman was the only one who ever did any talking; the rabbit man speaks very little English."

"I'll wait a few moments and see if he shows up. I—stay! I'll be with you in a moment. There's a man I want to see."

Old King Brady made a sudden dart out on the street.

Hagenheim saw him collar a Chinaman who was shuffling by.

He drew the fellow up against the taxidermist's window and they began to talk.

The captured Chinaman was Ching Deck.

Here was as shrewd a man as there was in the entire Chinese colony, and one whom Old King Brady had known for years.

The son of a white mother, Ching Deck spoke "Barbary Coast" patois, half English, half Chinese, his own language, and perfect English into the bargain.

"Is it you?" he exclaimed, when Old King Brady caught him by the arm and slung him around.

"I'm here again, Deck, and I want your help the worst kind of way," replied the old detective, "are you busy to-night?"

"Yes, but I can put off my work. I am going to my room for a moment and then I am with you."

"Been out of town? I looked for you everywhere?"

"I've been in San Jose for the last three days and am off again to-morrow morning. You have struck me just in time. What are you working on?"

"Disappearance case. Charley Wangman, the gold king of Little Pekin."

"Yes? I heard he had disappeared."

"Know him?"

"No."

"Know anything about the case?"

"Not a thing."

"Deck, did you ever hear of serpent worshipers among your people?"

"Snake men! Yes. Some here in Frisco, they tell me."

"Know where they hold out?"

"No, I don't."

"Can you find out for me?"

"I am afraid I can't do it in a hurry. These people follow up a very old kind of Chinese religion; they believe in the snake god. I don't think I could make you understand, for I don't know very much about it myself. They meet in secret, though. The Chinks would chase them out in a hurry if they knew."

There was nothing to do but to tell Ching Deck the whole story, and Old King Brady there by the taxidermist's window whispered the details hurriedly.

Deck grew greatly excited.

"If Mr. Harry has been caught by these people probably they mean to feed him to the snake," he said. "Of course, I'll help you. I must; many a time you have helped me out both here and in New York."

"What can we do?"

"I don't know. Let me think. What was the number you got on Sacramento street?"

Old King Brady told it.

"It can't be there," declared Deck. "I know that house. You have been lied to, Mr. Brady; but come with me. Perhaps some of the people up at the Jackson street joss house may know. I really don't see how these snake people could hide themselves anywhere else."

They went to Dick's room on Dupont street, where the detective put some papers in a little safe, ate a bowl of cold chicken and rice, drank a cup of tea and declared himself at Old King Brady's service.

Then they went to the Jackson street joss house.

This is the largest of the Chinese temples in San Francisco.

It is a dark, dingy hole with a big altar at the back, upon which are placed a number of hideous idols.

Differing from a Christian house of worship in a thousand ways, a Chinese joss house also differs in a very important particular. It never closes. It is a continuous performance. Night and day seven days in the week the place is open for anyone who wishes to consult the gods.

But Ching Deck wanted to consult one of the priests just then, so instead of entering by the Jackson street door he turned down the alley, intending to enter by a side

door, which led directly to the apartments occupied by the priests.

They had not taken ten steps along the alley, when a man brushed past them carrying a basket.

In some way he stumbled and fell, the basket flying from his hand.

Instantly it struck the ground, a rabbit leaped out and darted down the alley.

The prostrate Chink clutched the basket and jammed the cover shut.

He sprang to his feet and, still holding the cover in place, darted in through the door of the building next beyond the joss house and was gone.

Old King Brady caught his breath.

"You saw that, Deck?" he breathed.

"You bet! Rabbits!"

"Can it be——"

"It might! Come on! Quick!"

Dick hurriedly entered at the door, with Old King Brady at his heels.

Two staircases opened from the dark passage, one leading to the rooms above, another down into a cellar. There was no basement. The Bradys had entered on the ground level.

The rabbit man had vanished.

They listened, but could hear no step on the stairs.

"He must have gone down," breathed Old King Brady.

"Sure," replied Deck. "We should hear him if he went upstairs."

"What lies below?"

"This belongs to the joss house. I never went down there."

They descended the stairs on tiptoe and landed in the darkness.

"We can do nothing here without a light," breathed Old King Brady. "First thing we know we shall get a knife in the back."

"Hush! Listen!"

"I hear music."

"Sure. Smell the hop?"

"Oh, distinctly. Your joss house priests do a little private smoking once in awhile, it seems."

"Sure! We can't stay here. We must have a light. You have your dark-lantern?"

Old King Brady produced it.

The light showed them a long, narrow passage running between boarded partitions on both sides.

They crept on to the end, a distance of some thirty feet, to find themselves up against more boards.

The passage was only a blind lead after all, it appeared.

Old King Brady flashed his light against the end partition looking for some secret spring.

In an instant his hand was upon it.

The partition flew back, revealing a small room beyond. Apparently it was a mere rubbish hole.

Empty packing-cases lay scattered about, there were boxes and barrels and a litter of straw and excrement.

"Hush! Shut the door, quick!" breathed Deck. Instantly Old King Brady pushed the door back into place.

"Footsteps on the stairs," he whispered. "I heard them. We are either trapped or we are going to find out something now. Get down behind these boxes, Deck, and we shall soon see."

They dropped down behind one of the larger packing-cases and Old King Brady shut off the light.

Soft footsteps were now heard in the passage.

A moment later the secret door opened and a Chinaman in native dress carrying in his hand a cheap electric flash-lantern, entered the room.

"At last I have hit the trail," thought Old King Brady. There was no mistake this time.

The man who had come in upon them was Ah How!

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

"Charley! Wake up! Rouse yourself! Help has come!"

Ben Thomas gave the prostrate form upon the mattress a kick.

The eyes opened and the gold king stared at him with an unmeaning look.

To Harry the expression of his face was that of a dying man.

But it changed after a moment and some sign of intelligence betrayed itself.

"That you, Ben," he muttered.

"Sure it is! Brace up!"

"No! What day is this?"

"It's the ninth—the day."

"All right. I don't care. Feed me to Wyama. Let her go."

He half closed his eyes and, fumbling on the little stool beside him, found a match and lighted the opium lamp.

"Don't smoke any more. You want to brace up now," said Ben.

"Who says so? I'm going up against the pipe."

"Nonsense, Charley. Will you listen to reason? We have captured a victim for Wyama. What did the prophecy say? That on the ninth you must sacrifice yourself unless a substitute came into our hands at Little Peking without our seeking. He has come and here he is."

Charley Wangman raised his eyes to Harry then.

Now at last he seemed to comprehend.

"That man?" he muttered.

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"A detective."

"Huh! Well?"

"You are saved. Ah How is here. Everything is ready for the ceremony. You must brace up and do your part."

There was a long silence, during which the halfbreed stared at Harry.

"What is your name?" he asked then.

"Harry Brady is his name," replied Thomas. "What I tell you is so."

"I don't care. Lemme have my smoke. Take him away. Talk about it s'mother time."

He picked up the pipe and began to "chy" the pill in its bowl.

Ben Thomas looked at him with a curious expression.

Harry read in his face an air of triumph. There was no mistaking it then.

He had almost a mind to turn on the fellow. But he was unarmed—everything had been taken from him and his weakness was overpowering. He felt that it would all be no use.

"Come!" said Thomas, and, leaving the gold king to his opium, he led Harry over toward the large gilded cage.

"You wanted to know your fate, Brady," he said, "and so you shall. Look into the pagoda. Watch!"

He whistled softly.

In a moment a huge, slimy head was projected out of a little door at the base of the pagoda.

It is strange that Harry had not sooner suspected the truth, but he had not.

Little by little a monster python crawled out upon the platform behind the grating; slowly it entwined its glittering, slimy folds about the pole and drew itself up and up until the head was lost to view in the opening above.

"Wyama, the god of the Chinese serpent worshippers," chuckled Thomas. "That fool yonder believes the snake all powerful. To-night he proposes to enter that cage and let himself be devoured. You, Brady, are to go in his stead, or perhaps Wyama may catch you both—who can tell. Come, follow me."

Not a word did Young King Brady utter in reply.

It was no time for talk.

Death in a most horrible form seemed to be staring him in the face.

Dumbly he followed Thomas back to his prison, where the secret door was closed upon him.

Food had been provided in his absence. A dainty meal was spread upon the table and Harry, feeling hungry, sat down and ate.

If his brain had been clear he never would have done it. Of course, the food was drugged.

He had no sooner finished the meal than sleepiness overtook him and he dropped upon the bed.

Consciousness was gone in a moment.

Doubtless the drug was renewed during the day, for when night came Harry was still sleeping what promised to be the sleep of death.

* * * * *

Old King Brady and Ching Deck had come to the right spot at the right time.

They learned just what they wanted to now.

Ah How never dreamed of their presence.

Kneeling down, he raised a trapdoor and passed out of sight, closing the trap behind him.

"Well! Here is their holdout all right, Mr. Brady!" exclaimed Deck as soon as the coast was clear.

"Not a doubt of it," replied the old detective. "But see, he has left the door open behind him. Yes, and the trap is plain enough. There is someone else expected to follow him in here."

"You're right. We are not safe. The sooner we go the better."

They hurried back through the passage, leaving the secret door as they found it, and regained the street unobserved.

Without an instant's delay Old King Brady hurried to police headquarters, but a few blocks away.

"Let me out of this, Mr. Brady. I don't want to be mixed up in the affair," said Deck, as they were about to enter.

"There is no reason why you should, and I am a thousand times obliged to you," replied the old detective. "Be sure to look me up at the Lick House in the morning and hear how it all ends."

They parted then.

Ten minutes later Old King Brady was on the return trip to the alley by the Jackson street joss house with a dozen plain-clothes men at his heels.

Old King Brady was just about to turn into the alley when who should come darting out but Ching Deck.

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "I thought I would come back here to watch after I left you, and it is a good thing I did. A gang of six Highbinders have just gone in there. They mean mischief, surest thing."

* * * * *

Harry's return to consciousness was brought about by Ben Thomas kicking him.

He awoke with a bursting head and with his senses so dulled that he would have sunk off to sleep again if two Chinamen who were with the assayer had not lifted him off the bed and stood him on his feet.

"Shake him up!" cried Ben. "Shake some life into him. I want to talk to the fellow before we begin."

Then followed a trying ordeal.

Poor Harry was beaten and kicked about until he turned upon his tormentors and knocked one of them down, when Thomas ordered them from the room.

Harry dropped into a chair more dead than alive, but a little brighter in his mind.

"Do you hear me? Can you see me? Can you understand?" cried Thomas, planting himself before the unfortunate detective.

"I hear you."

"Then listen. You cannot escape your fate; as sure as you are sitting in that chair you are to be served up as a meal for that python this night."

"Why should you do such a fearful thing? Have I ever wronged you?"

"You have not, but I'll tell you why: I'm going to be half owner of the mine at Little Pekin when this job is done. Do you suppose I am going to stand for your interference in my affairs? Not much."

"I don't more than half understand you. My head is all mixed up."

"Then listen and guess at the other half. Charley Wangman discovered that mine, he and Ah How and I; all went to the Holman University together, that's how I came to be with him. Charley prospered and made money by the hatful; he was liberal enough, but he would never listen to taking either How or me in as partners. That's what we wanted, and because we could not get that we now propose to take all."

"Charley was always a great student of the old Chinese literature. He got to believing in serpent worship, and he drew How in with him. When he got rich he fixed up this place and drew others in. He went so far as to import that snake. They worship the thing; they believe it is a god. They have got a woman here who goes into trances and makes prophecies; they call that the snake talking to them. Was there ever such rubbish? Well, I pretended to become converted, too, and I've seen all sorts of queer things since.

"Some time ago this Chinese seeress prophesied that on the ninth of this month Charley must serve himself up as a sacrifice to the snake. Do you know that he believed it? How fostered the belief and so did I. Why, you ask? Simply because we want the mine and we want Charley out of the way. At the same time this sybil stated that an alternate sacrifice might come to us, and if so, Charley was to be allowed to live, but was to remain here perpetually worshiping the serpent, which in other words means that he is to smoke opium till it kills him. Now, perhaps, you begin to catch on, Brady. You came and we captured you. I'm not going to give you any further details, although I could give you lots. The scheme goes through, and How and I get the mine. That paper served on Fang Wang was only a bluff to steer the old fellow off the track and make him believe that Narraway's people were after the Little Pekin. We never dreamed that the old fellow would think of such a thing as sending for you and your partner to help him out."

The secret door flew back at this instant and Ah How, dressed as a Chinaman, came shuffling in.

"Ben!" he cried, angrily, "what is the meaning of all this talk? I have been listening. How can you be such a fool?"

Thomas laughed.

"Talk is cheap," he sneered. "Listeners sometimes hear what they don't like. I didn't know you were back, How."

"Well, I'm here."

"Is all arranged?"

"Yes. We may as well get down to business and have done with it."

"All right. I'm ready any time."

Ah How went to the door and gave a shrill whistle.

In a moment the two Chinamen came into the room.

"Take that fellow to the temple!" cried How.

He pointed to Harry, who was in the act of falling asleep again.

But if Ah How had been the master here he certainly was not so now.

Suddenly Ben Thomas turned on him and, whipping out a revolver, covered the man.

"You fool!" he cried. "Do you imagine that I am going to stand for only half in this? Not I! It's all or none! You believe in your Wyama. I don't, but if her snakeship is to be fed on human flesh to-night she shall have a good meal, and you are to be the starter. Away with him, boys! You know what I promised you! Take him away!"

Even before this speech was finished the two Chinamen had rushed upon Ah How with drawn knives.

Just what happened, Harry never could get quite straight in his mind.

He remembered seeing Ah How shake his assailants off and dart out into the passage.

The pair sprang after him with wild cries; there was a sharp exclamation—the sound of a heavy fall and then all was still.

Thomas had run out into the passage now.

"Let him lie as he is!" Harry heard him shout. "Get in and do up the detective. The snake shall have a fine feed on them both, but I'm merciful enough to kill them first."

Harry staggered to his feet and caught up a chair, resolved to make at least an effort to defend himself.

At the same instant the rush of many feet was heard and Thomas burst out with a startled cry.

Harry caught the word Highbinders.

Shot after shot followed.

Then all in an instant Harry's strength seemed to leave him and he dropped in a faint to the floor only to awake to find Old King Brady lifting him up.

It was the last Harry knew for hours, and when next he came to his senses he was in the hospital with his partner seated at his side.

Then he learned just what had happened and knew that Old King Brady and his plain-clothes men had arrived just in time to see Ben Thomas shot down by Highbinders who had raided the place.

Two of the gang were shot first, however, and one dead.

That Ah How hired them to raid the temple and do up Thomas, Charley Wangman and Young King Brady was learned through the confession of one of the gang.

It was a case of two black-hearted villains turning on each other.

Ah How was dead and Thomas died in the hospital of his wounds next day.

The two Chinamen who killed Ah How were both

wounded by the Highbinders, and they also subsequently died of their wounds.

But Charley Wangman was taken from the place drunk with opium. He never knew what was going on.

In Ah How's pocket was found a deed of the Little Pekin mine signed over to him by the deluded wretch who had believed him to be his best friend.

It was a strange ending to a strange case.

One man rejoiced, and that was old Fang Wang, for he got back his son alive.

Harry made a rapid recovery, and within a week the Bradys returned to New York with a fat fee in their pockets.

The police cleaned out the serpent temple, the python ultimately going to Woodward's Gardens.

It was finally bestowed upon the city by Charley Wangman, who, once recovered from his debauch and hearing what had happened, renounced his fad forever.

Later the Bradys learned that he made over a half of the Little Pekin mine to Mr. Blackman and went off to Mexico with his father.

Subsequently the mine was sold to the owners of the Four Kings for a good round price.

The Highbinders all went to San Quentin's prison on long terms.

It was impossible to prove who the real murderers were.

Old King Brady did not forget Ching Deck when the reward came his way.

The case got into the papers, of course, and was a nine days' wonder.

Old King Brady, thinking of Ah How's fate, frequently remarked how strange it was that he should have been slain in the passage leading to the serpent temple after all, as had been prophesied.

It looked as if the prophet had mistaken one temple for another, and Ah How's net at the mountain shrine was no use to him in San Francisco.

But this was only one of the many strange things connected with the case of The Bradys in Little Pekin.

THE END.

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