

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year.

No. 468.

NEW YORK, JANUARY 10, 1908.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AND THE CHINESE FIRE FIENDS; OR, BREAKING UP A SECRET BAND.

By A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.



From that cavernous mouth smoke came curling. A moment more and the two Chinamen would have thrown him in. Then the curtain was thrust rudely aside and Old King Brady, followed by Harry, burst into the room. "Hold!" the old detective cried.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND.

San Francisco as it existed before the great earthquake and subsequent fire was a city which can never be duplicated.

For odd people, strange societies, queer religious sects and singular holes and corners, it had no equal.

All this was the growth of time in the most cosmopolitan city on earth.

The new San Francisco springing up from the ruins will necessarily be a very different place.

Of all the faded, shabby streets in the old city, Stockton, between Sutter and Vallejo, was probably the worst.

Located on the edge of Chinatown, as you ascended Nob Hill, it was long the resort for queer people of every description.

Powell street, a block above, in the same section, was much better, but even that was given up to cheap boarding houses and furnished room houses of the second grade.

On a certain evening in February, a few years before the fire, a young man, plainly but neatly dressed, might have been seen emerging from one of the furnished room houses on Powell street at about half-past seven o'clock.

He clutched the stoop railing and descended with as much caution as if the steps had been covered with the ice of a New York winter's day—something which San Francisco never sees—and, reaching the sidewalk in safety he began to rap his way toward Sacramento street with a cane.

To the most casual observer it would have been apparent that the man was blind.

It seemed a pity, for he was a well-built, good-looking fellow under thirty.

His eyes were not disfigured in any way, save for the fixed stare, which betrayed the true state of the case.

The young man, however, advanced with that perfect confidence which some who are born blind seem to attain.

He turned down Clay street and made his way through the heart of Chinatown to Portsmouth Square.

Many jostled him, but he paid no heed and asked no questions.

The latter, indeed, would have been quite useless, for almost every one whom he passed was of the Chinese race.

He seemed to know when he reached the square, and he made his way across it unerringly by a diagonal walk, coming out at the corner of Washington and Kearney streets.

But here he was at fault, and he paused to inquire the way.

"Please direct a blind man?"

Three times he said it before any one paid heed.

Then a hand was laid on his arm, and a cheerful voice asked:

"Where is it you wish to go?"

"To the Braundig cigar store on this block," was the reply. "I was never there before; otherwise I could find it. I shall be obliged for your help."

"Certainly," replied the man who had spoken. "This way. It is only a step."

A moment later and the blind man was left in front of the cigar store.

Thanking his unseen assistant, he opened the door and walked in.

"Good evening," he said, politely. "Is Mr. Arthur Marrin here?"

"Here I am, Mr. Barney," replied a voice.

The cigar man behind the counter looked amused.

It was a case of the blind meeting the blind.

A young man, hardly over twenty, who had been sitting at the back of the store, arose and groped his way forward with a cane.

He was a less cheerful looking subject than the man Barney.

The true condition of his eyes could not be seen, as he wore green spectacles.

The pair shook hands cordially.

"Well, I'm glad your friend came, Marrin," said the cigar dealer. "Won't you both have a smoke with me?"

"Thank you, Mr. Braundig," replied Marrin. "Let me introduce my friend Mr. Barney."

The cigar dealer acknowledged the introduction, and, producing the cigars, helped them to a light.

"Think you two can take care of yourselves, do you?" he asked.

"I never lost myself yet," laughed Marrin.

"I can travel this town from one end to the other," added Barney, proudly.

"Good!" said Braundig. "I am glad you two have become acquainted. Misery loves company, they say."

"There are worse things than being blind," replied Barney. "I had sooner be as I am than a helpless cripple or a paralytic, any day."

"Well, good night! Have a good time," said the cigar dealer, and the two blind men rapped their way out of the shop and on toward Portsmouth Square.

It was a case of a chance acquaintance, which was now to be cultivated.

These two young men had accidentally met on the Oakland ferryboat, a few days before.

Finding that they were similarly afflicted, they struck up an acquaintance, and at parting had agreed to meet on this particular evening.

It was also agreed that young Marrin, who had, through the kindness of Mr. Braundig, learned to make cigars and

was employed by that gentleman, should pass the night with his new acquaintance, both being unmarried.

They had no other intention than to walk and talk; indeed, there was little else that they could do.

They entered Portsmouth Square.

It was a lovely evening, mild and balmy. February in California marks the opening of spring.

The would-be friends seated themselves on a bench and began to talk.

At first it was young Arthur Marrin telling of his experiences at the cigar making trade.

"Of course, I can never hope to compete with those who have their sight," he said; "but Mr. Braundig is very good to me and has been very patient. He selects the tobacco and places it so that I can lay my hands right on it. He says that my rolling is better done than any man in the place."

Barney, who was plainly the young man's superior in education and intelligence, listened and commented with every display of interest.

This and other subjects discussed, the conversation lagged for a moment, and then Marrin said:

"But you have not told me what your business is yet. I did not like to ask the other day."

"Oh, I am an interpreter," was the reply.

"You were not born blind, as I was, then?"

"Oh, no. I had my sight until my twenty-third year. I am twenty-nine now."

"How came you to lose it?"

"It went gradually—a case of paralysis of both optic nerves."

"It is hopeless?"

"So the oculists say."

It would seem as if Barney wished to avoid talking of his business, for he now began to make some remarks about Chinatown, but Marrin was not to be sidetracked.

"About your business, Barney," he persisted. "Are you a court interpreter?"

"Oh, no."

"How many languages do you speak?"

"Only one, besides English."

"What one?"

Barney laughed.

"You will have it out, won't you?" he said. "Well, then, if you must know, it is Chinese."

"Chinese! Do you mean to say that you can speak Chinese?"

"I can speak Cantonese as well as I can English. That is the sort of Chinese these Chinks here in California almost all speak."

"Is there more than one kind of Chinese?"

"There are many kinds. There are as many different languages spoken in China as there are in Europe; more, some say."

"For whom do you do your interpreting?"

"Now, my dear fellow, there's where I must ask you to ring off. It is a secret which I cannot disclose."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I don't want to be inquisitive."

"That's all right. I would tell you if I could, but I just can't, so there you are. It must not interfere with

our acquaintance, however. I feel that we are going to be fast friends."

"I have long wanted a blind man for a friend."

"The same with me. Let us go up Kearney street and get ice cream. I never drink anything. Our kind just have to keep the head clear."

They visited the ice cream saloon, to which Barney led the way unerringly.

Here they lingered a while, and later they returned to the Square.

As their acquaintance progressed they began telling each other of their past lives.

Barney informed Marrin that he was born and brought up in China. That his father had been a merchant and was at one time very well-to-do, but finally died in poverty through the defalcation of his partner.

Marrin had little to tell, being an orphan, and having been brought up in a blind asylum as a charity patient.

At last they started for Barney's room, for it had been arranged that they should spend the night there, as has been said.

They went up Sacramento street through the Chinese market, arm in arm.

The swarming Chinks, seeing their affliction, made way for them.

Indeed, Barney's was a well-known figure on this great thoroughfare, and many Chinamen had good reason to know who he was, as will be later shown.

And still they talked—talked too much, and there came the trouble.

Alone Barney could have gone to his room with absolute certainty, but now, with his mind distracted, he blundered.

Instead of turning down Powell street, he turned in on Stockton, one block short of his destination.

"Sure you can find the house?" demanded Marrin.

"I never fail," was the reply. "I should consider it a disgrace if I did."

"I am not as good at it as that, but I am improving."

They continued to walk and talk.

In the middle of the block, on the east side of the street, Barney suddenly paused.

"Here we are," he said.

He put out his hand and clutched a stoop railing.

By a singular coincidence, it was just such a railing as belonged to the stoop of the Powell street house.

They ascended the stoop, and Barney produced a latch-key.

Again, by a singular coincidence, it fitted the lock; he threw open the door, and they walked inside.

Now, if these two young men had been able to perceive even a glimmer of light, they would at once have known their mistake.

Instead of the dingy hall lamp of the Powell street house, a brilliant light burned here.

Barney's room being on the second floor, he started upstairs, directing Marrin to grasp the rail.

At the same instant a voice behind them called out something in Chinese.

Barney stopped short and answered.

A brief conversation in that most mysterious language was held.

"We are in the wrong house. We must get out of here," said Barney. "Be careful how you turn."

Again the Chinese voice spoke.

Barney's answer was fairly shouted:

"Marrin! Look to yourself!" he hastily added. "We are in serious trouble here!"

But it was a case of the blind leading the blind.

Of course, poor Marrin had no earthly show when strong hands seized him, and he was dragged back down the stairs.

The last he heard of his companion he was shouting angrily in Chinese.

And now the young cigarmaker's nerves were put to the test.

The cold muzzle of a revolver came against his forehead.

"You makee holler and me killee you!" a voice hissed in his ear.

He could hear a struggle on the stairs, and he knew that Barney must also have been captured.

Then he was dragged into a room and tumbled over on a couch.

Several persons seemed to gather about him, and all kept up a constant jabbering in Chinese.

Two held him down on the couch but after a few minutes Marrin was rudely raised up and a tumbler containing some liquid was thrust to his lips.

"Dlink!" said a stern voice.

"No, no! Let me go! Have mércy on a poor, blind fellow!" pleaded the boy.

Again the revolver came against his forehead.

"Dlink and you may live," said the voice. "No dlink and me shootee."

And with that Marrin's mouth was forced open and the liquid was turned down his throat.

It had a sweetish taste, and was by no means unpleasant.

Marrin was dropped back on the couch.

Every nerve was tingling.

Strange sensations began creeping over him.

At last the voices seemed to come from the dim distance.

Then all was oblivion.

The next Arthur Marrin knew some one was pounding the soles of his feet with a club.

"Wake up, there! Wake up, there!" a voice called.

And when poor Marrin came to understand the situation he knew that the night had passed and that in the early morning hours he had been found sleeping on the ground in a lot off Alaska street on the edge of the India Basin, miles from where he lost his head.

So much for the blind undertaking to lead the blind.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRADYS TAKE UP THE CASE.

It is singular how farreaching are the results of some seemingly slight events.

Two weeks later, in an elegantly furnished office on

Union Square, New York City, three persons sat discussing the case of our two blind men.

One was a tall, elderly gentleman of striking appearance, who wore a long, blue coat, with brass buttons, and an old-fashioned stock and stand-up collar.

This was the world-famous detective, Old King Brady, who needed only the big, white felt hat, with its broad brim, which hung on a peg near his desk, to make him instantly recognizable to the criminal fraternity all over the country.

His companions were Young King Brady, his pupil and partner, and Miss Alice Montgomery, the accomplished female partner of the Brady Detective Bureau.

"And so you see, Harry, it is San Francisco again for ours," remarked Old King Brady. "The Secret Service Bureau is determined to find Ben B. Barney, if he is alive, or to avenge his death if the Chinese have killed him."

"Was he, then, such a useful man?" demanded Young King Brady.

"He was considered the best Chinese interpreter on the Coast. The Secret Service Bureau have employed him for the past five years."

"I can't believe he could speak Chinese a bit better than Alice."

"Comparisons are odious," laughed Alice. "How do you know?"

"And lovers are partial," said Old King Brady. "Seriously, Alice, it begins to look if I am ever to see Harry perfectly sane again it will only be after he has married you."

"That is hard on me to expect me to undertake to cure this young lunatic," said Alice.

"I'm ready to take the cure any time," laughed Harry.

"Not yet, young man," replied Alice. "I prefer the detective business to housekeeping, any day in the week."

But this was all in pleasantry.

The fact is, Harry has for a long time been desperately in love with Alice, but not as yet has he succeeded in prevailing upon her to become his wife.

But the Chinese part of the question was no joke.

Alice both speaks and reads that difficult tongue, as well as several of the European languages.

The daughter of a missionary, and born and brought up in China, she was taught the language in early childhood.

That in her detective work it has been of the greatest service to her, can easily be guessed.

And when do we start for San Francisco?" demanded Young King Brady.

"To-morrow at three o'clock," replied the old detective, "so get ready. Close up everything we have here."

And this is the way with the Bradys.

While not actually in the employ of the United States Secret Service, they hold themselves subject to the call of the bureau at any time.

Thus, one week later, the Bradys, with Alice Montgomery, turned up at the office of Secret Service Commissioner Narraway at San Francisco.

Here the case of the disappearance of the blind interpreter was gone over again.

Then, for the first time, the detectives heard the full story told by Arthur Marrin.

"And have none of your people been able to locate this house?" demanded Old King Brady.

"They have utterly failed," was the reply. "That is why I suggested that you be called on the case."

"Does not Marrin know which street he and Barney ascended the hill?"

"He insists upon it that they went up Sacramento street, which is very probable, for Barney boarded on Powell, near Sacramento."

"He was well accustomed to going about alone?"

"Not only that, but he was most expert at it. Why, the man could find his way all over the city. He never had a guide."

"No chance that he was attacked in his own house?"

"Not the most remote. The people he lived with are not only entirely respectable, but they were very much attached to Barney. He had lived with them three years."

"No chance that this Marrin is lying?"

"We think not. He is well spoken of by his employer."

"With what was he drugged?"

"Some Chinese decoction of opium, the doctors say. All this ground has been gone over thoroughly, Mr. Brady. It rests with you to discover something new."

"But we must first get at the preliminary points. Can you imagine any reason why the Chinese would want to kill or capture Barney?"

"Every reason. He has been five years our interpreter, and has been used in many opium smuggling cases; but if you ask me if I can think of any Chinamen who might be down on him I could answer that there are probably a hundred who might reasonably be supposed to hold a grudge against him."

"Then there is no clue?"

"None that I can think of. Not only have our men worked Chinatown to a finish, but the police detectives have done everything they could, and nothing has come of it. Now, then, it is up to you."

And the Bradys accepted the commission.

They had worked up many difficult cases among the San Francisco Chinese to a successful finish.

The question was to know where to begin, and what naturally suggested itself was to call Arthur Marrin into consultation.

But this was precisely what Old King Brady decided not to do.

He knew what it must have been for the young blind man to be hounded by local detectives and Secret Service men.

"He has probably told his story so many times that he does not know whether he is telling it straight or crooked," the old detective said to his partners. "For that reason I propose to leave him alone, for the present at least."

"And where do we begin?" demanded Harry.

"I start in at Barney's lodgings," replied the old detective. "You and Alice can begin a search for the house."

But what better chance will we have of locating it than any of our predecessors?"

"You have one immense advantage over them."

"Which is?"

"You go at it disguised as Chinamen."

"Of course," broke in Alice. "Lots of people must have seen those two blind men that night. Since they were in Chinatown those who saw them must have been for the most part Chinese, but I disagree with you about the disguising, Mr. Brady. I think for a white woman to tackle the Chinks, in their own language, will be most likely to bring success."

"Well, I don't know but what you are right," replied Old King Brady, after a few minutes' reflection. "But you want to try it at the same time of day that these two blind men are supposed to have gone up Sacramento street."

"That is, between ten and eleven o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I make up as a white blind man?" suggested Harry.

"Not at first," replied the old detective. "Get busy as Alice suggests to begin with. I may pick up a clue at the house in the meanwhile."

It was then six o'clock, and the detectives, who had taken up their quarters, as usual, at the Lick House, on Montgomery street, postponed beginning their case until after supper.

Old King Brady then started for Powell street, and turned up at the lodging house kept by Mrs. Meagles, where Barney had lived.

His ring was answered by a young Chinaman, who showed him into a shabbily furnished sitting room, and after a few minutes Mrs. Meagles appeared.

She was a motherly looking Englishwoman, with a worried expression on her face, which seemed to indicate that she might have troubles of her own.

"So you are just another detective," she exclaimed, when Old King Brady made known his business. "They have the life worried out of me, and I can't see what good comes out of it. There is no doubt in my mind but that the Chinese killed poor Mr. Barney. I always felt afraid they would."

"And did he feel afraid, Mrs. Meagles?" demanded the old detective.

"Did he! Well, I should say so! Many a time he says to me, 'They'll turn on me some day, Mrs. Meagles,' he says. But he didn't care."

"Didn't care?"

"No. He had nobody belonging to him. Although everybody mightn't believe it, the dear man didn't care whether he lived or died. He took his blindness that much to heart. Oh, he was a lovely man!"

"And would he never take any precautions, feeling as he did?"

"No; he persisted in going around alone and at night, right through the heart of Chinatown. Many a time I warned him. Indeed, I told him that he ought to find some other boarding place, where he wouldn't have to go back and forth among the Chinks; but, do you know, I think he really liked their ways."

"Did any of them ever visit him here?"

"Oh, sure. Very often."

"You have no idea who they were?"

"No. What would I know about the Chinks?"

"Your man, possibly he may know. Have any of the

detectives who have been here before me ever questioned him?"

"Well, I should say they had! But it's no use. Ping Pow thought just as much of Mr. Barney as I did. He wouldn't hurt a hair of his head. Why, Mr. Barney was teaching him English; they were fast friends, and Ping used to sit in his room nights and talk Chinese until it would make your ears tired to listen to them."

"Mr. Barney boarded as well as lodged here?"

"Yes. The poor man found it hard to go out for meals, so I provided for him, but he was the only one."

"Has his room been rented yet?"

"No; I thought that much of him that I have left all his things just as they were, except for the pulling over the detectives have given them, but I can't much longer; I must have the rent."

"Rent the room to me," said Old King Brady, on the spur of the moment. "And don't tell Ping Pow that I am a detective."

"You needn't suspect Ping Pow."

"Wait! I suspect nobody, but I do want to find Mr. Barney, if he still lives, and I want you to help me all you can."

"Which I will do, you may be sure. I feel just awful about the dear man."

"What rent do you want for the room?"

"Well, Mr. Barney paid three dollars a week."

"I will give you five, and pay two weeks in advance. Here is the money, and now show me to the room."

Mrs. Meagles stowed away the money, and led Old King Brady to the front room on the second floor.

As soon as the door was opened the old detective ceased to wonder that the landlady had hesitated about disturbing Mr. Barney's belongings.

The room was a perfect museum of Chinese curiosities.

Considering that they had been arranged by a blind man, the taste displayed was remarkable.

To examine everything was likely to take time, so Old King Brady did not regret having engaged the room.

"I shall take possession here to-morrow," he said, "and in the meanwhile admit nobody. You understand I am a Secret Service man, and not an ordinary detective?"

"I understand. I hope you will prove an extraordinary detective, then."

"Let us trust so. By the way, has any mail come for Mr. Barney since his disappearance?"

"Yes; there are three letters."

"Yes? Didn't you give them to the detectives?"

"No; what would I do that for? Mr. Barney might have turned up. They have no business with the poor man's mail."

"I have, then, and you must give them to me."

"Well, I suppose if you say so, I shall have to. It has gone so long now that I don't suppose there is much chance of the dear man ever turning up."

"Get me the letters," ordered Old King Brady, and Mrs. Meagles, leaving the room, soon returned with them.

Two were of no consequence; one being a lodge notice and the other a bill.

But when Old King Brady broke the seal of the third, which was addressed in a painfully awkward hand, he

saw that he had come upon something which might prove to be of importance.

The letter was in Chinese!

CHAPTER III.

QUEER DISCOVERIES.

Shortly after supper Alice and Harry left the Lick House and went over to Dupont street.

It was the same old Chinatown.

The surging crowd of Celestials seemed even greater than usual.

To look for the vanished blind man in these densely populated streets seemed indeed a hopeless task.

"How are we going to begin?" asked Harry.

"We don't begin until the appointed time," replied Alice. "Those were Mr. Brady's orders."

"Oh, he did not intend it that way. Of course, if we strike anything we go right ahead."

"Let us turn down Sacramento street. I want to see the Chinese market again."

This was one of the show places of old San Francisco.

The block between Dupont and Kearney was lined with little, open stalls, where everything in the way of Chinese edibles was displayed.

Whole pigs, roasted and varnished, hung from hooks.

Horrible, yellow cheese lay on platters. There were coops of live fowls of every description, baskets of vegetables, strings of dried sharks' fins, bags of queer beans and boxes of mysteries, articles unknown to Americans, which might have been any strange thing.

In no part of Chinatown was the crowd more dense than on this block.

As Alice and Harry elbowed their way through the throng the former suddenly drew her companion into a doorway.

"Look here, Harry," she said, "I've got an idea."

"So have I, by jove!" laughed Harry. "It just this minute seized me."

"I hope it did not clutch you too hard, then."

"It got a pretty good grip on me. But it may have been tried by some of the other detectives."

"I will guarantee that mine hasn't, then."

"Yours comes first, Alice."

"See this sign?"

"I can't read Chinese."

"I will never consent to marry you until you learn."

"I'll put myself in the hands of a teacher to-morrow."

"But the sign?"

"I shall have to depend upon you to read it for me. What does it say?"

"Dr. Ging Gow Cures All Kinds of Bad Eyes!"

"Well, what about that?"

"Isn't it possible that our blind man, understanding Chinese, may have consulted this man about his eyes?"

"Would he consult a Chinese oculist?"

"If he was born and brought up in China, as Mr. Narraway asserts, that is just what he would be likely to do. As I have often told you, these Chinese physicians know

a lot more than outsiders give them credit for. Anyway, it is worth trying."

"Shall we consult Dr. Ging Gow as detectives?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I suppose there isn't any reason why we should not."

"Let us do it, then, just for a flyer. What was your idea?"

"That, while we were waiting for eleven o'clock, we try to find if some of the nighthawk cabbies around the Square did not carry young Marrin to the India Basin that night."

"It would seem as if some of the detectives must have done that."

"But, even so, we may succeed where they failed."

"That's true, too. Meanwhile let us try Dr. Ging Gow."

"All right. Come on!"

They ascended the stairs and knocked on the doctor's door.

And this was the time they were treated to a surprise. The Chinese in San Francisco have progressed in Western ways far more than the whites give them credit for or are aware.

Here was an example.

The door was opened by a China boy, in native dress. They were ushered into a room well furnished in Chinese style.

In addition, it presented all the appearance of an American oculist's office.

There was a fine operating chair, a big glass case, filled with the latest implements of the profession.

Clearly Dr. Ging Gow was up to date.

Alice spoke to the boy in Chinese, which caused him to open his eyes.

He passed into another room.

"Do we get the doctor?" whispered Harry.

"Yes," replied Alice; "right away."

In a moment a young Chinaman in American dress entered.

His face was intelligent and pleasing, but it bore a look of surprise.

"You wished to consult me professionally?" he asked in perfect English.

Alice answered in Chinese.

The doctor responded, his face showing his surprise.

"We will speak English for your benefit," said Alice, looking at Harry. "I have told Dr. Ging Gow that we are detectives. There is no necessity for me speaking in Chinese since the doctor speaks such excellent English."

"I can return the compliment," replied the doctor, bowing. "Your Chinese is the best I ever heard an American speak. But that does not describe it—your speech is nearly perfect."

Alice handed the doctor her card and introduced Harry, after which she asked if he was acquainted with Ben B. Barney.

"You mean the interpreter of the Secret Service office?" asked the doctor.

"Yes."

"He is a patient of mine—or, rather, has been. What about him?"

"Perhaps you are aware that he has mysteriously disappeared?"

"Indeed! I had not heard of it. I think you must be mistaken."

"Not at all."

"Explain."

Alice then told the whole story, realizing that Dr. Gow was no man for half confidences.

The doctor listened attentively, with a face singularly grave.

"You did well to come to me," he said, when Alice paused. "Mr. Barney was treated by me about a year ago, but I failed to help him. His case is hopeless, and I so informed him. Are you aware that he spoke Chinese nearly as well as you do, Miss Montgomery?"

"Yes, we understand that."

"Are you aware that he was in the habit of disguising as a Chinaman and going about Chinatown at night?"

"That is new."

"It is a fact. He always came to me in Chinese dress. Did you know that he was a convert to a peculiar religious sect among my people?"

"That is also new."

"It is a fact. I am a Christian. I was educated in London, but I happen to know something of these people. I warned him of his danger, for they are a bunch of fanatics. Just what their doctrines are is not known, outside of themselves; but they are certainly fire worshipers, and they are much feared by my people. It is believed that every year they fire some Chinese house at night, with the idea of making a sacrifice to their fire god. Now, for several years, mysterious fires have been set in Chinatown. We believe that these fire fiends are at the bottom of them all."

"It is hard to believe that a man of Barney's character would engage in any such business," said Harry. "You have talked with him on this subject?"

"Once; but understand he repudiated the idea of these people being fire fiends."

"And he told you that he had joined this sect?"

"Certainly; as I said."

"What is the name of this sect?" asked Alice.

"They conceal their name," replied the doctor. "You know that is a Chinese trick. We call them the 'Ning-po.'"

"Fire worshipers."

"That will do. It is not the exact translation."

"When was this?" demanded Harry.

"Nearly two years ago. It was when he first began to take treatment with me. When he found that I did not approve of the Ning-po he dropped the subject. But I think I have something to tell you which will certainly interest you. I saw Mr. Barney on the street three nights ago in his Chinese disguise."

"Good!" cried Harry. "Where was this?"

"Dupont street, between Jackson and Pacific."

"Was he alone?"

"No. Two Chinamen had him by the arms. They were walking rapidly. Although you may not know it, no one would know that Mr. Barney was blind to look at him. He was so well made up that no one would ever have guessed that he was not a Chinaman."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No."

"Did you know who his companions were?"

"No. They were strangers to me. I have told you all I know."

"And I am sure we are very grateful to you, doctor," said Alice. "What you have told us is most important; but one question more, do you happen to know any one who belongs to the Ning-po?"

The doctor assured Alice that he did not, and shortly after they left.

"That was great, if he can be believed," said Harry, when they found themselves on Sacramento street again.

"You can believe him on every point but one," replied Alice.

"What is that?"

"About his not knowing any of the Ning-po."

"Oh, I suppose so. One Chink will never give the other away."

"Never. You need never expect it. But, still, what he said may be true."

"Shall we go for the cabbies now?" questioned Harry, as they pressed on down the hill through the crowd.

"Why not? It can do no harm."

But it did not come about that way, for when they reached the corner of Clay and Kearney streets, who should they run into but Old King Brady.

"Alice!" exclaimed the old detective. "Just the person I most wanted to meet!"

"What is up?" demanded Harry, with a wink at Alice not to give away what they had learned just yet.

"I have been to Barney's room; in fact, I have engaged it for a couple of weeks. The place is a perfect museum of Chinese curiosities. Among other things which came of my visit is this letter, which the landlady gave me. It is in Chinese, and, naturally, I am curious to know what it is about."

"I can't see to read it here, Mr. Brady."

"Certainly not. Let us go to Portsmouth Square and sit down under an electric light."

They did so, and Alice tackled the letter,

She pondered over it for some minutes without speaking.

"This letter is in cipher," she said at length.

"Sure?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Yes; that is what it is. A Chinese cipher, not of characters, but of words."

"Give me an idea?"

"Well, I begin at the right-hand column and read down in Chinese style. It runs like this: 'Sun, waving grain, yellow duck, beaten gold, house by the river, the junk, with the yellow sails,' and so on. You can make nothing of it."

"Singular."

"It is just a cipher. You see, it is practically a list of objects. Each one, no doubt, stands for some definite word. Without the key it would be impossible to translate it."

"Even in English it would be hard. A word cipher is the most difficult of all kinds to handle."

"Read it through, Alice," said Harry. "You may strike some clue."

"I'll study it," replied Alice, "and while I am doing so you must tell Mr. Brady what we have done."

Harry, who only wanted to hold back until he had learned what his partner had been doing, now went at it and told of the visit to Dr. Ging Gow.

Of course, Old King Brady realized its importance.

"This is very interesting," he said. "It throws a new light on the whole business. Does Alice believe that this Dr. Gow actually saw Barney?"

"I certainly do," replied Alice. "But look here. I've found figures in this last column."

"What are they?"

Alice named them.

"There are two here," she said; "one and six; that would seem to be a date. On what day did Barney disappear?"

"The 16th of February."

"It looks as if these figures meant something. Can the four be the number of some house?"

"Very likely. What are the words before it?"

"Company, share, and a word signifying a Chinese weight, which is about equivalent to our ton.

"Stockton!" cried Harry.

"Well, well, I believe you have hit it!" said Old King Brady. "Number so-and-so Stockton street!"

The number we prefer not to give, but we will mention that it was that of a house on the east side of Stockton street, a few doors from Sacramento, and, as the reader knows, it was at this point that the two blind men made their blunder.

"I think you have hit it," said Alice. "No. — Stockton. That is certainly it."

"What is the word before company share, or stock?" inquired Harry.

"That character I can't make out. I—why, look here! The character is cut in half. It is the same as the character meaning company, guild, association, or society; but only half of it is written here."

"A play on word," said Old King Brady: "Com No. — Stockton!"

"And add an 'e' and you have 'come,'" replied Alice. "You are certainly right."

"I believe I could unravel the whole cipher if I only understood Chinese," chuckled the old detective, greatly tickled with his success. "Now, let us think. According to Marrin, he and Barney were talking earnestly when the blunder was made. So Barney lost his head. Instead of turning in on Powell, he turned in on Stockton, one block short of his destination. What about that?"

"I believe you," said Harry. "As sure as you live, we have hit the house!"

"And now for a theory: Let us suppose that Barney joined this Ning-po society as a fad. Everybody is more or less faddy, why not a blind man? Let us suppose that he had only a partial knowledge of its character; that when he learned that they were fire fiends he tried to pull out; that the Chinks followed him up; that he was ordered to attend at that house on that particular night; that he resolved not to obey this summons in cipher, and, fearing that the Chinks would come after

him in the night, he arranged to have young Marrin sleep with him?"

"An ingenious theory," said Harry. "And I am not saying that it is not the correct one. But what is the next move?"

"The next move is mine," said Old King Brady. "Your cabby plan, simple as it is, I consider still worth trying. You two sit here and leave it to me. I saw a cabby on the stand whom I used to know. Perhaps I can get something where the detectives who preceded us failed."

And with this Old King Brady got up and walked away.

CHAPTER IV.

HARD AT WORK.

Old King Brady's cabby was one Pat Connors, an old-timer in San Francisco.

Several times the old detective has had occasion to employ him, and as he is always exceedingly liberal with such people he had a right to expect some return.

And he got it in this case.

He carefully explained the situation to Connors, and made him understand that there would be no arrest.

At first the cabby declared that he could do nothing, but a ten-dollar bill quickly caused him to change his opinion.

"Just get into me cab and wait, Mr. Brady," he said. "I know a feller who druv some Chinks in the early morning about two weeks ago. You say all you want to know is the number of the house from which this blind boy was taken?"

"That is all, Pat. There will be nothing doing. I only want to get a starting clue. Have other detectives been pumping you fellows about this?"

"Sure. Three of them."

"I see; and you have talked it over among yourselves and made up your minds to keep your mouths shut. I guess you know who the right party is, all right."

Connors grinned.

"Yes, but I don't tell all I know, Boss Brady," he replied, "and it isn't every detective who can pump me as you can. But stop here. I have to go around to the Washington street side of the Square, so."

He was gone about ten minutes, and then returned, triumphant.

"Well?" demanded Old King Brady.

"The blind boy was took out of a house on the south side of Stockton street, a few doors from Sacramento. He disremembers the number; but that's where it was. The Chinks brought him out, and went with him. They dropped him in the lot while me friend was looking the other way."

"And a fine price he got for that fare," said Old King Brady. "Of course, he thought he was carrying a corpse."

"Sure I didn't ax him. Sorry I couldn't get the number, but he really don't know it."

"You have earned your ten, Pat. It's all right. I can find the house."

And the old detective returned to Harry and Alice.

"The case grows on our hands," he said. "Your cab scheme has worked. Marrin was taken out of a house on Stockton street, a few doors north of Sacramento. The next thing is to see if this number corresponds."

They walked to Stockton street and located the number given in the Chinese cipher letter, exactly where the cabby had located the house.

The house was an old-fashioned, two-story frame, a relic of early days.

It was dark, and the blinds were closed. There was much rubbish in the area. It looked like a house deserted.

"This is evidently the place," said Old King Brady. "But we must not stay here and attract attention."

They walked on toward Clay street.

"What are you going to do now?" demanded Harry. "Tackle the house?"

"I am thinking. If we could only find out who the house belongs to."

"We ought to be able to find some real estate office on Clay street or Jackson. It's early yet. They would probably be open."

"Good idea! We will see."

They turned into Clay street, and, sure enough, there was a real estate man's sign on the block between Stockton and Dupont.

From his location, the Bradys knew that the man must make a business of renting to the Chinese.

The name was Bartlett, and, entering, they found the gentleman himself.

Old King Brady presented his card.

Mr. Bartlett had heard of the old detective, and was all attention.

Old King Brady named the house number.

"Work on a certain case we have on hand makes it necessary to know who the owner or lessee of that house is," he said. "Can you help us out?"

"Perhaps," was the reply. "I have never handled that property, but I have a list of owners on both Stockton and Dupont. It is not complete, and is several years old, but it may help."

"Very true."

"Here you are," he said. "No. — Stockton belongs to Wing How, a Chinese citizen, born here; present residence, New York."

"That don't help us a bit," said Old King Brady. "Your book does not tell who represents him in San Francisco, I suppose?"

It did not, and the Bradys, thanking Mr. Bartlett, left.

"Now, then, I'm for tackling the house," said Old King Brady. "But not until after we have seen Alice safe at the hotel."

"I shall stand for nothing of the sort," replied Alice. "The idea! I located the house, and now you calmly propose to sidetrack me."

"Not against your will. Come, if you must."

"I intend to. I may be needed. The Chinks will hardly dare to attack us. Half of them in Chinatown know you by sight."

They returned to Stockton street and, ascending the steps, rang the bell again and again, but received no answer.

"This place seems to be deserted, all right," said Old King Brady.

Just then a window opened in the next house below and a white woman, with her hair in curl papers, looked out.

"Nobody lives there!" she screamed.

"Oh," said Old King Brady, "I was looking for Mrs. Bryan's. I must have got the wrong number."

"I don't know any such person."

"Has this house been unoccupied long?"

"Ever since I have lived here, and that's over a year."

"But there is no bill on the door. Don't the owners want to rent or sell it?"

"I don't know anything about that," replied the woman, and she slammed the window down.

"We let go in order to take a better hold," said Old King Brady. "Come!"

They went away, making the rounds of the block, and then tackled the house again.

This time there was no bell ringing.

Old King Brady got busy with his skeleton keys.

He opened the door without difficulty, and they shut themselves in.

Harry flashed his light about.

The hall was bare, save for a large lamp, which hung from the ceiling.

The transom over the door was covered with heavy felting.

"To keep the light from being seen on the street," said Old King Brady. "That serves our purpose. Light up."

Harry lit the lamp, and Old King Brady threw open the parlor door.

The room contained a long table, many chairs and a bamboo couch.

Hung on the wall were several Chinese scrolls, with letters on them.

Alice declared that the characters were old Chinese, and that she could make nothing out of them.

They passed into the back parlors, finding nothing.

Upstairs there were two rooms, cheaply fitted up as bedrooms, but the rest of the floor was unfurnished.

The detectives, satisfied now that there was no one in the house, passed down into the basement.

The front room was bare, but in the kitchen there were a few old cooking utensils and some cheap Chinese crackers in the closet.

The cellar was also examined, but revealed nothing.

The yard behind the house was very shallow; the rear wall of some building fronting on China alley protruded on this lot, which led the Bradys to believe that Mr. Wing How, of New York, must own both buildings.

There was no door leading into this Chinese tenement, but one could easily get in through the windows.

This ended the explorations.

The Bradys passed out on Stockton street, satisfied that they had located the house where the two blind men had been captured, but further than that their visit counted for nothing.

"And now we ring off for the evening," said Old King Brady. "Harry, I have decided that you had better sleep

with me to-night. We will see Alice to the Lick House, and then take possession of Barney's room."

As they walked down Sacramento street Old King Brady, chancing to look back, saw a Chinaman right behind, who seemed to be eying them with some attention.

He did not think much of it at the time, for the street was still swarming with Chinamen, but when they turned into Montgomery street and he looked back again and saw the same Chink he began to wonder if he was not being trailed.

He was sure of it by the time they reached the Lick House, and he called the attention of Harry and Alice to the man, so that they might know him in case they saw him again.

Gathering together such things as he thought he and Harry might need, Old King Brady started to return to Mrs. Meagles's house.

When they got out on Montgomery street the trailing Chinaman had vanished.

"It may amount to nothing," remarked Harry.

"I don't know about that," replied Old King Brady. "I am satisfied that he was shadowing us. However, it can't be helped."

"Arrived at Mrs. Meagles's, the door was opened by the landlady herself.

Old King Brady introduced Harry, and they sat down in the parlor for a few moments' talk.

"Tell me, Mrs. Meagles," said the old detective, "what truth is there in the story I heard to-night that Mr. Barney was in the habit of going out nights in Chinese disguise?"

"What!" screamed Mrs. Meagles. "Not a word of truth in it! Who told you such a thing?"

"Oh, we heard it from a person we have confidence in."

"Well, it's a lie!"

"But did he go out nights much?"

"Well, yes; quite often. But not so much of late as he used to."

"How often did he used to go out?"

"Well, it was nearly every night the first two years he lived with me."

"Was he in the habit of coming in late?"

"About midnight."

"And where did he go?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I never asked him. I have all I can do to attend to my own business. I never interfere with my lodgers. The door is always on the latch."

"Then, as a matter of fact, you don't know actually what time Mr. Barney was in the habit of coming in?"

"No."

"We are trying to get at the bottom of this mystery, Mrs. Meagles, and we have to do it the best way we can. My partner will stay with me to-night and perhaps for a few nights more. I will pay you extra for him."

"And indeed you don't have to, Mr. Brady. So long as I get the rent for my room, it is nothing to me how many sleep in the bed."

The Bradys now went upstairs and shut themselves in Mr. Barney's room.

There was no bolt to the door and no key in the lock, which struck them as singular.

For an hour and over they continued to examine Mr. Barney's effects.

They might well have belonged to a Chinaman.

There were dozens of photographs of Chinese scenes and of Chinamen.

In a closet they found as many as fifty Chinese books.

At last, in a box of photographs, they came across something which interested them.

It was a photograph of Barney himself in Chinese dress.

Comparison with the photograph of the missing man, given them by Commissioner Narraway, left them no reason to doubt who the original was.

The clothes shown in the picture were not such as are worn by ordinary Chinamen.

They were most elaborately embroidered, and looked more like the costumes seen in the Chinese theatres.

In his right hand the Chinaman held a blazing torch.

"Singular," said Old King Brady. "But it corresponds fully with what Dr. Gow told you."

"I should say so," replied Harry. "Evidently there is something in this fire fiend story. But it is getting late. Suppose we get to bed?"

"Hark!" breathed Old King Brady. "There is somebody at the door."

"Think so?" whispered Harry. "I heard nothing."

"I am sure of it."

"We can soon settle it. Keep on talking loud."

Old King Brady began to talk about the photograph.

Harry slipped off his shoes, tiptoed to the door, taking care to keep out of the range of the keyhole, and suddenly threw the door open.

And the old detective was right.

There on his knees, with his ear to the keyhole, no doubt, was Master Ping Pow.

CHAPTER V.

PING POW.

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry. "And what are you doing down there?"

Ping Pow scrambled up, muttered something in Chinese, and hurried off upstairs.

"Shall I go after him?" demanded Harry.

"No. What's the use?" was the reply. "It is as I told you. That's enough for us to know."

"I know something else, governor. He is the fellow who trailed us to-night."

"So I see. I thought I had seen that Chink somewhere. Now I understand."

"This is very important."

"If we understood his motive—yes. Probably he knows me by sight."

"There is hardly a doubt about it. Your clothes are such a giveaway."

"Never mind my clothes, Harry. They have served me too many good turns during my long career as a detective for me to make any change now. Shut the door and come to bed."

Harry not only shut the door, but locked it with one of his skeleton keys.

"I think one of us ought to watch," he said. "That fellow means mischief."

"We will turn in. I will watch in bed."

And Harry knew that, having once made up his mind to do this, there was absolutely no danger of Old King Brady falling asleep, which is more than can be said for most men.

So they went to bed and the gas was turned off.

It was now nearly midnight, and not until two o'clock was there anything doing.

Then Old King Brady heard soft footsteps in the hall.

Some one was walking with bare feet.

"Ping Pow," thought the old detective.

He felt of the revolver under his pillow to make sure that it was in place.

The first thing the Chinaman did was to very gently try the door.

Finding it locked, he next inserted a key and, opening it, stood in the breach.

There was just light enough in from the street to enable Old King Brady to see him.

And now, to his surprise, he perceived that it was an entirely different looking person from Ping Pow—a much older man.

He softly closed the door behind him and tiptoed to the table, and there began pulling things about.

On the table stood a pitcher of drinking water, which Mrs. Meagles had given Old King Brady.

The Chinaman raised the pitcher and drank a little.

Then he came towards the bed.

If he had put his hand under his blouse, Old King Brady would have acted on the instant, but both were exposed.

He was simply making sure, as he thought, that the detectives were asleep.

Seeming to come to that conclusion, he returned to the table and, producing a small phial from under his blouse, he uncorked it and dropped a portion of its contents into the water pitcher.

This done, he tiptoed to the door, passed out and locked it behind him.

Old King Brady immediately aroused Harry.

"Get up and dress yourself, just as quickly as you can," he said.

"What now?" demanded Harry. "Has Ping Pow been here?"

"No, but another Chink has. He put some poison stuff in the water pitcher and slipped out."

"Great Scott! This is serious. They mean to put us out of business, then!"

"Evidently such is the intention. Dress yourself, slip out of the house. The fellow went upstairs to Ping Pow's room. He will be leaving before daylight. You must trail him. It is a great chance, and we must make the most of it."

Harry dressed as rapidly as possible.

He was none too soon, either, for he had not been gone out of the house more than ten minutes when Old King Brady heard footsteps coming downstairs.

They paused for a moment at his door, and then went on down to the front hall.

Jumping out of bed, opening the door and listening, Old King Brady heard the front hall door softly close.

He waited about ten minutes, and then, getting out of bed again, he lighted the gas, went to the closet, where he had seen an empty bottle, and into it poured the contents of the water pitcher.

Then he put out the gas, returned to bed and went to sleep at once.

He was awakened about half an hour later by a light knocking on the door.

He got up, took his revolver from under the pillow and softly opened the door.

It was only Harry, back again.

Not until he had closed the door upon his partner did Old King Brady speak.

"Well," he then demanded, "what luck?"

"I trailed him into China alley, governor. He entered a house there."

"Did he get sight of you?"

"I am sorry to say he did. There were very few people on the street. It was impossible to avoid it."

"All right. It can't be helped. Now we will go for Mr. Ping Pow."

"Would you?"

"Decidedly. It can do no possible harm."

Old King Brady got up and dressed, and, with Harry, started upstairs.

They did not know the Chinaman's room, of course; but it was safe to assume that it was one of the hall bedrooms.

Harry listened at the keyhole of the front hall room, and then tried the back one.

"It is here," he whispered, rising to his feet.

"Sure?" questioned Old King Brady.

"I can smell opium."

"Oh, that settles it. I only hope the door is unlocked."

It not only proved to be so, but inside the room was Master Ping Pow, in bed and sound asleep.

The Bradys closed the door and stood over him.

"Flash your light on him, Harry," said the old detective.

And as Harry did so he yanked the bedclothes off the sleeping Chink.

With nothing on but an old undershirt, the Chinaman leaped out of bed, with a yell of terror.

Old King Brady thrust the revolver in his face.

"You scoundrel!" he hissed. "So you would poison me, would you? Well, you shall drink your own medicine. Come with me!"

He fell on his knees.

"No, no, no! No killee me!" he howled.

"Stop that noise or I shoot right now!" said Old King Brady, sternly. "Why did you and that other fellow want to kill me? Speak if you wish to live!"

"Me no tly killee you. Me good friend Mister Barney. Me no can makee you lunderstand."

"Dress yourself!" said Old King Brady, showing his shield. "You trailed us through the streets to-night; you listened at our door; you see now that I am a de-

detective. My friend here is another. You are under arrest and will have to come with me."

He expected another howl.

What happened was a distinct surprise.

Ping Pow burst out crying, and then into a hysterical laugh.

"Brace up, Pow," said Old King Brady. "What are you trying to say?"

"You 'lest me! Oh, I'm so glad. You sendee me San Quintin for a huddled year. Dlen I be safe."

Old King Brady was quick to catch the keynote of all this.

The man was sincere.

He feared some fate worse than arrest and imprisonment.

To find out the cause of his fear was up to the old detective now.

"Ping Pow, you need an American friend," he said, in a different tone. "That's what you need. And you can have one in me if you wish it. Do you know who I am?"

"Sure—yes! You Ole Kling Blady."

"That's right. You knew Mr. Barney?"

"Yes, yes. He muchee good flend to me."

Ping Pow began to cry again.

He was little more than a boy, and, as far as Old King Brady was able to read the Chinese face, his was a good one.

"Dress yourself and come with me," he said. "Perhaps you will not be arrested, after all; but I'll see you safe from your enemies, whoever they may be."

Ping Pow looked at his Chinese clothes, which lay over a chair.

"So they see me with you in the street, I dunno what comee," he said. "You 'lest me and lockee me upee dlen dlat allee light. I muchee 'flaid."

"Dress him in a suit of Barney's clothes, if you want to, take him to Alice," suggested Harry. "They would about fit."

"Good idea! You understand what he says, Ping Pow?"

"Yes. Dlat do. We go over to Market stleet, no through Chinatown."

"All right."

"Where you takee me?"

"You know the Lick House, where you followed us to-night?"

"Yes."

"Well, there. When we get there a person will talk to you in Chinese. Will you tell all about this business then?"

"Me no talkee to no Chinaman," said Ping Pow, his fears returning.

"This is not a Chinaman. It is an American lady to whom I am taking you. She can talk Chinese. See, I promise that you shall be just as safe as if you were arrested and locked up."

"Well, me go."

"Harry, get the clothes," said Old King Brady.

He made no attempt to question the fellow further.

A Chinese ally was what was most needed in this case.

It looked as if they might be able to make one of Ping Pow.

"Me telle dlat lady eblyting," he said, as they were about to start. "P'laps you can sabe poor Mlister Barney."

"Ho is alive?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Yair; me t'ink so; me no know for sure."

Old King Brady did not press him further, and they quietly left the house.

"I suppose Mrs. Meagles won't thank me for running away with her servant," chuckled the old detective; "but it can't be helped."

It was half-past three when they reached the Lick House.

As the Bradys were well known there and were in the habit of bringing queer people in and out the hotel at all sorts of queer times, no attention was paid to them.

Alice was at once aroused, and she soon came into the sitting room of the suite the old detective had engaged.

"Well, and who have we here?" she demanded.

"This is Ping Pow," replied Old King Brady. "He wants to talk with you; but, first, you and I must consult."

He drew Alice into the next room, and told her what had occurred.

"I can soon tell whether he is to be trusted or not," said Alice.

"Leave the poisoning business to the last," said the old detective. "Pump him dry now. A whole lot depends upon what you learn from him."

Alice went right at it.

At last she said to Harry, in Spanish:

"Take Mr. Brady outside and tell him that we must talk this business over alone. It is up to him to dispose of Ping Pow."

Harry obeyed.

"The only thing I can think of is to put him to bed in your room," said Old King Brady.

"Suppose he escapes?"

"Then, let him go. These Chinese crooks know that the Bradys are on their trail. That is all he can tell."

The decision was communicated to Ping Pow, who was perfectly willing to be thus disposed of.

"Only let me stay with you," he said to Alice, in Chinese. "I can never go back to Chinatown again."

"Ask him if he would be afraid to go to New York," said Old King Brady.

Alice put the question, and replied:

"He says he would like to go to Boston; that he has friends there, and he would be safe."

"Tell him he shall go to Boston at my expense if he will help us out in this case," said Old King Brady.

Alice translated, and it was only necessary to see the fellow's face to understand that he was really pleased.

Ping Pow then went into Harry's room, and the detectives sat down to listen to what Alice had to tell.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW CHARACTER ENTERS THE CASE.

"Well, I think I may truthfully claim to have pumped that fellow dry," began Alice, "and in a general way his

story gibes with all the rest of this business. He says that Barney has been captured by the Ning-po people. He says that Barney was very enthusiastic over this peculiar sect, and used to attend their meetings regularly, until, all at once, about a year ago, he seemed to get frightened and pulled out, only going once in a while.

"It seems that during the time of his enthusiasm he tried to persuade Ping Pow to join, and succeeded far enough to have Pow initiated into what might be termed the first degree.

"Soon afterward he pulled out and told Ping Pow to do the same, which he tried to do; but the Ning-po people were after him all the time, and threatened him with death unless he went on with the initiation. Being afraid to do that, he resorted to every sort of excuse. Then came Barney's disappearance. The Ning-po people got after Pow harder than ever. They told him that Barney was alive, but that he would be sacrificed to the fire god unless Pow reported for his next degree. Since then he has been living in terror, for these fire fiends threatened his life if he did not report. To-night they came to him in the street and told him that the man who had engaged Barney's room was Old King Brady. We were pointed out and he was told that he must follow us, which he did, and reported to this Chinaman, whose name he claims not to know, that we were staying at the Lick House.

"Then he went home. When you and Harry came in he listened at the door to try to catch on to your talk and plans; this was by order of the supposed-to-be-unknown fire fiend, who was then in his room. They were to sleep together, and he claims that he fell asleep with the man beside him in the bed, and that he knew nothing more until you aroused him. That is all I could make out of Ping Pow, except that he expects to be captured and sacrificed to the fire god at any time."

"A remarkable story, and I have no doubt it is a straight one," said Old King Brady. "But there are several points to be covered yet. Does he know where these fire fiends meet?"

"Yes, he does."

"Will he take us there?"

"I don't think so. Perhaps if you could disguise him he might consent."

"Does he know who they are?"

"Well, he claims that he doesn't; but you know what a Chinaman is as well as I do, Mr. Brady. When it comes to giving away names, you can never depend upon them. I can tackle him again on that in the morning."

"When does he say the Ning-po are going to sacrifice Barney to their fire god?"

"He doesn't know the date, but he thinks it will be soon. He describes them as a terrible bunch."

"All right. I suppose that is as far as we can go now, so you better go back to bed, Alice. Harry and I will lie down on my bed, and we will get up at eight and see what this day has in store for us. We certainly have accomplished wonders for one night."

"Hold on!" said Harry. "There is one point which has not been covered."

"And what is that?" asked Alice.

"The location of these people. Did he say where it was?"

"In a building in China alley, near Sacramento street. He didn't seem to know the number."

"That is just where I saw that Chink go in," said Harry. "I should say that there is no doubt about Ping Pow having given it straight."

The session broke up then.

Before retiring Harry looked into his room and found Ping Pow asleep on the bed, fully dressed, except for his shoes, with a comfortable pulled over him.

"That is all right," said Old King Brady. "If the fellow intended to bolt he would have done so before this."

And so it proved.

Harry could not sleep, and he was up by half-past six. Going into his own room, he found Ping Pow walking about, uneasily.

"What you do with me?" he demanded.

"That is for Mr. Brady to decide, Pow," replied Harry. "But you needn't worry. He will take good care of you. The Ning-po won't get you, that's a sure thing."

"Dlat belly fine lady."

"Miss Montgomery? Oh, yes. I think so."

"You her feller?"

"Sure."

"Gee! She belly fine lady. She speakee Chinese good. Me wish me Slectret Slervice man. Mr. Barney he say he makee me one if me learn to talkee Elinglish better."

"You are young yet. You may. Perhaps Mr. Brady could do that if you really would work against your own people."

Ping Pow screwed up his face and shrugged his shoulders.

Evidently there lay the stumbling block.

Harry talked further with him, but it was not until breakfast time that they got down to business.

Old King Brady made Ping Pow eat with them, and when the meal was nearly over he told Alice to tell him that he expected him to take them to the Ning-po lodgerooms.

"He objects," reported Alice, after putting the question.

"Tell him to wait and see how I will disguise him. Ask him if there is any danger if we go in the daytime?"

"He says he does not know," reported Alice. "He was there only once at night, and he is sure that he could not take you there, as he was blindfolded when he went into the house, and when he came out.

"Well, he shall take us as far as he went before they blindfolded him, that's one sure thing," replied the old detective; "but we shall have to coax him along, I suppose."

After breakfast all hands went to a costumer's on Kearney street, who was much patronized by the Bradys at that time.

Here Old King Brady got busy with Ping Pow.

Now, when it comes to disguising, no man living can equal the old detective.

A Chinaman with a pigtail is a most difficult subject to handle, but the old detective got there.

When he had finished and Ping Pow looked in the glass he was simply amazed.

A black wig covered his head, pigtail and all, the latter being laid all over the scalp instead of being twisted around it in the usual style.

A false black mustache and some painting under the eyes finished the business.

"Me Japanese," declared Ping Pow, and Old King Brady felt complimented, for that is what he had tried for.

To attempt to make a white man out of Ping Pow would have been to attempt the impossible, but he certainly did look exactly like a young Japanese.

"Are you afraid now?" demanded Alice in Chinese.

"He says he is not," she reported. "He will go with you anywhere now."

"I thought I would get there," replied the old detective. "Now, then, if you must go along, fix up in your Chinese rigging, and let Harry do the same."

And when this had been done Ping Pow could scarcely contain himself.

Again and again he assured Alice that any one would take her for a Chinaman, but this was no news, for Alice knew it before.

They now started for the notorious China alley, which at that time sheltered pretty much all of the criminal class among the Chinese.

Ping Pow readily pointed out the house to which he had been taken on the night of his initiation into the first degree of the Ning-po.

It was one of those hives of humanity for which the alley was so famous.

Ping Pow assured Old King Brady that he had gone through the main hall, and had entered a room on the left, where he was received by several Chinamen and Ben B. Barney.

Here he was blindfolded, taken down a short flight of stairs and then along on the level, and up other stairs; that when the handkerchief was removed he found himself in a room where there was a long table and many Chinamen sitting about in chairs. Here the initiation was performed.

"And is this where you saw your man go in, Harry?" demanded the old detective, after Alice had translated for Ping Pow.

"It certainly is," replied Harry.

"You and Alice go into that room, and see if we are not immediately in the rear of the Stockton street house. Pow and I will keep on the move."

So Alice and Harry pushed on into the house, and knocked on the last door on the left.

The knock was answered by a coarse-looking, old Chinese woman, with whom Alice talked. There was nobody else in the place.

Harry got a look out of the back window, and saw that it was as Old King Brady had suspected.

The tenement was an unusually deep one.

Behind it was the back yard of the deserted house on Stockton street.

"What did you say?" demanded Harry, when they came out on Sacramento street.

"Oh, I asked for a mythical Chink, whom, of course,

she did not know," replied Alice. "She seemed suspicious, too. I told her that I had just come down from Seattle."

"That was the Stockton street yard which we saw through the window."

"It seemed so to me."

"It was. And now to report. I wonder what the governor will do next?"

They met Old King Brady and Ping Pow on the corner of Stockton street.

"You found it as I said?" was his first remark.

"Yes," replied Harry.

"I have determined the same thing by measuring."

"And what comes next?"

"Alice and Ping Pow pull out. You and I tackle the Stockton street house again."

And this decision was so peremptorily given that Alice saw it would be no use to object.

Once they were alone, the Bradys re-entered the Stockton street house.

They did it boldly, and, as there was no Chinaman in sight, they felt that they had not betrayed themselves.

There was a bolt on the inside of the front door, and this Old King Brady shot.

"This door is probably left on the latch for a purpose," he declared. "We will head off interruption, if we can."

"Of course, you suspect an underground passage?" questioned Harry.

"It is hardly a matter of suspicion," was the reply. "I should call it a certainty. But whether we can find it is another thing. First of all, we want to make sure that we are alone here."

They passed into the parlor or meeting room.

It was vacant, but now they could hear some one moving about upstairs.

Old King Brady put his finger to his lips, and Harry showed that he had heard by a nod.

There was a large closet in the room, which they had seen the night before, and into this the detective slipped and partially closed the door.

"We are up against it," breathed Old King Brady. "I wish I had not shot that bolt."

"I'll slip out and draw it back, if you say so?"

"Do; make as little noise as possible. I should imagine that we had not been overheard as yet."

Harry got back just in time, for then footsteps were heard upon the stairs.

Old King Brady pulled the closet door shut, all but the merest crack.

A moment later and a man entered the parlor.

He struck a match and lighted a cigarette.

Old King Brady, through the crack, got a good view of him.

It was no Chinaman.

To his surprise, he recognized Mr. Bartlett, the Clay street real estate man, with whom they had talked the night before.

He walked through into the back parlor and then they heard him descending the basement stairs.

"Did you see?" whispered the old detective.

"Yes—it was Bartlett."

"Right! What can it mean? Can he belong to the Ning-po?"

"It would seem unlikely enough; but, on the other hand, what can he be doing in this house?"

"It is a queer turn of affairs, certainly. It only goes to show how careful one ought to be in the detective business. That we made a bad break when we called on that man, there can be little doubt."

"Hark! He is coming upstairs again."

At the same instant the front door opened on the latch and two Chinamen came into the parlor.

They sat down and began jabbering in Chinese.

An instant later and Mr. Barlett entered the room.

Old King Brady had observed that the man was slightly deaf when he talked with him the night before.

It was even more apparent now in the conversation which followed, and it accounted for his not having heard the detectives when they came in.

"Oh, you are here, are you?" he exclaimed. "I thought you were never coming; but before we get down to business I have something to tell you."

"What dlat?" demanded one of the Chinks.

"Old King Brady, the detective, is a man you have probably heard of?"

"Yair. Me sabee Ole Kling Blady."

"Well, then, Wing, he was in my office last night, inquiring about this house."

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT ALICE HEARD IN THE HOP JOINT.

It certainly seemed as if the Bradys had made wonderful headway in their case.

Seeing that they had only reached San Francisco late on the previous afternoon, it was really remarkable that, where other detectives had failed entirely, they had been able to learn so much.

But now came a halt in the case, and for the time it looked as if it was going to stop altogether.

For the day passed, and neither of the detectives put in an appearance at the Lick House.

It was the same the next day, and the next.

Of course, Alice's feelings need no description.

As Old King Brady strenuously objects to having the police called in on his cases at the first show of danger or for a temporary disappearance, Alice did nothing until the second day, when she called on the chief of police and told him what had occurred.

She also called on Mr. Narraway and informed him.

Then there was a great hustling.

Alice kept Ping Pow in the background and wisely, for no good could have possibly come by dragging him into the business.

The Chinaman, who was thoroughly alarmed, was only too glad to keep out of it.

He was sure that the Bradys had been sacrificed to the fire god, and even in his disguise it was next to impossible to go on the street.

The police searched the Stockton street house and the China alley tenement.

No Bradys and no secret connecting passage or underground den could be found.

Then all Chinatown was searched, but nothing came of it.

The chief doubted the existence of the Ning-po society, or secret band, and declared that the Bradys had probably met their fate at last, which he considered had been long due them for their rashness in mixing up with the Chinese and taking the chances they did.

On the third night there was a mysterious fire in San Francisco.

A big warehouse on the India Basin, filled with valuable goods, was burned to the ground.

There was heavy insurance carried on both building and contents.

The Westover Export Company owned the latter.

The papers made a lot of talk about it.

The fire was declared to be surely incendiary.

Chinamen had been seen lurking about the place on several occasions.

Alice consulted Ping Pow, and he openly declared that he believed the Ning-po fire fiends had burned the building, but this was only guesswork, of course.

The fourth day came and passed and still no trace of the Bradys.

Even Alice was now ready to give them up, but the brave girl never stopped working.

Night after night she had prowled about Chinatown in her disguise, once with Ping Pow, but on the other occasions alone.

Nothing came of all her efforts.

On this fourth night she was ready to try it again, when Ping Pow, who had grown very friendly—too much so, Alice thought—announced that he was going with her.

"Don't if you are afraid," said Alice, half sneeringly—their conversation was always in Chinese—"as for me, I shall never give it up until I learn the fate of my friends."

"You are brave woman," replied Ping Pow. "I have played the part of the coward. I am going to stop it. To-night we go together, that is sure."

"We go to that house on Stockton street and watch," said Alice. "I ought to have done it before."

But Ping Pow kicked at this.

"No use," he said. "Too risky. They won't go there again, now that the police have been there. If they do they will kill us if they catch us, that sure."

"Then where shall we go?" demanded Alice. "You ought to know Chinatown better than I do. Suggest something, Pow."

"We will go to the house of the Seven Delights," replied Ping Pow. "It was there that Mr. Barney used to go, and there he met these people. We may overhear something, who knows?"

"An opium joint?"

"Yes."

"Did Barney hit the hop, then?"

"He did a little at that time, so he told me. He had given it up before I got to know him, though."

"And you—you smoke?"

"Oh, a little, once in a while. Let us go?"

It seemed to offer a possibility of picking up some clue, so Alice yielded.

She still believed in the underground den, but, as the police had made a most thorough search in the cellar of the Stockton street house, in which Alice herself had assisted, applying Old King Brady's methods, she could not see what use it was to try that again.

And so Alice started out with Ping Pow to visit the house of the Seven Delights.

They passed along Dupont street until they had almost reached Jackson, when the Chinaman slipped in through a doorway and they went up a steep flight of stairs, at the top of which a red light burned.

Here there was a small restaurant not patronized by whites.

"We go in here first," said Ping Pow. "If we go directly upstairs to the hop room they may suspect."

As they had proposed to dine together in Chinatown, Alice made no objection.

The place was just one long, narrow room, crowded with tables.

It was packed with Chinamen of the lower order.

Waiters were rushing about, and the scene was one of noise and confusion.

As they pushed their way between the tables Ping Pow clutched Alice's arm with a grip which almost made her exclaim.

They got a table near the end of the room, and then Alice asked, in a whisper, what the matter was.

"We have come right," whispered Ping Pow. "I saw that man."

"What man?"

"The man who came to my room that night, who tried to poison Old King Brady," whispered Ping Pow, in a voice so low that even Alice, on the opposite side of the table, could scarcely catch the words.

"You are sure?"

"Yes, yes; I make no mistake."

"Where is he?"

"Four tables up on the other side."

Alice located him.

"He has a scar on his cheek?" she asked.

"Yes; that is the man. If he sees me I am lost; but I will not desert you."

"Don't be such a coward. He won't recognize you. This is just what we want. We must shadow him. If we were only near enough to hear what they are saying."

The man was one of a party of three.

They had evidently just come in, for they had not yet been served.

The coming of a waiter prevented further talk for the moment.

Alice ordered a well-known Chinese dish for both, and asked the waiter to hurry it along, which was done.

"Do you know any of the others?" she asked Ping Pow, who declared that he did not.

Several times during the progress of the meal the Chinaman appeared to look their way, but if he penetrated Ping Pow's disguise he showed it by no sign.

At last one of his companions left him.

The other lingered for a few moments, and then went out alone.

Alice began to wonder if Ping Pow had not been recognized—if the Chinaman, instead of allowing himself to be shadowed, was not intending to shadow them.

But at last he got up and started for the door.

"Now, Pow," said Alice, and they trailed after him.

It was the custom in this place to pay the waiter, so there was no delay.

They got out into the hall in time to see the Chinaman descending the stairs, so this put an end to the project of visiting the house of the Seven Delights, on the floor above.

Gaining Dupont street, they followed the Chinaman on for a block, when he crossed and descended into a basement, before which a yellow light burned.

"Another hop joint?" asked Alice.

"Yes," replied Ping Pow. "What is worse, I am known there."

"Come, none of that! You know you were going to stop playing the coward."

"Oh, I am not going to desert you."

"Don't mind me. I am good to go it alone."

"But I would not let you. You are too much a charming woman, Miss Alice."

Alice stopped short just as they were about to descend the steps.

"Now, none of that, Ping Pow," she said. "You keep your place, if you don't want me to make you trouble."

Ping Pow grinned.

"Oh, I didn't mean anything."

"Then see that you don't mean anything," retorted Alice, "for I won't stand for it. Now we go down."

The den into which they descended was just a low-down opium joint of the sort which was common enough in Chinatown at that time.

Alice bought the hop for both, and they were left to select their own bunk, of which there were many ranged along both sides of a long room.

Everything was in the rudest style, and, as there were no curtains to these bunks, there was not the least difficulty in locating their man.

He was lying in a bunk with another Chinaman, who was preparing to cook the pill.

Alice and Ping Pow chose the bunk adjoining.

The attendant came along with the layout and lighted the little lamp.

"You cook," said Alice, in Chinese, and she stretched herself on the inside against the wall.

Ping Pow was evidently in for a smoke.

Alice only went through the motions of inhaling, which was all the better for her companion, who promptly got away with all the pills.

Meanwhile, in the adjoining bunk, scarcely a word had been spoken.

Ping Pow lay over and appeared to doze.

Time passed, half an hour at least.

The stench of the place was so nauseating that poor Alice, used as she was to such scenes, felt that she could scarcely endure it.

Finally Ping Pow braced up and called for more hop and proceeded to cook a second pill.

"Mind what you do," whispered Alice, warningly.

"Oh, this won't hurt me," replied Ping Pow; "don't you be afraid."

It was soon after he had finished his smoke and had dozed off again that the two men in the other bunk began to talk in low tones.

A light partition separated the two bunks.

Alice got her ear against it and found that she could hear better.

They were talking of money.

It seemed to be that somebody owed them something, which had not been paid.

"Have you seen anything of Ping Pow?"

"No; he has not been seen since," was the reply.

"If we could only get him and roast him to-night with the detectives!"

Alice's heart beat wildly.

Here was something definite at last!

The Bradys were still alive, then. They were to be roasted by the fire fiends!

It was startling enough.

Alice strained her ear for the next.

"This is the fire god's night, and the sacrifice will be a great one," was said, after a little.

"Does the spy die to-night?" asked the other.

"Yes," was the reply; "but he will be fed directly to the fire god at midnight, after the job is done."

"How many are there in that house?"

"A hundred at last."

"None too many. May they all perish!"

"Oh, it will not be so. It never has been so. Some will surely escape."

"If they would only give some clue to the location of the house!" thought poor Alice in agony.

It was all true, then.

These wretches really intended to fire one of the big Chinese tenements as a sacrifice to their god.

There are fanatics among the people of every nation.

Bad as this secret band evidently was, it cannot be said that they were any worse than men in all large cities, who will and do fire crowded tenements for gain.

Alice continued to listen, but no more was said until at length she heard one of the Chinamen in the next bunk remark that it was time to be on the move:

She then awoke Ping Pow, whispering:

"We must get out of this at once," and prepared to move herself.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRADYS COME UP WITH BEN B. BARNEY.

The Bradys in the closet of the Stockton street house scarcely dared to breathe.

The answer to Agent Bartlett's statement showed little surprise.

"Dat's allee light. He no comee 'gain mebbe. If he do, dlen you lettee me know."

"I thought I would tell you, Wing. The Bradys are said to be the shrewdest detectives ever. They work for

the United States Secret Service. By jove! it gave me cold chills when I knew who they were."

"Dley tellee you?"

"Yes. The old man gave me his card."

"Dlen sure dley no 'spect you. What him say him want?"

"They asked me who owned this house."

"Oh, sure! Me lunderstand. See, lookee, boss, dley on other job—see?"

"Great Scott! I hope so, then. Well, what's the word?"

"Me sellee allee de hop. Me givee you money now."

Again Old King Brady ventured to peep out through the crack.

He saw Wing hand the thrifty agent a big roll of bills. Evidently Mr. Bartlett was hand in glove with his Chinese neighbors, and backing them up with cash in their opium-smuggling schemes.

The talk which followed proved it.

They discussed a plan to bring in a large amount of opium by way of Canada.

The Bradys heard Bartlett tell Wing to put him down for \$2,000.

The detectives now began to hope that the pair would go away and give them a chance to leave the house.

But they had no such luck.

While the discussion was still going on a click was heard behind them, followed by a sharp exclamation.

Instantly Harry received a stunning blow on the back of the head, which doubled him up.

A secret door had opened, and three Chinamen, crowding into the closet, flung themselves upon the old detective.

Old King Brady, pressed violently against the door, it flew open and he fell headlong.

Bartlett gave an exclamation of surprise and Wing jumped in to help his friends.

The struggle which followed was a brief one, and ended disastrously for the old detective.

It could scarcely have been otherwise, seeing that it was four against one, for Harry was past rendering any help.

Bartlett took to his heels as soon as he saw how the land lay.

It was a complete knockout, and Old King Brady, stripped of his belongings and tied hand and foot, lay a prisoner on the floor.

Harry, who had now recovered consciousness, was in the same situation.

The Chinks stood about, talking rapidly in their own language.

There seemed to be a disagreement between them as to what should be done with the prisoners.

Old King Brady tried to get into conversation with them, but they paid absolutely no attention to his remarks.

At last the detectives were blindfolded and carried into the closet head and feet.

Old King Brady went first.

They carried him down a narrow stairway, and then along a passage, which he knew must lead under the yard to the Chinese tenement in the rear.

Here he was deposited upon a rough board floor, and presently Harry was brought in and laid beside him.

Then the handkerchiefs were removed, and the detectives were left alone in this underground room, which was bare of furniture and entirely dark.

It was some minutes before either spoke, and then Old King Brady asked Harry how he felt.

"Well, my head aches," was the reply. "I certainly got a terrible crack, but I am more hurt in my feelings than anything else. To think that I should have been caught napping and have allowed myself to be knocked out the way I did!"

"You have nothing to blame yourself for. It came upon us very suddenly, Harry. They had me down before I knew where I was at."

"What did Bartlett do? I was entirely unconscious for the moment."

"Do! Why, he did nothing at all; never even spoke a word. His face was as white as a sheet when he pulled out, which he did just as soon as he got a chance."

"It's a bad business, governor. It is a good while since we made a break like this."

And the Bradys were both perfectly willing to admit that it was a bad business, as the hours passed and no one came to their relief.

The day passed in misery.

Of course, the prisoners were unable to follow the lapse of time.

It seemed as if the night must have passed, too, when at last the door was opened and a Chinaman, wearing clothes elaborately embroidered with gilt thread, entered the room.

His face was concealed behind a hideous mask, representing a man's head, with great, staring eyes and open mouth.

He carried a lantern, which he placed on the floor, and then, running his hands in the sleeves of his blouse, he began speaking in English, as perfect as that of the detectives themselves.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "and how do you find it? Rather uncomfortable—yes?"

"Decidedly," replied Old King Brady. "Have you come to give us relief?"

"No relief is coming your way, Mr. Brady. Let me tell you something—the Chinese of San Francisco are thoroughly tired of your interference in their affairs. It has been decided that you must die."

"You speak good English, my friend. More than that, you speak like an intelligent man. Can't we come to some understanding? I——"

"Stop! No attempt to bribe me can possibly succeed. You have undertaken to interfere in a matter which involves the religious belief of myself and associates. No matter where I learned to speak my good English; no matter about anything, except what I say. Do you promise?"

"Certainly I will make no trouble if you can give us even temporary relief."

"And you?" added the Chinaman, turning to Harry.

"The same here," replied Harry.

"Should you change your mind and start in to make

trouble," said the mask, "you will do well to remember this!"

He then flourished a revolver over the detectives and, kneeling down, proceeded to free their legs and help them to their feet.

It was not easy to see the necessity of all this talk, for the Bradys, with their hands tied tightly behind them, were perfectly helpless.

The mask led them out into the passage.

He followed it for a few feet and then turned aside into another.

At the end of this they came upon a Chinaman seated on a stool before an iron door.

The mask said something in Chinese, and he drew a revolver, and, holding it in his left hand, produced a key with his right and proceeded to unlock the door.

"Enter," said the mask, and the Bradys passed into a room of some size, fitted up in Chinese style.

Among other things, it contained three small beds.

Upon one lay a man under a blanket, apparently asleep.

The Bradys took him for a Chinaman, as his back was to them and he had black hair.

"You stay here," said the mask. "I shall now set you free. Remember this door is constantly guarded, and whichever one of you attempts to pass it will be instantly shot dead."

With this warning, he freed the detectives and withdrew.

"Well," said Harry, as the iron door clanged behind the mask, "this is an improvement, at all events."

As he spoke, the man on the bed turned over, and they saw that he was an American.

He reached out an arm, groaned, and then, throwing off the blanket, sat up on the bed.

Instantly the Bradys recognized Ben B. Barney by the picture Mr. Narraway had shown them.

It was hard to realize that the man was blind.

Old King Brady put his finger to his lips.

He wanted the blind man to begin, which he immediately did.

"Is there any one in this room?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"Yes," replied Old King Brady.

"You are no Chinaman?"

"No."

"Friend, I am blind. Tell me who you are?"

"Mr. Barney, I am Old King Brady, the detective. With me here is Young King Brady, my partner, of whom you have, of course, heard."

The Chinaman gave an exclamation of joy.

"And you are here to rescue me?" he cried. "It is so, of course. Have you captured these fire fiends? Is this the end of one of your successful raids?"

"I regret to say that it is just the other way," replied Old King Brady. "Being under Government orders to hunt you up, we have fallen into trouble and are prisoners ourselves."

Old King Brady then told him all.

"It is a bad business," said Barney. "So my folly has brought this misfortune upon you. Do you happen to know if the young blind man who was with me that night has also disappeared?"

"You refer to Arthur Marrin?"

"Yes."

"He escaped and is now well and attending to his business."

"Thank heaven for that! I was afraid they had killed him."

"No. He was found unconscious—drugged, of course—in a lot near Alaska street, away down by the India Basin. He had not the least recollection as to what had happened to him, and could afford the detectives no clue to your fate. But now, Mr. Barney, it is up to you to give some explanation of your own doings. We are anxious to know how you came to fall into this trap."

"It was my blunder," replied Barney. "I turned in at the wrong street, and, while traveling, unconsciously entered a house to which I had been in the habit of going. The fact is that, having lived in China, I mixed up with the Chinese here in San Francisco more than I ought to have done. I wanted to investigate the different religious sects among them, and——"

"And so you were foolish enough to join the Ning-po, or order of fire fiends," broke in Old King Brady.

"I see you know. Yes, it is true. I became interested in these fire worshipers and foolishly joined them and took the initiation, but when I learned that they went to the length of firing houses as a sacrifice to their idol it was a shade too much and I pulled out. Please excuse me from talking about it. Folly is too light a term for the course I have pursued, and now my punishment comes. But what troubles me is to think that you two should be involved in it. Mr. Brady I very greatly fear that you will never escape from here."

"Tell me the worst at once," said Old King Brady. "What is their purpose?"

"Do you happen to know when it will be full moon?"

"I am sure I haven't the most remote idea, Mr. Barney. Why?"

"Because, on the night of the full moon the Ning-po will surely sacrifice me to the fire god, and I fear that you will share my fate."

"Certainly it is an unpleasant prospect, but don't let us dwell on it. We, as detectives, have to take what comes. Have you been confined in this room ever since your disappearance?"

"Yes. I have never left it."

"Is the secret meeting place of the fire fiends here—where they keep their idol, their temple, or whatever you call it?"

"No, no; it is another place."

"And where?"

But the noise of the opening door put an end to the conversation then, and it was not until later that it was renewed.

CHAPTER IX.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

The opening of the door of the Bradys' underground prison proved to have to do with a matter of no less importance than dinner.

Three Chinamen entered, each carrying a large basket. These, when opened, proved to contain covered dishes, crockery, knives and forks and other necessary things in connection with the meal.

A table was spread, and the detectives and Mr. Barney then sat down to as fine a Chinese spread as could be asked for.

Two of the Chinks retired, but the third remained and acted as waiter, serving the three prisoners with as much attention as if they had been honored guests.

The meal over, this man retired, leaving on the table a bottle of excellent wine and a box of first-rate cigars. "Come!" exclaimed Harry. "They don't mean to starve us at all events."

Day succeeded day, and still the Bradys remained prisoners with Barney in that room.

The monotony was terrible.

Excepting the Chinaman who brought them their meals and who would not talk, they saw nobody.

How it was all going to end, they could only guess.

Barney was greatly depressed, and had but little to say as time went on.

The confinement was evidently telling on the man, and indeed it began to tell on Old King Brady to such an extent that Harry became greatly alarmed.

They had now lost all run of time, and as their watches had been taken from them, they could not tell night from day.

The end came while they were all asleep, when their prison was suddenly invaded by six Chinamen, among them the masked man, who had previously talked with the detectives.

"Rise up!" he cried, as he entered the room. "The time has now come for you to leave here."

Old King Brady and Barney were aroused by the entrance, but Harry slept on.

Barney spoke rapidly in Chinese, and the mask replied in the same language.

"Do we all go?" demanded Old King Brady.

"No; only you two," replied Barney. "May heaven protect you! I don't know what your fate is to be; if I did I would tell you at any cost to myself."

"Their fate is not to be yours, spy!" said the mask, in English.

"I am no spy!" cried the blind man. "You wrong me, and you know it! I have never revealed one of the Ning-po secrets, and even now, after all I have suffered, I would scorn to do so and violate my oath."

The mask turned his back on Barney, not even noticing this speech, which was delivered in the most impassioned manner.

Those with him carried two big, fur-lined blouses and Chinese hats.

"These things you two are to put on," said the mask to Old King Brady. "Wake up your friend. You two are to go with us. Let me tell you this much—it is possible, just possible, that we may decide to let you live."

Old King Brady woke Harry up, without answering him.

They put on the blouses and the hats, and were then blindfolded and led out of the place.

In a minute they found themselves ascending stairs.

Then they went along on the level, and the next they knew they were in the open air and could hear people moving past them.

"These men are bold," thought Old King Brady. "They have taken us out on to China alley, surest thing."

But he had little hope.

Chinamen invariably mind their own business.

If one of the police detectives should happen to see them there might be hope, but the Chinks probably looked out for that.

They were in the open only a minute, and then passed into another building.

Old King Brady, counting the steps, was sure that it was the second door from the house in which they had been confined, but whether they advanced north or south he could not tell, blinded as he was.

They were hurried rapidly along a passage, passed through doors, descended stairs, went along on the level, descended more stairs and then halted.

Twice they were challenged, the second time being now.

The answers given were unintelligible, of course.

A moment's delay and they were pulled forward a few steps, and then the blinders were pulled away.

The Bradys now found themselves in a sizeable room, elaborately furnished in Oriental style.

But it was in one respect the most peculiar place they had ever penetrated in any of their Chinese expeditions.

Fitted into the wall at the end of the room was a huge head made of hammered brass.

It was a colossal mask, with great, staring eyes and wide-open mouth.

The Bradys saw at a glance that it was an exact duplicate of the mask worn by the English-speaking Chinaman, who had not followed them here.

Besides this head there was an ugly, gilded idol against the wall, nearer the curtained door, which separated this inner chamber from the room into which they had first entered.

The Chinks stood about, as though waiting for some one.

After a few moments some one entered the other room and a door slammed.

There was some shuffling about, and then the mask came through the curtain.

"And now, Mr. Brady, to settle your fate," he said, in the polite tone which only a Chinaman can assume; and John Chinaman, when he really wants to be polite, cannot be excelled by the politest Frenchman who ever lived.

Old King Brady silently nodded.

"I suppose," continued the mask, "that you are wondering where you are, if that man Barney has not told you all the secrets of the Ning-po, in which case you are probably able to guess that you are in the shrine of their god, as you would call it; but we call it nothing of the sort."

"You are quite mistaken," replied Old King Brady, coldly. "Mr. Barney has told me nothing of the secrets of the Ning-po, which statement you had from his own lips."

"And was not believed. But it makes no difference. Here we are, and we come for a purpose, said purpose

being to save your lives if such is the will of my heathen god, as you call him."

"Pardon me, my friend. I have called that brass image nothing. I have no comments or criticisms to make on your religion or that of any man."

"All very fine. I don't want to kill you two, so I have decided to give you one chance; to put your fate up to the brass image, so to speak."

Old King Brady said nothing.

He wanted to see the end of all this as quickly as possible, and was in no way disposed to indulge in useless talk.

The Chinaman now stood back against the walls, and the mask called out something in Chinese.

Immediately the door curtains were pushed aside, and a China boy of not more than ten years came running into the room.

He was naked, save for a cloth about his waist.

He ran on to the big brass mask and, giving an upward spring, dove head first into the cavernous mouth.

Silence followed.

Harry, who stood nearest, tried to get a look into the mouth, but all was dark inside.

The wait was a long one, but as no one spoke, the Bradys also maintained silence.

At last, a thin, piping voice, like that of a little child, was heard issuing from the mouth of the mask.

As it spoke in Chinese the Bradys were left out in the cold, of course.

The masked man stood motionless, but the others pressed forward, as if eager to hear.

For fully five minutes the voice continued to talk, and when it ceased at last the mask began, and there was a rapid fire of conversation.

At last the masked man threw up his hands, with a despairing gesture.

"It is useless, Mr. Brady," he said. "Fate is against you. Prepare your mind for the worst."

"And that is death?"

"And that is death, as you say."

"And by fate you mean the decision of that little boy."

"You do not understand. The boy had nothing to do with it. But I cannot explain, and were I to make the attempt you would not understand me. I am sorry. I have nothing against you, but it cannot be helped."

"Spare him and let me be the sacrifice!" cried Harry.

"Nonsense!" said Old King Brady. "Best put it the other way. I am an old man, with but a few years to live."

"I tried to put it both ways," said the mask; "but it was not to be. However, I propose to be merciful; you will not know when death comes."

He said something in Chinese, and two of the men sprang at Harry and tumbled him over on the floor.

At the same instant the mask covered Old King Brady with a revolver.

"Attempt to interfere, and you die on the instant!" he cried.

The case seemed hopeless.

Old King Brady made no move.

Another Chinaman now brought a glass containing a colorless liquid, and Harry, forced to drink, sank into unconsciousness.

Old King Brady's turn came next, and he got his dose. But the old detective proved harder to drug than Harry.

Although his senses became so benumbed that he could neither move nor speak within a very few minutes, he still retained some consciousness of his surroundings.

For some time he lay where they had thrown him down.

The mask and all but one of the Chinamen had disappeared.

At last two came in, and Harry was carried out neck and heels.

A minute later all consciousness left the old detective.

How long he remained thus, he never certainly knew; but he felt sure that it was not for any great length of time.

When he returned to his senses he was lying on the floor in a small room.

Harry was beside him, and both were gagged and bound.

And now the meaning of it all was plain.

The room was filled with a dense, suffocating smoke.

"This house is on fire!" thought Old King Brady. "These fiends mean us as a sacrifice to their god!"

CHAPTER X.

Alice to the Rescue.

Alice had trouble in arousing Ping Pow.

The result was that the Chinese plotters in the next bunk got out before she could get Ping Pow started, so Alice went out after them alone.

She was just in time to trail them around into China alley, where they went shuffling along until they came to a certain door, which they entered.

Alice paused at the door.

Perhaps Ping Pow would follow her up.

She felt, however, that she had just as soon he would not, for if he was recognized by these men, his presence might do more harm than good.

Just what to do now the brave girl did not know.

The house into which the Chinamen had entered was one of those hives of humanity for which Chinatown alley was noted.

To attempt to follow them up would be simple madness.

Thus she concluded to quietly await developments, which was indeed about the only thing she could do.

So, putting her hands into the sleeves of her blouse, she stood leaning against the wall, with her eyes half closed, like a person who had been hitting the pipe too heavily.

Half an hour passed, and then Ping Pow's man came out alone.

Alice watched him as he went up the alley.

In a moment he was stopped by two men.

Alice saw that they were the two men who had been with him in the restaurant.

She shuffled on and passed them.

"They were taken in half an hour ago," one was saying.

"I must see for myself," replied Alice's Chinaman.

Of course, it would not have done to wait.

Alice had to go on out of hearing.

But the remarks were highly significant.

"Did they apply to the Bradys?"

Alice wondered.

She got into the shadow of a doorway, and watched.

Presently the three got on the move, and entered a house a little further along in the alley.

Alice still watched.

It was now nearly midnight.

Were these three to do the fire-fiend act themselves?

The strain was becoming unendurable.

Still Alice hesitated about appealing to the police, for, if nothing came of it, then she would be put in a bad light.

At last she determined to enter the house and make the round of the halls.

She had scarcely passed the door when all three of the men came hurrying downstairs and shot past her into the alley.

"They have surely lighted the fire!" thought Alice. "What if the Bradys are here?"

She hurried upstairs, fancying that she smelled smoke.

Nor was it fancy!

No sooner had she reached the top of the first flight than she smelled it distinctly.

A dim light burned in a niche.

Alice looked along the hall.

Surely she could not be mistaken.

Smoke was curling out of the keyhole of a door at the end of the hall.

Pressing on, Alice tried the door, but only to find it locked.

She had her skeleton keys, however, and with one of them she quickly opened the door.

A puff of smoke came out to greet her.

The room, which was bare of furniture and unoccupied, was full of it.

But there was no fire here; the smoke appeared to come out of an adjoining room, through the keyhole and under the threshold of a connecting door.

Alice flung up a window and, holding her handkerchief to her face, made for this door.

It was locked, like the other.

She could hear the crackling of fire inside.

The first key she tried did the business, and she passed into a larger room, where the sight which greeted her made the brave girl forget her own danger.

There, upon the floor, lay Old King Brady and Harry, gagged and bound.

A bed in the corner was all afire.

The floor of the room had been sprinkled with benzine, and it was the same in the room beyond.

Alice called to her partners as she dashed in through the smoke.

No answer coming for the moment, she feared that death had already claimed them.

But there was no time to investigate.

Thankful that she had no skirts to take afire, Alice flung up both windows.

Seizing the burning mattress, she managed to drag it to the nearest window, burning her hands in the operation.

"Look out below!" she shouted in Chinese, and down the mattress went.

The bedstead had taken fire in several places, but Alice easily extinguished it with her foot.

"Mr. Brady!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Brady!"

There was no answer; for the moment she had forgotten the gags.

Old King Brady's eyes were open, while Harry's were closed.

She pulled the cloths out of the mouths of the detectives. The room was rapidly clearing of smoke.

"Oh, Mr. Brady!" gasped the overwrought girl.

But, though the old detective was staring at her fixedly, he did not answer.

He could not.

Although Old King Brady saw all that she had done and inwardly was perfectly conscious, he found himself powerless to utter a sound.

And then, a minute later, his senses drifted away again.

The next he knew the room was crowded with Chinamen.

He had recognized Alice in her disguise, but he could not see her now.

His bonds had been cut, and so had Harry's.

Then a young man in white was bending over Harry.

There were two policemen in the room, and the Chinamen had vanished, all but Alice in her disguise, and he recognized her and again tried to speak.

His tongue seemed paralyzed, and once more consciousness left him, and the next he knew he was lying in bed in a hospital ward.

Harry was on the next cot, and Alice was sitting beside him in her usual dress.

"Alice!" called the old detective. "Come here!"

At last he had spoken!

It was an indescribable relief.

Alice came right over to him.

"Oh, Mr. Brady!" she exclaimed, and burst into tears.

"There, there, my dear girl! Take it quietly," said Old King Brady. "You have save my life. I knew all, even if I could not speak. But, tell me, is all well with the boy?"

"He is still unconscious," replied Alice, "but the doctors assure me he will come around all right."

"And let us hope so. What day is this?"

Alice told him.

"I thought it was longer," sighed the old detective, and then he sank into a deep sleep.

It was morning when Old King Brady awoke, but Alice was still there at his side.

His first question was about Harry.

"He came to all right," said Alice. "And now he is sleeping quietly. You were drugged."

"Oh, I know. But we can't stay here. There is work to be done. Where are we?"

Alice named the hospital, and informed him that the

doctors said that they must remain where they were until the next day.

"Nothing of the sort," replied Old King Brady. "Harry can stay if necessary; but I am perfectly well and must leave here at once."

It was noon before they got away, however, and when they did go Harry went with them.

And, really, it was remarkable how slightly either of the detectives were affected by what they had gone through.

During the morning Alice had told her partners her own experience, of course, and they in turn had related theirs.

At the Lick House they met Mr. Narraway by an appointment made over the telephone, and, with the Secret Service Commissioner, the whole ground was gone over again.

"And so poor Barney lives?" said Mr. Narraway. "Well, it is certainly dangerous business, this mixing up with these Orientals. One can never tell what it may lead to. I can now understand certain strange allusions about the wonderful occult secrets possessed by some of the Chinese; on two or three occasions he tried to interest me in these matters, but I always turned a deaf ear."

"He has fallen a victim to his own folly," replied Old King Brady. "And he freely admits it. But there he probably still is, and as to-night is full moon, he will surely be sacrificed to that horrible brass head unless something is done."

"In what way do you imagine they propose to kill him?"

"I have not the faintest idea."

"Do you think he knew himself?"

"I haven't the least doubt of it, but he would not tell me a thing about the secrets of the Ning-po, as I have said."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"Get busy at once. If you will give me, say, six men, I will break through the partition of that closet in the Stockton street house. Of course, there will be no difficulty in making our way to the room where Barney and I were confined."

"If he is still there," said Harry.

"If he is still there, as you say," replied the old detective; "but I fancy he will be left there until night, unless our escape may have scared the Ning-po into removing him somewhere else."

"Which it will, you may be sure," said Harry, emphatically.

There had been some discussion between the Bradys on this point before, and they had failed to come to an agreement.

Harry was certain that Barney would be taken to the place where the brass head was, but Old King Brady did not feel so sure.

"I can give you six men, or sixty, for that matter," said Mr. Narraway; "but I am inclined to side with Harry. We ought to find this other place."

"Must find it in any case," replied Old King Brady; "but we will do the other thing first. When can I have the men?"

"When do you want them? Wouldn't it be better for you and Harry to lie by and leave me to attend to this?"

But Old King Brady sat down upon this last proposition emphatically, and the appointment was made for two-thirty, when all hands, the Secret Service Commissioner included, were to meet at the Stockton street house.

And the appointment was kept.

Eight men, instead of six, were brought by Mr. Narraway, and two were left to guard the door, which was necessary, as the gathering at the house, of course, attracted a crowd.

Old King Brady wasted no time in attempting to find the secret spring, but just cut out the back of the closet with a hatchet, and the stairs stood revealed.

They filed down, the old detective in the lead, and, passing under the shallow back yard, made their way to the secret rooms, without the least difficulty.

But Harry's theory proved to be the correct one.

The place had been completely cleaned out.

Every room was deserted, and no trace of Ben B. Barney was found.

They pushed on and came out in a vacant room in the China alley tenement, where there was a trap door in the floor.

This ended it, of course, and Old King Brady was obliged to acknowledge himself beaten.

"And what now?" demanded Mr. Narraway, who found it difficult to conceal his disappointment.

"Next we arrest Mr. Bartlett, if we can get him," replied the old detective, quietly. "He may be induced to confess and give us the clue."

"Oh, I guess we will get him," replied the Commissioner. "The man represents large real estate interests in Chinatown. He could scarcely afford to disappear all in a minute."

"We can try, and that's the next move."

They returned to the Stockton street house, and, dismissing the Secret Service men, the Bradys, Alice and Mr. Narraway went around on Clay street.

Mr. Bartlett was at his desk.

He turned deathly pale when he saw the Bradys.

"Does this mean my arrest?" he exclaimed, springing to his feet.

"Nothing less," replied Old King Brady.

"With what am I charged?"

"Opium smuggling."

"You can't prove it. I simply defy you. I am a man of good reputation in this town. My word will stand in court against that of any paid spy!"

"Put it that way if you choose, Bartlett," said the Commissioner. "You know me, and you know the reputation of the Bradys. To class them as paid spies is ridiculous. Everything that passed between yourself and those Chinamen was overheard. There is but one way in which you can slip out of this."

"And what may that be?"

"My interpreter, Mr. Ben B. Barney, a blind man, is a prisoner and in the power of the gang to which your friend Wing belongs; help us to rescue him and arrest Wing and the others and the act will be counted in your favor."

Bartlett tugged at his flowing, black mustache.

"I can't help you," he said.

"Very well. Then come along."

"Am I to be locked up?"

"You certainly are," replied Old King Brady. "Decide quick, now, whether you want to come over on our side or fight with the Chinks."

"Am I to be locked up, anyway?"

"How about that, Mr. Narraway?" demanded the old detective.

"He certainly will have to be, Mr. Brady. I told him all I could do."

"You hear, Bartlett? Decide."

"I'll think of it," replied the real estate dealer, and upon that he was taken to the station, where he was held as a Government prisoner.

Old King Brady labored with him all he knew how, but the man was stubborn and would give no help in the Barney case.

CHAPTER XI.

'BEGINNING AGAIN.

By the time the Bradys reached this stage of the game it was four o'clock in the afternoon.

If Ben B. Barney was to be saved something would have to be done in short order.

To go to the police was something Old King Brady saw no use in.

As Alice told him, the police had overhauled the houses on the side of China alley toward Stockton street, but without avail.

To start a raid now might have the effect of precipitating the very thing Old King Brady wished to avoid.

It was difficult to know what to do.

While the old detective had been working to no profit over Bartlett, Harry and Alice were down in Chinatown trying to pick up points, but with no success.

What they wanted was Ping Pow.

Mrs. Meagles's servant had apparently vanished off the face of the earth, and all the opium joints were visited in vain.

It looked as if the Ning-po had got him, and meant to make him walk the plank.

But, still, as Harry said, it was just possible that Pow was sleeping off his debauch in a room in one of the many Chinese lodging houses.

Of course, they visited Mrs. Meagles's first of all; but she had seen nothing of Ping Pow since the night the Bradys took him away, and she now had another Chink installed in his place.

Mr. Narraway had given it up, and gone back to his office, when, at ten minutes past four, Old King Brady met Harry and Alice coming down Clay street.

After the first interchange of information, which yielded nothing, Old King Brady drew them aside into Portsmouth Square.

"Let us sit down a few minutes and talk this situation over," he said. "It will be time well spent. We have till

midnight to act in, so we can well afford to do a little thinking in. We must begin again."

They seated themselves in the Square, and Old King Brady sat for some moments in silence.

Meanwhile Harry and Alice were whispering.

It looked as if a little lovemaking was going on.

Old King Brady watched them out of the corner of his eye.

He had not been blind to similar passages which occurred at the hospital.

It looked to him as if the shock of Harry's danger might have moved Alice to listen to her lover with a little more attention than she had done as yet.

Perhaps it was so, but they soon gave it up, and Harry asked if he had come to any decision.

"No," replied Old King Brady, "I positively have not. I can think of no plan, except to make a police raid of the China alley houses, and that is what I suppose we shall have to do, but as it is the one thing, above all others, which I don't want to do, I am in despair."

"Alice has suggested an idea to me," said Harry, "which certainly sounds feasible."

"Out with it, then, quick, Alice, for heaven's sake!" said the old detective. "This is a time when a man is ready to grasp at a straw."

"If this was an American case you would bring all the influence to bear that you could exert?" said Alice.

"Certainly."

"Do the same now."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you know several of the rich Chinese merchants on Sacramento street. Consult one of them. Ask him to see the head priest at the Jackson street joss house. Unquestionably he knows some of these fire worshippers, personally or at least by name. The money that bunch pay into their treasurer is just so much out of the treasury of the joss house, and don't you imagine for a moment that the priests are not aware of this. Chances are they would jump at an opportunity to put the Ning-po out of business, if it could be brought about without them appearing to take a hand in the game."

Old King Brady caught Alice's hand and shook it warmly.

"My dear girl, you have saved the day," he said, "and I believe that the scheme will certainly work. You and Harry remain where you are or go to the hotel, as you choose. I will slip up on Sacramento street and see my old friend Quing Pong, the importer. I will be back just as soon as I can."

"We will hang around here," said Harry; "but it will take an hour at least."

"Oh, yes," laughed Alice; "he will have to serve you with tea and sweetmeats, and samschu and all the rest of it; but don't try to hurry him. Would it help any if I went along and talked Chinese?"

"I think not. He is very old, and, of course, very peculiar. He knows me and likes me. I'll go it alone."

And so Old King Brady left them, and then Harry began his lovemaking in dead earnest.

"Alice, you must—you really must—listen to me!" he declared. "If you only knew what I suffered on your account during those terrible days of our imprisonment.

I was sure that the Chink had got hold of you, too, and——”

“Don't talk to me,” broke in Alice. “You have no idea of the anxiety I suffered on account of you both.”

“But it is not the same. You will not understand me. I——”

“Stop, Harry! I understand you perfectly. Believe me, I am not as indifferent to the devotion you have shown me as you imagine. Wait a year.”

It was hard lines, but it was the nearest Harry had ever come to getting an admission that his love was returned, and with that he was forced to rest satisfied.

Meanwhile Old King Brady was interviewing Quing Pong.

This man had, since the early fifties, been an importer of Chinese goods in San Francisco, and his capital was recognized by the different commercial agencies at upward of a million.

He was one of the heads of the famous “Chinese Six Companies,” and a man universally respected by all who knew him.

He received Old King Brady with true Chinese politeness, and in English absolutely perfect asked how he could serve him, but not until after the formality of tea-drinking had been gone through.

To talk business without this would be a violation of all Chinese etiquette, and was not to be thought of.

It was half an hour before the question was put, and until that time came Old King Brady well knew that it would be simply useless to say a word.

The old detective then launched out and told him all.

“I have heard of these people,” said Quing Pong, “but personally I know nothing of them. They are crazy creatures, the same as you find among all nations. What you say is true. At the Jackson street joss house they undoubtedly know all about them. All I can do is to give you a letter to Hek Wing, who is what you would call our high priest. Whether he will be willing to help you or not, I would not undertake to say.”

“If he won't do it for you, it will be of no use to seek further,” said Old King Brady.

The old man smiled.

“I think you are right, there,” he said. “I have some influence in the Chinese colony. Personally I wish you every success. These people ought to be driven out. But you know, Mr. Brady, that we Chinese have a way of minding our own business. It is so with the Highbinders. We let them live. Why? Because when they are gathered together in one society we know all about them and know what to expect. With you Americans, on the contrary, you never can tell who your neighbor is. He may be a murderer or a thief; but he passes for an honest man, just the same.”

Old King Brady assented, not wishing to be drawn into a long discussion, and Quing Pong went to his desk to write the letter.

It was not a long one, but the old man painted his characters so slowly that at the end of half an hour he was still at it.

But at last it was done and delivered to the detective.

“Does this Hek Wing speak good English?” asked Old King Brady.

Quing gave a curious chuckle, which he probably intended for a laugh.

“He can scarcely speak English at all,” he said; “and yet he has been in San Francisco for many years. He rarely goes out, and so he never learns.”

“Then I will take a Chinaman with me. Any objection?”

“No, no! It will make no difference. He will consult the gods. What they say he will do. If the time of the Ning-po has come, then he will help you. If not, he will do nothing at all.”

“Let us hope, then, that it has come,” thought Old King Brady, as he left the house.

He returned to the Square, and at last located Harry and Alice, who were walking about, talking confidentially.

“Well, and how did it work out?” demanded Alice.

“You shall be the judge,” replied Old King Brady. “I have a letter to the high priest of the Jackson street joss house, and as it is not sealed you may read it for yourself.”

Alice ran over the letter.

“This is very strong,” she said. “He speaks of you as his dear friend, and urges the priest to help you if he can. I cannot read quite all of it. There are several characters at the end which must be old Chinese, which I never saw before.”

“We can only try it on,” said Old King Brady. “You want to get into your Chinese disguise just as quick as you can, Alice. Of course, we cannot take a woman to the joss house, and I am determined that you shall go with us. Be very careful about your makeup. If he should guess that you were a woman, it would ruin all.”

“Perhaps I better not go, then. Much as I would like to go, I am perfectly willing to stay away.”

“No; you go. This priest speaks little or no English, according to Quing Pong. We shall need your help.”

They returned to the hotel, and Alice made her disguise as best she could.

To Old King Brady and Harry it seemed simply perfect, but still the old detective had his doubts.

But they could only make the attempt, so they started for the joss house.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

The Jackson street joss house was the largest and most important in San Francisco before the fire.

Its door stood open day and night, and any one was free to walk in and look around, for the Chinese have no prejudices in this respect, in which particular they differ from almost all other Oriental nations.

But it was one thing to get into the joss house and another to obtain an interview with the high priest.

Alice tackled the attendant who told her that Hek Wing was sick and could not possibly see anybody.

Thus it was necessary to give up Quing Pong's letter, which Old King Brady did with the greatest reluctance,

for he had relied upon Alice's persuasive tongue to help the matter through.

The wait which followed seemed interminable.

As a matter of fact, it was over an hour.

Again and again Alice spoke to the attendant, but she could get no satisfaction.

They could wait until the high priest got ready to send them his answer, or they could go away, just as they pleased.

Harry grew most impatient, and Old King Brady had practically given it up, when at last a Chinese boy, whom they had not seen before, popped out through a little door under the main altar, and, making his way among the crowd of joss stick throwers, who were kneeling before it, throwing the sticks out of boxes, as one would throw dice, approached the attendant and said something in a whisper.

"That's ours," breathed Alice, as the attendant looked their way.

The man came over to them, and said:

"Hek Wing will see you now. Follow the boy."

Alice thanked him in Chinese, and Old King Brady gave him a silver dollar.

The boy led them under the great altar, which was crowded with idols and the offerings of the faithful, and they passed down a narrow flight of stairs, into the lower temple, which few white men ever saw.

Here they made several turns, and at last halted before a door, upon which the boy knocked twice.

Then, without waiting for an answer, apparently, he opened the door, and the Bradys and Alice passed into a room most elaborately fitted up in Chinese style.

There were three Chinamen present.

One was an old man, with a snow-white pigtail and a long, drooping, white mustache.

He sat in a great teakwood armchair, beautifully carved.

His feet rested upon a soft cushion, and his hands, with fingernails of immense length, lay upon the arms of the chair.

Of course, it was easy to see that this personage was none other than the priest.

The Bradys bowed low, and Alice kneeled before him in Chinese style.

She then arose and listened attentively to his words, which were spoken in a thin, piping voice.

"He is Hek Wing," she said, in English. "He says that he knows all about the Ning-po, but that the will of the chief god of this joss house must be ascertained. He—but wait; he is speaking again."

Hek Wing talked for some moments, and Alice answered him.

He seemed to eye her so closely that Old King Brady's fears were aroused, and he asked Alice by a secret sign if she thought she was suspected, to which question she replied by a sign in the negative.

Still the talk went on, until it seemed as if the old fellow never would get through.

Alice's turn finally came, and she explained that the priest was full of doubts as to what he ought to do, but that he had finally decided to let the Bradys consult the god for themselves.

"Here," asked Old King Brady, "or upstairs in the joss house?"

"Here. They will bring down a small image of the god."

"Good! What's his name?"

"Huen-tse. He is the god of vengeance, not the head deity of the temple. He changed his mind about that. You will have to make an offering before you shake the joss sticks, understand, Mr. Brady, and it better be a big one if you want to see anything come out of it."

"How big?"

"At least a hundred dollars, Mr. Brady. Have you got that much?"

"Yes. Will it be enough?"

"I think so."

One of the silent Chinks now arose and left the room, while the other placed a table, with its top beautifully inlaid with marble of different colors, in front of the priest.

Old King Brady had cashed a draft for three hundred dollars early in the afternoon, so he was well provided for the emergency.

In a few minutes the Chinaman returned, bearing a hideous, little idol, about a foot high, which, from its color and evident weight, appeared to be solid gold.

This he placed upon the table, and the other man produced a round box, which contained the joss sticks.

Now, the whole system of joss-house worship hangs upon the throwing of these sticks.

The spirit of the god, who is believed to have once been a living man, is supposed to enter the idol when summoned to superintend matters.

The Chinese do not worship these spirits; they merely consult them.

The applicant enters the joss house, pays the fee for the sticks, lays a small offering, either of money or of something else, from jewels down to a handful of rice, upon the altar, and then, kneeling before the idol, invokes the god in silent prayer.

He then throws the stick like dice.

Old King Brady stepped forward and received the box of joss sticks from the attendant.

"Wait, Mr. Brady," Alice said; "the priest is going to speak."

Without moving, the old man began a long harangue.

As he finished a gong clanged noisily from behind a curtain in one corner of the room.

"Now put up your money," said Alice.

Old King Brady handed out five twenty-dollar gold pieces with a flourish and laid them on the table before the idol.

"Now, get down on your knees, ask for what you want silently, and throw your sticks," said Alice.

Old King Brady did so, and shook up his joss sticks in the most approved fashion, and gave them a toss out of the box.

It was Alice herself who translated the motto on the one which landed nearest the table.

It read as follows:

"At the turn of the night, at the full of the moon, strike, and you will succeed in your purpose, for the end of the wicked one has come."

Hek Wing leaned forward in his chair and seized the stick.

"You have read it rightly," he said to Alice, in Chinese. "Wait!"

He turned to the attendant nearest him and demanded a Chinese almanac, which was brought to him.

Then, having consulted it and ascertained that the moon was at her full that night, he delivered a short harangue.

"He says," translated Alice, "that we are to be on the corner of Sacramento street and the alley at five minutes before twelve, no sooner and no later. A man will meet you there and show you how to get into the room where you saw the brass head."

"All right," replied Old King Brady; "but he gives us very little leeway."

It was all over then, and a few minutes later the Bradys found themselves on the street.

The Bradys hurried to Mr. Narraway's office.

They asked for ten Secret Service men, but they told nothing of their doings in the joss house.

Of course, the Bradys got their men.

Old King Brady received them at the Lick House and explained the situation.

"You want to spread yourselves along the alley," he said. "Keep out of sight in the doorways and keep a sharp eye on Harry and me. Where we enter you are to instantly follow, keeping a little behind us."

Ten minutes before the time appointed Old King Brady and Harry were at the corner of Sacramento street and China alley. Alice remained at the hotel.

Harry walked through to Clay street and, returning, reported that the men were all on hand.

Precisely at five minutes to twelve, while the full moon was shining down upon Chinatown, a small, insignificant-looking Chink, with his hands in his sleeves, came shuffling up to the detectives.

"Hek Wing," he whispered. "You folly me."

He did not even stop as he spoke, and the Bradys trailed after him.

They passed the big tenement in the rear of the Stockton street house, and, just as Old King Brady had anticipated, the Chink turned in at the third door below.

He walked rapidly through the hall and pointed to a door on the left.

"You catchee dem first off," he said. "Man with scar face, him muchee blig coward; stickee l'olver 'gainst his nose; him open sleclet door."

Then he took to his heels and ran out of the house.

Old King Brady held up his hand as a signal for the Secret Service men, who were already in the hall.

They came noiselessly up behind him, and a second later the door went crashing in.

There were two Chinamen in the room, who sprang up, with long, bamboo pipes in their hands, and one, sure enough, had a scared face.

Half a dozen revolvers were thrust in their faces.

Old King Brady tackled Scar Face.

"Open the secret door, or I'll blow the whole top of your head off!" he exclaimed.

Then a spring was pressed and a wall panel flew back, revealing a narrow flight of stairs.

Three of the Secret Service men tied up the pair, while the Bradys and the others tiptoed down the stairs.

At the bottom was a locked door.

Old King Brady got busy with his skeleton keys, and noiselessly unfastened it.

He and Harry stepped into a small anteroom, the others remaining outside.

Red curtains cut off the room beyond. The place smelled of smoke.

The detectives crept to the curtains and peered through.

There were only three Chinamen in the room.

Two, one of whom was the man Wing, held a white man, bound with many cords, in front of the huge brass head, while the third stood aside watching.

From that cavernous mouth smoke came curling.

A moment more and the two Chinamen would have thrown him in.

Then the curtains were thrust rudely aside, and Old King Brady, followed by Harry, burst into the room.

"Hold!" the old detective cried, adding the signal which brought the Secret Service men swarming in.

It was all over in an instant.

The prisoner was Ben B. Barney, dead to the world.

One of the men was the Bradys' mask; they knew him by his voice.

Behind the big brass head, which opened like a door, was a flat pan filled with live coals.

Death in a horrible form would have been Barney's fate if the Bradys had delayed another instant.

And this was the end of the secret band.

The Bradys landed the five in the police station.

Barney was taken to the hospital, where he soon recovered consciousness. He was entirely unharmed.

Old King Brady's mask turned out to be a well-known Chinaman, Fing Lee by name, a clerk in the Bank of Oregon, where he was in receipt of a large salary.

All five went to San Quentin on long sentences, but not a word would they speak concerning the Ning-po, and no more members were caught.

Mr. Bartlett was fined and imprisoned for his opium smuggling, but no opium was captured.

Ping Pow was never heard of again.

For their work the detectives received only the usual fees.

Mr. Barney was very grateful, but he had nothing to give them.

He is still an interpreter for the Secret Service Bureau, thanks to the successful outcome of the case of "The Bradys and the Chinese Fire Fiends."

THE END.

Read "THE BRADYS AND THE STOLEN BONDS; or, A TANGLED CASE FROM BOSTON," which will be the next number (469) of "Secret Service."

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ITEMS WORTH READING.

"Comte," said Louis XV to the Count de St. Germain, "will you help me to gain 4,000 francs? I have got here a diamond with a flaw, valued at 6,000 francs. It would be worth 10,000 if it were flawless." After having the diamond carefully weighed Louis handed it to the count, who examined it minutely and replied, "It might be done, sir, if you will allow me to keep the stone for a month." A month later he brought back the diamond in weight, but flawless. The jeweler to whom a friend of Louis offered it for sale gave 9,600 francs for it, but the king repurchased it as a curiosity.

"The best time to visit a foreign restaurant," said the city salesman, "is the evening of the day when there has been something doing by the government at home. The regular patrons of such cafes make things hum then. To-night I am going to take an out-of-town friend to a typical French restaurant. The Chamber of Deputies got busy in Paris today, and a lot of dyed-in-the-wool Frenchmen will celebrate the event with all kinds of high jinks. It is that way in all distinctly foreign restaurants. Not even in the capitals of their respective countries are the measures adopted by the home governments watched more closely than by the patrons of New York's foreign restaurants, and in no place is important legislation discussed with greater oratorical fireworks."

The glass eye crop comes from Thuringia, Germany. As Newfoundlanders are fishermen or as Cubans are tobacco growers so the typical Thuringian is a maker of glass eyes. Almost every Thuringian house is a little eye factory. Four men sit at a table each with a gas jet before him and the eyes are blown from plates and moulded into shape by hand. The colors are traced in with small needles, and as no set rule is observed in the coloring, no two eyes are exactly alike. Sometimes a one-eyed man or woman, coming, maybe, from a great distance, sits before one of these Thuringian tables posing for a glass orb, and the artisan, with his gas jet, his glass and his needle, looks up at his sitter and then down at his work, and altogether the scene suggests a portrait painter at work in his studio.

An eminent Spanish scientist has made the recent discovery that the sunflower yields a splendid febrifuge that can be used as a substitute for quinine. More than ten years ago Moncorvo reported to the therapeutical society of Paris with relation to the same subject. Accordingly the sunflower should not only by its growing exert fever-dispelling effect, but also yield a product which is used advantageously in all fevers. The Russian peasantry seem to be convinced that the plant possesses properties against fever, and fever patients sleep upon beds made of sunflower leaves and likewise use covering made from them. This use has recently induced a Russian physician of prominence to experiment with a coloring matter prepared from sunflower leaves, and it is reported

that he had good results with the coloring matter and with alcoholic extracts from the flowers and leaves. With 100 children from one month to twelve years of age he has, in the majority of cases, effected as speedy a cure as otherwise with quinine. The common sunflower was originally an American plant. Eminent botanists state that its original home was Peru and Mexico.

The great factories of Japan employed in 1905, 587,851 persons. Of these, 347,563, or 60 per cent, were female. Nearly 37,000 girls under fourteen years of age toiled with their hands in these mills, working an average of fourteen hours a day for the sum of five and one-fourth cents per diem. This is the factory record. But, scattered over the empire, there are nearly half a million houses in which weaving is carried on. In them there labored in the year 1905 more than 767,000 operatives—and of these 731,000 were women and young girls. The average earning capacity of a female weaver in Japan is only nine cents a day. Is it any wonder that the burden of that terrible national debt weighs heavily upon the people? For everything is taxed in Japan. The normal tax on land is 2-1-2 per cent of its assessed value. An income tax is levied on all incomes over \$150 per annum, with trifling exceptions. All business is taxed, sometimes in three or four different ways. Liquors, sugar, patent medicines, mining tools, traveling—all are taxed directly. The indirect tax through customs dues amounts to an average of more than 15 per cent. Tobacco, salt and camphor are monopolized by the government—all the people say. Under the extraordinary special tax schedule—which the government now admits is to be permanent—the land taxes were greatly increased; the business taxes were advanced to half as much again as before; the income tax was greatly increased, and all other taxes were advanced.

WITH THE FUNNY FELLOWS.

"Seems to me a man of your standing in the community ought to drive a better looking horse," the summer boarder said. "I wouldn't trade him for the fastest roadster in the hull county," said Farmer Huckleberry. "That hoss knows just what to do when he meets an ottymoble. He cavorts around an' topples over an' breaks up a dollar's wuth a buggy shaft an' mebbe 50 cents wuth o' harness, an' I'll bet I've collected much as 'leven hundred dollars from the ottymoble owners. The old hoss is all right."

Lloyd Griscom, the new Ambassador to Italy, described at a dinner in Washington a diplomatic game of baseball in Brazil. "An Englishman," he said, in the course of this description, "caught for his side, though the poor fellow was strange to the catcher's box. The Englishman grew confused in the second inning, missed a ball and it struck him on the nose, keeling him over. 'What was it?' he said feebly, as he came to. 'A foul—only a foul,' said the umpire. 'Man alive,' said the Englishman, 'I thought it was a mule.'"

Two young Irish girls, one of whom had apparently only "lately landed," were walking through West Forty-third street the other day and the following scrap of their conversation was overheard by a woman who was close behind them. In front of the Catholic Church of St. Benedict the Moor the girls paused to read the name, and then glanced upward at the large figure of the saint which adorns the front of the structure. "Why, Mary," exclaimed the "greenhorn," clutching excitedly at her companion's sleeve, "it looks like a black man!" "Sure," responded Mary, composedly; "that's a church for colored people." "A black saint!" repeated the other, half under her breath. "Well, and how many more quare things will I hear of in this country, I'd like to know!"

A GENERAL ATTEMPT AT FRAUD.

By HORACE APPLETON.

"I wish to see Mrs. Campion—I suppose I may go up?" The speaker was a tall young woman; the place the entry of a large hotel at Brighton, England; the person addressed a page of the establishment. The woman had started to ascend the staircase, when the youthful functionary interposed and asked her who it was she wished to see. "I am an old friend; I have been here before," the woman added, as the boy looked dubious.

Her smile was disarming; not less so her handsome apparel. The boy said, "Very well, ma'am," and the visitor passed on. Half an hour afterward the woman passed out. A commissionaire asked a waiter standing near him who the woman was.

"She isn't staying here," he remarked.

"No—a visitor, I suppose," replied the waiter, and he walked off.

The woman was by that time out of sight and the commissionaire forgot all about her; but he had half consciously photographed her face in his mind.

Mr. and Mrs. Campion were a newly wed couple from Devonshire.

Mrs. Campion was a remarkably handsome woman of about twenty-four. Her husband was ten years her senior and resembled a country squire in his air and manners.

In the afternoon the pair strolled out, and at five came in to tea. At six o'clock Mrs. Campion's bell tinkled with as much violence as an electric bell is capable of betraying, and when the page responded to the summons he saw Mr. Campion looking a thunderstorm, and Mrs. Campion, very pale, reclining on a fauteuil.

"Tell the proprietor I must see him at once," said Mr. Campion.

The landlord, Mr. Wilson, was speedily on the spot, to learn that Mrs. Campion's emeralds valued by their owner at \$10,000, had been stolen. They were secured in a large chest in Mrs. Campion's dressing-room. She kept the key of this trunk. The other jewels were in the same place, but none of them had been touched, probably because of their inferior value. The thief had opened the trunk, and the casket containing the emeralds—a necklace, bracelet and earrings—had been removed.

Mr. Campion did not rave or storm; he simply said that he should hold Mr. Wilson responsible for the loss. The host replied that the guests had not taken reasonable care of the jewels and refused to make good the loss.

Inquiries resulted in disclosing the fact that a woman had called that morning and had been allowed by the page to go to Mr. Campion's rooms.

"We don't know any such person," said Mrs. Campion. "It was inexcusable to allow her to come up to our rooms. I daresay one of these hotel thieves heard of the emeralds—I have twice worn them at parties since I have been here—and laid a plot to steal them."

The next day Mr. and Mrs. Campion left for London, and at once commenced an action against Mr. Wilson for the value of the stolen jewels.

The suit was tried, but as the crime was not of a specially sensational order, and the parties were not known to the general public, it excited little interest. The plaintiff deposed to the facts. The emeralds had been in the possession of his family many years; they had been valued by experts at \$10,000.

A witness who had seen Mrs. Campion wearing the emeralds at Brighton, and who was well acquainted with the value of jewels, stated in evidence that \$10,000 was rather under than over the price of gems so rare and fine.

Mrs. Campion swore that the jewels were locked in a trunk of which she had the key. It was a patent lock. She had put the casket away after attending a party at which she had worn the emeralds. The day of the theft she unlocked the

trunk for her maid to lay out the jewels, and the loss was then discovered. The maid, Celeste Bardel, who had been six years with her mistress, corroborated this evidence.

The defense was "contributory negligence." Mrs. Campion ought to have given her jewels into the personal care of the proprietor; but there could be no question about the negligence of the page, who allowed a stranger free access to the rooms of the guests. The verdict was for the plaintiffs for the full amount claimed. As soon as the verdict was rendered the commissionaire, Daly, who was one of the witnesses, whispered to Mr. Wilson:

"Pardon the liberty, sor, but if I was you, sor, I'd appale." Wilson started.

"What for? It would only be a waste of money."

"O'i'm not so sure, sor—it 'ud gain toime."

"What are you driving at, Daly?"

"I don't know meself; but I'd appale if it was me. Your pardon, sor."

Somehow the man's manner impressed his master. He instructed his counsel to give notice of appeal, and ask for a stay of execution. Counsel was inclined to advise against what seemed to him a useless and expensive course, but Wilson was firm, and he gave the required notice.

The stay of execution was opposed by Mr. Campion's counsel, but the judge would only order that the \$10,000 be paid into the court pending the appeal. Daly beamed, and when Mr. Wilson left the court he took the Irishman with him to the solicitors.

"Now, Daly," he said, when the two gentlemen were seated, Daly, a former private in the Irish Fusilliers, standing respectfully "at attention," "what have you in that head of yours?"

"Why, sor," saluting, "if Oi was you, sor, I'd get a ditective on to't. The gintleman, he's a gintleman; but there's gintlemen, sor, that can do dhirty work; but the lady, she's not the thrue lady, sor. I was takin' a good look at her in the coort; an' ye moight be afther foindin' out, sor, whether the gintleman's got the big eshtate in Devonshire. Ye see, sor, if I may be bold, ye don't know it, sor, except the gintleman sayin' it an' havin' plenty o' money, an' there's more than wan way av gittin' that—"

"Well, Daly," said Mr. Wilson; the solicitor was listening attentively.

"Well, sor," he went on, "it don't seem foike a gintleman to want the money paid down at wanst, does it? Wid anyone loike yerself, he couldn't think ye'd run away widout payin'; an' he looked black, an' he looked at the lady. Maybe, sor, you was to pay the money now there'd be no more heard of Mr. Campion."

"Do you mean to suggest," said the solicitor, "that Mr. and Mrs. Campion are swindlers?"

"Faith, an' I wouldn't wonder, sor. There's a many things stranger done than stalin' yer own property."

Wilson sprang to his feet.

"The man may be right in his suspicion!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "I'll go to Long," a famous detective; "it will do no harm, anyhow."

The matter was placed in the detective's hands, and during five days Mr. Wilson heard nothing more of the matter. The public had forgotten it already. Then one day the detective presented himself before Mr. Wilson.

"Well, sir," he began, "I think this is a swindle. I've found Waldon Hall—there is such a place—and Campion is your guest's name; but the hall is a tumble-down place, in such bad repair that nobody will take or buy it, with about two acres of worthless land belonging to it. The late Mr. Campion's father had wasted what property there was.

"His son finished the business. Young Mr. Campion was always the blackguard—my personal description of him was at once recognized—and at the age of twenty-five he left his home, such as it was, and went abroad. That disposes of the honeymoon business. As for family jewels, there haven't been any within living memory. So it's clear that this man and woman are a couple of swindlers, the visitor and the maid their accomplices. The emeralds are probably paste,

and the call of the lady that morning an arranged thing. If that had failed, they'd have worked the job some other way. As likely as not the jewels are in their possession now, to be used in a future swindle. You see they were clever enough to flash them about a bit, so that they were seen by independent witnesses."

The detective went to Paris, and there discovered, through the police, that Celeste Bardel, the maid, was known to the secret police under several names. Mr. Campion and his wife were also suspected of certain swindles, but nothing had been proven. About a year ago, however, a lady answering the description of Mrs. Campion, but giving another name, had purchased a paste emerald set—necklace, bracelets and earrings—of a jeweler in the Rue de la Paix.

The entire set was sold for \$125. There was no doubt whatever that Mr. Campion, of Waldon Hall, was a cunning and accomplished swindler, his good birth and education enabling him to appear to advantage. Of course the money with which he cut a dash at Brighton was obtained in some dishonest manner, but Mr. Wilson was not disposed to rake up his late guest's whole career; his last coup was sufficient to bring action for attempt to defraud, and Mr. and Mrs. Campion found themselves in the dock instead of in the witness box, together with their accomplice, Celeste; the tall, fair lady remained perdue. Sure enough the emeralds were found in the possession of the couple, who were committed for trial. The regular detectives, in the interval, took up the matter, with the result that it was discovered that the gentleman with the family jewels and his wife were wanted in Berlin and Vienna for remarkable clever frauds. Mlle. Celeste was delivered to the French police under an extradition warrant, and Mr. and Mrs. Campion passed a long and not altogether pleasant honeymoon in an English prison.

HUNTED BY WOLVES.

A man named Robinson has just returned from the forests of Northern Minnesota to Chicago. He had some great sport up there, he says, and one experience which was decidedly unpleasant.

There is no place in the United States, perhaps, where wolves are so plentiful and so fierce as in the pine regions of the North. A timber wolf, though, is always vicious wherever you find him—or wherever he finds you, as it was in the case of Robinson.

Not far from Pine Lake, in Cass County, Robinson and his friends decided to camp. There had been snow on the ground for three weeks, so they journeyed northward from Wheelock, the nearest railroad point, in a big sleigh—"a pair o' bobs," the driver called it.

During the second afternoon the horses were making such slow time that Robinson decided to get out and walk. He carried his Winchester with him and his revolver in his pocket, and finally, from thinking what might be in the woods near him, he decided to penetrate into the forest a little and kill something for supper. You know how eager a man gets when he hasn't hunted any for a long time and finally reaches the place where game ought to be found.

Pretty soon Robinson found deer tracks. They were fresh and he followed them eagerly for a while, and at last, just as he was about to abandon the chase and retrace his steps, he caught sight of them through the trees. With much caution he crept near enough to shoot, and brought down a heavily-antlered stag. That was surely worth an hour's walk through the snow.

It took him a good while to cut out a few pounds of steak for supper and then hung the deer up out of reach of the wolves. This work was so interesting that he scarcely heeded the flight of time. When he at last discovered that night was almost upon him he made haste to return. As he was not certain as to the right direction he decided to take the back track till the road was reached.

As was natural the distance back to the road was about twice as great as he thought it was, and he had just about

reached the halfway point when he saw something like a shadow flitting silently among the trees ahead of him. Soon he saw the dim outlines of another—and another.

They were wolves. Like Robinson, they had been tralling the deer, and, like any other party of hunters, they decided to abandon the cold trail, and take up the chase after the bigger game, when they came in sight of it. So Robinson soon found that the wolves were following him.

They were quite timid at first, slinking along two or three hundred yards behind. He fired at them and they vanished into the woods. He pushed on, hoping they were gone, but pretty soon he saw them again—a little closer this time and decidedly more numerous. He fired once more. There was a howl of anguish, and then a chorus of howls prolonged and blood curdling.

Robinson began to run at the sound, but looking back over his shoulder, he saw the whole pack was rolling down the path after him like a resistless wave.

It was twilight, but he could see to shoot, so he turned about and emptied his Winchester into the mass, hoping his companions would hear the firing and come to his rescue. He ran as fast as he could after that, and the snarling and fighting of the beasts began to grow dim—then broke out afresh in a mournful brass tremolo which made his hair stand on end and his breath come short and quick.

The savage blood was running fiercely now. They were coming—coming in ever increasing numbers. However fast he might run, they came faster and faster.

In a dreadfully short time the wolves were so close behind him that he climbed a tree. His gun hindered him somewhat, so he left it on the ground, and perching himself on the limb he sat there and watched the wolves as they gathered in from all quarters of the earth. By and by he remembered the revolver in his pocket. He had plenty of cartridges, and he spent half an hour shooting at the wolves. It was so dark by this time that he did little execution, though once in a while there came a sharp yell which told of a shot gone home.

Robinson was safe from the wolves, but was growing cold—very cold and sleepy. The numbness spread from his feet to his legs and from his legs to his body, till he felt like a wooden man or a graven image.

He was curling up in the fork of the tree with the very suicidal intention of going to sleep when he heard three shots from the direction of the road. He managed to refill the cylinder of his revolver, though his hand was so cold he lost nearly all his cartridges. He fired twice in the air, and heard the answer—one shot.

He was just falling into a sweet slumber again—somehow he forgot that help was coming—when the signal aroused him the second time, much nearer now, and he managed to respond. Then the torches were gleaming through the trees, and the rescuing party was at hand.

The wolves made a bold stand, but six Winchesters, in the hands of six determined men, were too much, even for such a desperate horde of hunger-driven foes.

When the last live wolf was gone, Robinson was asleep again. Even the noise of the firing and the excitement of a fierce battle failed to keep him awake, and he tumbled down among his friends just as they surrounded the tree.

"If you want to know just how sensitive some folks are in this town listen to the reasons some of our tenants given for canceling their leases," said a renting agent. "Here are complaints from five families who want to move because they live on 'funeral streets.' A lot of people, it seems, are sensitive about that. There are certain streets in town—those near churches where many funerals are held and those leading to the Long Island ferries—which are usually traveled by funeral parties. Houses in those streets are becoming a poor investment. There is more moving from those houses than from any others we have anything to do with, and generally the movers give as the reason for their dissatisfaction the fact that the sight of so many hearses gets on their nerves."

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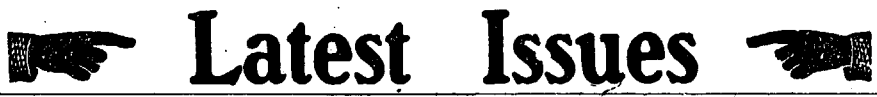
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