THE IVORY SAMPAN

By Sidney C. Partridge

"OH! Mr. Wang," said Miss Alice Molony to the famous Chinese Man of Mystery, as she met him one afternoon at Lady Cockrill's tea, "do come and sit right down here and tell us some more about those strange superstitions of the natives. You know it's all well enough to read about them in the guidebooks, etc., but they never seem half as real as when we hear somebody describe them, especially one who knows them as well as you do."

Wang Foo, with his usual courtesy, at once acceded to the young lady's request and, joining the little circle in the palm room, began with, "Let me see, where did I leave off the other evening? Oh, yes, I remember now, we were on the subject of demons and I had just started to describe the 'well-demon,' when we were all summoned into the drawing room to listen to the pianist from Moscow, were we not?"

"Yes, exactly so," replied Miss Alice, "and I want to go right back to that little demon until we get him safely out of the well."

"Ah!" smiled Wang Foo, "if you can get him safely out of all the wells of China, where they think he resides, you will be doing a magnificent work for civilization, but I am afraid that will take years and years of slow and patient scientific teaching."

Then he went on to describe the native idea of the well-demon and to explain that it was simply an accumulation of carbonic acid gas that suffocated those who went down into the wells to clean them, and which was interpreted by the simple-minded people to be the wrath of the demon, who, resenting their intruding into his domain, seized them by the throat and choked them to death!

"But why don't the missionaries or some one explain this to them?" innocently asked one of Miss Molony's friends, "that surely is a part of the enlightment of China."

"They do in every way they can. I have a copy in my home now of a most useful little tract entitled 'The Truth About the Well-Demon' that has been circulated by thousands all over the country. And that reminds me of an interesting and rather amusing experience that one of our Chinese students had who tried to explain this matter to the old patriarch of his village. He concluded by warning him never to attempt to descend into a well—or allow any of his family or friends to do so—until he had first lowered down a lighted candle and seen whether it burned freely or was extinguished by the gas. Well, at the end of a few days he met his old friend again, and when he asked him if he had had any chance to test the presence of the well-demon, he replied, in a somewhat resentful tone, 'Yes, and like most of your foreign theories it won't apply to China.'

"'Did you lower down the lighted candle, as I advised you?'

"'Yes, and the well-demon was so angry at this foreign interference that he grabbed the candle and blew it out before it got to the bottom!'"

"I wonder if they think we have any demons of this domestic kind?" asked Miss Alice. "I so often wish that I only understood enough of their language to ask them about this and a thousand other things."

"Oh! Yes, they think we have a choice collection of household demons that we believe in just as implicitly as they do."

"Why, the very idea! Do tell us of one, Mr. Wang, please——"

"Well, there's one that lives in your pantries or kitchens, that goes by the name of the 'milk-demon.' Have you ever heard of him?"

"Never."

"Why, that's what the Chinese servants call the lactometer, and they talk about it every time they see the foreigner use it."

"Did you ever! That only shows how little we dream of what is being said right around us all the time."

"Yes, they call it the 'milk-demon,' and I've heard them describe it in the teahouses and tell of its having a large, round head and a long, silver tail. And when the foreigner suspects that his milk has been watered, why he just puts the little demon into the pail and he jumps up and down in the milk and then whispers the whole secret to his master or mistress."

"What a wonderful revelation it is sometimes, to get a glimpse of ourselves as others see us, but—" the lady's remark was cut suddenly short by the entrance of Sir Rutherford, who apologized for the interruption as he said, "Mr. Wang, I hate to draw you away from this charming circle of listeners, but I am going to ask the ladies to excuse you for a while, as a cablegram is waiting for you in the office."

* * * *

NOW, Sir Rutherford Cockrill, his Britannic majesty's consul general at Shanghai, was not a man to be easily disturbed by any vague rumors of trouble among the native peoples, at the same time, his long residence in India and the Straits had trained him to be cautious and to anticipate any outbreak by nipping it in the bud. So it was quite natural that he should close the door of his private office as soon as he and Wang Foo had entered and await the opening of the cablegram with just a little anxiety.

"I wonder if your message is the same as mine?" This is what I make it out to be by the government secret code," he said, handing a square piece of yellow paper over to his guest.

"It will take me a few minutes to decipher mine," was the reply. "You see, sir, it is a very different code from the one used by yourself and the consular office—in fact, it is one that I drew up myself for Inspector Higgins to use, if I should at any time be needed when away from Hongkong. He and I are the only two that possess the key to it."

A comparison of the two dispatches showed that they were practically identical. The former was from the governor of Hongkong, Sir Evington Beecham, asking the consul at Shanghai to make every effort to apprehend "Ching Pow" ("Green Leopard") who, as assistant compradore of the Oriental Bank, had robbed them of some $60,000 and was supposed to be in concealment in Shanghai. His excellency also suggested that as Wang Foo, whose exploits in detecting crime had been so helpful to the authorities, was now in Shanghai, it would be wise to ask his assistance in the case. The latter message was from Inspector Higgins to Wang Foo direct, hoping that he would be able to co-operate with the English police and secure what aid he could from the native authorities.

"Well," said the consul, after he had read the translation of the other code, "I hope you are going to stay in the settlement long enough for us all to work together on this matter, Mr. Wang, are you not?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, I was just about leaving for a visit up the river with my old friend the Tao Tai of Ching Kiang, but the cause of justice bids me postpone it for awhile—so, Sir Rutherford, I am yours at command."

* * * *

THERE was really no reason why Dr. Roland O'Donnell should not have been the happiest and most contented young man in the port. He was not only the most popular dentist in the community, with a professional practice that drew in a munificent annual income and made it necessary for him to make appointments long in advance, but he was an all-round "jolly good fellow." He played, he sang, he rode in the amateur races, he pulled bow oar in the Shanghai eights and he belonged to the oldest and most aristocratic clubs in the settlement. He had built for himself a delightful little bungalow on the fashionable Bubbling Well road and drove in and out from his office every day in the smartest of dogcarts. We say "there was no reason why he shouldn't have been the happiest man in the port," but, of course, we are speaking from the standpoint of the cold, selfish and unsentimental masculine mind, and so we may as well acknowledge frankly, right at the outset, that the one thing in the world that was lacking was a "Mrs. O'Donnell" to preside over it all and add that unspeakable charm and grace to the bungalow life of the east. The royal palace was ready for the princess and it only needed some fairy godmother to wave her wand, and heart and home would welcome her.

And yet here was just the trouble, for with all the material available in the great port of Shanghai, not one of the matrons or dowagers seemed to have been able to play the fairy godmother act successfully. Roland O'Donnell, however gracious and yielding he mihgt be to the ladies in everything else, was in this matter a hopeless failure, for he made it perfectly evident that he proposed to either do the fairy godmother act himself or else dispense with it altogether.

Was it merely the office punkah that the coolie was waving in the air over the chair, the afternoon that Miss Alice Molony submitted to a little dental torture at the doctor's skillful hands? Or was the gentle "swish-swish-swish"—so refreshing and soothing—possibly the rustling of the garments of the aforesaid fairy, invisible but very much present? Who knows? But the fact remains that Roland couldn't stay at home alone that evening, but had to while away the hours with the old stand-bys at the club, and it was so the next night after. In fact, something had happened to the bungalow. There was a feeling of emptiness and vacancy about it that he had never known before, and who but the fairy and godmother could have been to blame?

"HOW MUTCHIE YOU WANTCHIE FOR THAT LITTLE SECOND-HAND SAM-PAN?"

"I hope you are going to stay in Shanghai at least until June, Miss Molony," he remarked, as they walked together in the consular garden a few days later, "the roses are wonderful here then, and you said you were so fond of flowers."

"Yes, I am, and I never dreamed that they were so beautiful here; why, these ports are real gardeners' paradises. I feel that I could just stay here forever"—the last words slipped out so very innocently, that she couldn't realize at all what they meant to her companion—"but alas, we are going over to Japan just two weeks from today, for uncle and auntie (she was traveling as their favorite niece) are set upon being in Kyoto before the close of the cherry dance, and that, I suppose, means good-bye to dear old Shanghai forever."

But although uncle and auntie did actually get to the cherry dance, and Miss Alice was there to enjoy it with them, she did not bid good-bye to Shanghai forever, and the reason therefor unfolds an interesting tale, in which her path and that of Green Leopard and Wang Foo and the police became most curiously interlaced.

It all came about through the very innocent purchase of a curio at the ancient shop of Cheap Jim (as the Europeans all called him) by the Nanking bridge. Miss Molony was just stepping out of her jinrikisha at the door of Jim's establishment, when who should arrive upon the scene at the identical moment but our good friend Dr. O'Donnell, on his way back from the tiffin-room at the club. "Ah! Fascinated by the 'Old Curiosity Shop,'" he said, as, ordering his coolie to put down the shafts, he hastened to assist her in alighting. "Well, our visitors to Shanghai all fall victims to it."

"Yes, although his whole shop does look like what my old New England grandmamma called a rat's nest, he certainly does have the most wonderful collection of them all," she replied.

"Now, I don't wish to seem intruding at all, Miss Molony," ventured the doctor, "but he is really such a fearful old Shylock in his prices to tourists that perhaps the presence of a resident might bring him to reasonable terms. May I not have the pleasure and honor of assisting you?"

The gallant offer was, of course, immediately and most graciously accepted by the fair visitor, and they spent a delightful hour in wandering through the mazes of Jim's rat's nest together. While her purchases were limited to a set of lacquer bowls, a sandalwood fan and a tiny bronze bell, the one thing that evidently charmed her more than all else in the shop was a wonderful little model of a sampan (rowboat) carved out of spotless ivory.

"Don't let him see you admire it," was the doctor's warning, "or the price will immediately rise! Just let me approach him casually while you are looking at those vases over there. Jim!" he said, addressing the native proprietor, "how muchee you wantchee for that little second-hand sampan?"

"Me velly solly, but dat sampan no can sellee. B'longee one piece my fliend hab putee dis side makee look see," was the somewhat regretful reply.

"Nonsense, Jim, don't talkee that stuff to me. Suppose me wantchee buy, you can talkee me ploper plice," said the doctor, quite proud of his fluent pidgin English.

"Velly solly! No can, no can," was the stoical and unchanging reply.

"All light, all light, suppose lady makee go, me come back talkee you by and by."

That evening a little parcel was handed to Miss Molony by her ahma (maid) at the hotel and, when she opened it, there to her surprise and delight was the ivory sampan from Cheap Jim's and a card with the words:

. . . . . .
. To the most patient of my .
. patients, with compliments of .
. ROLAND O'DONNELL, D.D.S. .
. Shanghai. .
. . . . . .

So the magic power of the almighty dollar had evidently triumphed again over the refusal of Jim and his "fliend."

* * * *

IN THE upper room of the basket-maker's shop, where Wang Foo always made his home in Shanghai, the Map of Mystery was wrapt in the deepest thought. He had been spinning the web of evidence for several days and now he seemed to be drawing near to the center and waiting for the entanglement of Green Leopard. He was relying not only upon the robber's superstition—for he knew he could always successfully call that into play—but upon something which the white man little realizes that the Asiatic possesses, and that is a conscience. Was Green Leopard in concealment in Shanghai? He concluded it very likely that he was, for the eastern criminal, like his brother of the west, drifts almost naturally to the largest centers of population and always feels that he can hide himself much more securely there than in the smaller towns or villages. And then, besides, strange and paradoxical as it may seem to good and law-abiding people, crime loves company, yes, just as much as misery does. Now, Inspector McArthur of the police recognized this fact full well and therefore he had cabled to Hongkong for photographs and description of Green Leopard and had them in his office to show to Wang Foo, when they met there that very morning.

"Sorry we haven't been able to get an individual picture of hom, Mr. Wang," remarked the chief, "but here is an excellent likeness of him taken in the bank group last year that ought to help us. See! That's the fellow, the second in the middle row, sitting right behind the English manager."

"Ah! Yes, I believe I should have picked him out, even if you hadn't told me," replied Wang Foo, as he drew out from his sleeve his little magnifying glass and, stepping up to the window, examined the photograph carefully in the stronger light. "And why would you have picked him out of the rest?" inquired the inspector, somewhat curious to know the Chinese ideas of detection. "Now, I should have said it was much more likely to be that tall, slim chap with the bad eyes, on the end of the back row there——"

"Oh! No, he's as innocent as a lamb. Why he's only a house-coolie. Can't you see by the very shape of his forehead and the listless expression on his face that he belongs to a much lower class and hasn't brains enough to even contemplate a robbery of this size? No, no, the best he could do would be to snatch a string or two of brass cash from a fellow coolie."

"But what was it that led you to suspect the fat chap in the second row?"

"Well, you see by this glass that he has spots on his face.

"That's what it says in the description here——"

"Yes, and they without doubt are smallpox scars——"

"Right you are again!" interrupted the officer, as he read from the message in his hands.

"And smallpox, at least in the virulent form that we know it in China, seldom leaves its victim without some form of mental or moral obliquity. I have questioned our leading missionary physicians on this point and they seem to agree with this position entirely. So I always naturally suspect a spotted-faced man before I do a smooth-faced one."

"The Hongkong police say that he is called 'Leopard' from spots on his face, so, of course, that must be a sort of nickname that was given to him after he had the disease and isn't his real name that he had when he was a child. Is that so, Mr. Wang?"

"Quite so. You see, a Chinese child has a regular series of names. He has first his 'milk name' as it is called, which is given to him in infancy; then he has his 'pupil name,' which he gets when he goes to school; then his 'common name,' or nickname as you call it, wich is that by which he is popularly known and is generally descriptive of his personal appearance, and then his 'sign of greatness' or 'literary name,' which is conferred upon him when he gets his degree."

"What a confusion!" exclaimed the inspector. "Why that makes our foreign system look as simple as 'A, B, C,' doesn't it? Well, the spots on his face account for the 'Leopard' part of his name all right, but how about the 'Green'? I don't recall ever seeing the animal of that color in any menagerie or zoo——"

"Oh! That doesn't refer to the animal, that refears to the man," answered Wang Foo with a smile. "You see that Chinese character 'Ching,' which here is called green, may also—strange as this seems to the European mind—mean blue, or, in fact, cerulean or heavenly, and this is what it means here. For the Chinese are very superstitious about smallpox and always speag of it by some other name, the popular comment on a patient being, 'He is painted with the flowers of heaven.'"

"So our friend, the thief here, may be the Cerulean Leopard, as well as the Green Leopard, may he?"

"Yes, or to put it after the manner of the ancient poets:

"'Ching Yu Yuen Tien,
Ching Yu Hsia Esao!'"

"And what, pray, might that mean, sir? I am afraid my rather prosaic mind cannot quite grasp it in the original," laughed the inspector.

"Why, that simply means:

"'Blue as the arching heaven,
Green as the grass below.'"

The morning's interview ended with a mutual agreement to have the picture of Green Leopard reproduced and the description of him given to every foreign and native officer on the force, together with instructions to watch carefully for him at every known rendezvous of bad characters.

Wang Foo thought it best to fall in with all these suggestions of the English police, though as he rode away down the bund in his rinrikasha he kept repeating to himself the words: "It is perfectly useless, perfectly useless; they will never find him that way!" A week passed away and the utter failure of the search proved that he was correct. In the meantime he had been carrying on his own independent line of inquiry and with some very remarkable results. Let us follow him and see what some of these were.

First of all, he sought out his old friend, the tao tai, who had just retired from office and was living in a native villa on the bank of the river, and took counsel with him as to the probable whereabouts of Green Leopard and the most likely way to apprehend him. This, of course, in addition to the official report and request that had been sent into the native authorities by the consul, and which they both agreed would amount to nothing, because of the simple fact that the reward or "squeeze" was considered by the tao tai's police to be utterly inadequate. When they were closeted together in the inner apartment of the villa, and when the triple sign of the Sacred Brotherhood had been made by the waving of the lighted incense in the air, Wang Foo began, "He is from Tak Yoi (Grand Delight), our own native village in the Canton district!"

"You are quite sure of this?" enquired the tao tai, who seemed rather troubled by this announcement.

"Positive, your excellency; here is a letter from our brother, the abbot of the Hongkong Temple of the Queen of Heaven. He feels the disgrace as keenly as we do and begs that we will do all in our power to shield the reputation of the village."

"Does that mean that we are to seize him and give him up, or that we are to assist him to escape?"

"Ah! That is just the question that has troubled me. We are between the two horns of the dilemna, as the Europeans say, we must seek to protect our own, and we must avoid any participation in a crime—there lies the problem. But, come what may, our very first duty is to find him. In what direction shall we turn?"

The tao tai thought for a moment or two and then slowly answered, "It is written in the Book of Fate, is it not, that, 'Within the half-moon of the commission of a crime the guilty one will seek the interpretation of his dreams from the tellers of fortunes? We must watch the seer, to whom he would most naturally go."

"And he is——?" anxiously inquired Wang Foo, as he took his little leather notebook out of his sleeve and prepared to make a careful record.

"The guardian of the Ivory Sampan at the little shrine back of the seven-story pagoda."

"And why should he want to go there?"

"Because the Ivory Sampan is the sacred emblem and treasure of our goddess at Tak Yoi, and whenever the children of southern Canton may wander, they will be sure to go there to ease their troubled consciences."

"True! True!" exclaimed the detective, as on the eve of a great discovery; "how strange I had not thought of that before!" And bidding his excellency, good-bye, he gave him the pledge of secrecy and returned to his waiting sedan chair.

* * * *

WHEN Green Leopard arrived in Shanghai with his ill-gotten gains, having come up by a coasting steamer and changed at Foochow to avoid suspicion, he naturally decided that the safest thing for him to do was just to go to a large native hotel and assume the perfectly innocent air of an ordinary traveler.

The stolen money was largely in Bank of England notes and in gold, which he hoped to dispose of in small quantities to the native moneychangers and thus avoid the danger of being trapped by having on hand a large number of native bills. He had it securely hidden away in a bundle in the very center of the old hogskin trunk which every Chinese traveler takes with him. He had, however, passed only two or three nights at the Resting Place of the Golden Phoenix (which was the high-sounding title that the hotel bore) when conscience, mingled with fear and dread, began to do its deadly work, and he awoke from an awful nightmare, trembling and dripping with the very cold and icy sweat of death itself. For this is what he had seen: Four awful demon lictors from the court of hades started to seize him as he lay in bed. "To wo men lai! To wo men lai!" ("You must come with us! You must come with us!") they shrieked. "Tsai na li? Tsai na li?" ("To what place? To what place?") he asked. "Tao ti yok wang ya men!" ("To the ya men of the king of hades!") was their only answer. He begged for mercy, for he knew only too well the horrors of that court, as he had seen them painted on the walls of the Buddhist hells. Their only answer was a mocking laugh as they dragged him out through the opening tiles and flew with him through the air and miles away to an open cave, and then down into the dungeons beneath the earth. They came to the edge of the black and slimy river of death and, pointing to the dark clouds that hung over it, they cried "Kan! Siang ya chwan lai, shi chwan lai pow tow shi lien!" ("Look! The boat of the elephant's tusks is coming! The death boat is coming to take you to the tortures!") He looked, and there, right before him, he was horrified to see the white ivory barge approaching, with the pale and ghostly rower of death silently plying the oars! Nearer and nearer it came, until it touched the bank at his feet. Summoning up all his courage and strength, he made one final effort to escape. "I am guilty! I am guilty!" he shrieked. "Spare me and I will pay the tribute in the finest gold!"

"Thou canst not bring here the money on earth," said the boatman of the Ivory Sampan.

"Where then shall I pay it?"

"At the Shrine of Our Guardian by the Seven-Story Pagoda. Swear by thy life that thou wilt pay it, or the boat bears thee now to thy doom!"

"I swear! I swear!" he cried, and awoke to find it all a dream!

He waited a few days before making the promised visit and then, having exchanged a dozen sovereigns for the native coin, he sauntered out toward the end of the settlement and, calling a jinrikisha, ordered the coolie to take him to the "Shi Low Tah" or "Seven-story Pagoda." Dismissing the conveyance at the entrance to the tower, he walked to and fro a little while until the coolie was out of sight, and then sneaked around by a little bomboo-lined path to the shrine at the rear. Alas for him, the little gate was locked and the old priest was away! There was not a soul there but a crippled fortune-teller in a little mat shed by the roadside. He hobbled out on his crutches and, bowing most courteously, said: "The august and venerable guest must be worry and thirsty, his unworthy servant begs him to tarry a moment and he will prepare the tea and pipes." Dagging out a little bamboo stool from his shed, he bade the honorable guest be seated while he attended to the making of the tea. "Let me pass behind you," he said: "I am unworthy that my shadow should darken your visage," and, suiting the action to the word, the cripple crawled behind the visitor. It was but the work of an instant for him to raise his crutch into the air and bring it down like a flash on the head of the honorable guest, who, stunned by the blow, fell backward into the mat shed. It was the work of only another instant for the suddenly transferred cripple to produce a pair of handcuffs and slip them onto the honorable wrists, for the redoubtable Green Leopard was now a prisoner in the hands of Wang Foo, who, disguised as the fortune-teller, had been patiently awaiting his coming!

"How shall we protect our village and our countryman, and at the same time secure the ends of justice?" asked the tai-tai of Wang Foo, when he heard from him the story of the capture.

"I have thought all that carefully over," answered Wang Foo, "and I have decided that our proper procedure is, first, to see that the police here ship him promptly back to Hongkong. Then, when we have him once safely there, we can fall back upon the old contract which the bank always makes with the compradore, that, in case of any dishonesty, he will make it good and guarantee the punishment of the criminal. This will enable us to keep him out of the English jail and save us from an everlasting disgrace. Then we will have the compradore send him back to his own father's house in the country as a servant, and the old man will see to it that he atones by hard labor for his most unfilial conduct."

"Hao Siang! Hao Siang; Shuin Sien Jin Tsz Tao!" ("Well thought out! Well thought out! It follows the doctrine of the Sages!"), replied his excellency, "but the stolen money, that, of course, must be returned?"

"Every dollar of it must be made good to the bank. Fortunately, he has spent as yet but very little of it, and most of it is still in the trunk."

When Inspector McArthur heard Wang Foo had actually captured the robber, he hastened to congratulate him, remarking as he did so, "You didn't seem to have much faith in our search for him, Mr. Wang, now, did you?"

"Well," answered the detective with a smile, "this was a little different kind of criminal from the ones that your men are accustomed to look for. While I really didn't have much idea that you would locate him, still, it kept the department busy for a week or two, and that enabled me to conduct my own search in a quiet and unobtrusive way, which is what I always prefer."

"And will you go down to Hongkong on the steamer with him?"

"No, I will leave that little transportation matter to you. Just send him down in charge of two trusty officers; keep a sharp lookout that he doesn't jump overboard or commit suicide in some other way, and I will go down a few days ahead and make arrangements with the authorities there to handle the case on arrival.

"You certainly have made a triple saving of it, this time, Mr. Wang, if I may say so, you have saved the man, you have saved the money, and you have saved the compradore's face."

"Well, you say in England, "there is always luck in odd numbers"—perhaps this is a case in point," smiled the man of mystery as he bade the inspector good morning.

* * * *

"MR. WANG," said Dr. O'Donnell to his Chinese friend, as he sipped a cup of tea with him at the consulate just before his return to Hongkong, "I wonder if you could drop around to my office after business hours this afternoon, I want to consult you on a matter of very great importance to me—and to others."

"Delighted to serve you and your friends in any way whatever, doctor," was the ever-courteous reply.

When they met there late that day the doctor opened his private desk and took out a letter in a lady's handwriting, and, handing it to Wang Foo, said, "Mr. Wang, you are our greatest solver of mysteries; please try your skill on that." The letter read as follows:

Dear Dr. O'Donnell:

It gives me very great pain to have to return to you the little gift that you sent me, but my feelings have been so worked up over it that I cannot feel happy with it in my possession. Although I do not for a moment imagine that you realized what it meant when you sent it, yet from what I know now, it would only tempt me to have unkind thoughts towards you—and that must never be. A dear Chinese lady explained it all to me the evening that I sailed, but I did not have the heart to allude to it when you saw us off at the dock. If no one has told you before, then I must do so now. The Ivory Sampan is the Chinese emblem of the Death Boat that carries departed souls over the River of Hades and to make a friend a gift of one is equivalent to expressing the wish that they may soon depart out of life! I do not feel that I can accept from you—though it come in all innocence and with the best wishes in the world—anything that might bear such an interpretation as that. Very sincerely yours, ALICE MOLONY.

The great detective smiled, and, looking up at the doctor said, "Well, what she says about the sampan is absolutely true! Did you send her an ivory carving of this kind?"

"Never in my life! I remember that one day we were looking at some curios in Cheap Jim's shop, and she happened to greatly admire an ivory boat that he had there, but when I tried to bargain with him for it, he wouldn't sell it at any price; said it belonged to a friend of his who had put it there on exhibition, and yet the very next day it was gone and he positively refused to say where it went."

"And you didn't send anything at all to Miss Molony? Think just a moment."

"Why, yes," acknowledged the blushing young doctor, "I sent her a box of American beauty roses."

"And didn't she acknowledge them?"

"She most surely did. See! Here is her note right here."

Wang Foo unfolded the paper and read:

"'My Dear Dr. O'Donnell:

"'How very sweet and thoughtful in you to remember me in this charming way. I thank you more than I can tell you. The gift itself may fade, but the memory of the spirit that prompted it will long abide with

"'Yours very sincerely,

"'ALICE MOLONY.'

"It doesn't specify just what the gift was——"

"No. Now that I come to think of it, that's true. But ivory fades, doesn't it, as well as roses?"

"Yes, the note is ambiguous. The solution is absolutely simple—in fact, so simple that I almost hesitate to mention it—the room boy at the hotel is the culprit. He accidentally exchanged the packages, delivering your roses to another lady and the ivory sampan to Miss Molony."

"But how about the cards which were inclosed?"

"That is equally simple. He, of course, opened both packages out of curiosity, and in replacing the cards just got them exchanged."

"Mr. Wang," exclaimed the doctor, so excited that he hardly knew what he said, "you dine with me tonight at the bungalow, but, in the meantime, that old pony of mine can't get us to the telegraph office quickly enough."

The message went flashing under the ocean to Japan:

"All a mistake. Packages exchanged by hotel boy. I sent you a box of roses, not the sampan. Shall I join you at the cherry dance and explain in person? ROLAND."

The answer that came flashing back was brief, but very sufficient. It was just two words:

"Come! ALICE."

(Copyright, 1921.)

THE SIMPLE DINING ROOM

The Less Complex It Is, the Better It Is.

The more completely a dining room is furnished simply for the requirements of a place in which to take meals and the more strictly it is kept simply for that use, the simpler will be the tasks of housekeeping and the better the form of the dining room.

There is a curious tendency on the part of some people to gravitate toward their dining room at all times of day. Now, where one is necessarily limited as to room, in the wee apartment or small cottage, it is sometimes necessary to combine dining room and living room, or even dining room and kitchen; but where this is not necessary, then the dining room ought to be kept from the cluttering accessories of a living room. Yet there are people who have ample living rooms who prefer to gather around the dining table in the evening, do their letter writing there and take naps on a lounge in the dining room than anywhere else. Perhaps that is because the light in the dining room is better or because the room is furnished more cheerfully. The answer is to furnish the other rooms more cheerfully and to supply them with a better light.

Because these cluttered dining rooms are at best untidy they and the clutter are not conducive to a keen appetite. Moreover, if you sit in your dining room between meals, then the atmosphere there will not have the clear, fresh quality that it should at meal time. The air will be vitiated. When you go into a house where the dining room, even though very small and inexpensively furnished, is kept simply for a room in which to take meals, you are at once struck with the thought that the persons in that house are orderly and well bred. But where you go to a house where on the dining room buffet is kept a bottle of ink, a pen and a box of note paper; where a row of unsightly flower pots filled with anemic geranium shoots struggling for existence embellishes the sunny window, and the pet dog takes his siesta on the lounge near the radiator or fireplace, and the housewife's mending basket, spilling over with a goodly harvest of stockings, shares the honors with a jaded rubber plant and a chafing dish on a corner tea table—well, then you mentally make a note that these people are just a little second-rate, or else that they haven't quite solved the problem of living to the best advantage.

The present mode of dining rooms is one of extreme simplicity. Between meals the table is left bare save possibly for a single linen centerpiece and a vase of flowers or pot of ferns. Chairs are usually neatly drawn up to the table in the position they take at meals, with the extra ones standing against the wall at regular intervals. The buffet does not carry a variety of accessories—mustard bottles, table crumbers, salt dishes, etc. It may have a few simple objects, such as a filled fruit dish or a silver tea set, but in the most fastidiously equipped houses it is now considered in best form to have nothing of an edible nature—salt, pepper or cruets—in sight between meals. The wall of the dining room is not regarded as the appropriate place for a collection of pictures—least of all framed photographs. In fine old homes of England it has long been the custom to place on the dining room wall a few stately, richly colored portraits, sometimes empaneled in the wainscoting of the room. And this custom is imitated in some of our American dining rooms. One or two fairly large decorative pictures may be used, but a number of small, intricate ones merely distracts the eye and detracts from the simplicity of the room.

A Trouble Story.

A REFORMER told a trouble story at a reform banquet in Washington.

"The people," he said, "who prophesy that our reforms will cause trouble and disorder are about as logical as the young widow.

"A young widow, on the way back from her husband's funeral, stopped with her supporters at a house of refreshment.

"She elected gin wherewith to refresh herself, and a liberal quantity of the transparent liquid was poured into her glass.

"'Any water, Mag?' one of her supports asked her, holding out the pitcher.

"The young widow put her hand hurriedly over the top of her glass.

"'Water?' she sobbed. 'Water? Good heavens, ain't I got trouble enough?'"

Ring Lardner Writes an Open Letter to Congress

TO the Editor: Here is a copy of the message I am sending to Congress and maybe they might not dast give it out to the papers so here is a copy of it.

To Congress:

Well lady and gents I realize it ain't customary for nobody only the President to send you boys a April fool message but still and all they's no law vs. anybody sending you one a specially a man that come as close to the White House as myself and might of got all the way in if I hadn't of left Washington a few minutes before the Hardings decided to make it an amusement park, at least judgeing from some of the birds that did get in I don't see how they could of barred this baby.

And besides, if you boys is anything like our last Congress a message will go just as big whether it comes from me or the President or the ouija board so any way I am going to write and point out a few things that needs tension that I studied them up while the President was down on the Florida golf links roughing it.

Well gents you know the old gag about people that lives in a glass house shouldn't drink out of the bottle, so the place to commence makeing reforms is right where you are at, namely the nation's capital and I don't know no way you could make a better begginning than appt. a committee to tend all the ball games in Washington this season and try to find out if the home team is really playing their best.

And the next thing to do is give the town Pullman telephone booths so as a person can enjoy a night's rest wile waiting for the wrong number and thus kill 2 birds with one nickel besides getting your shoes shined.

"Please use this rag to wipe your razor as one small cut destroys a towel."

"Guests without baggage 25 cts. extra for meals served in booth."

"Stop have you anything left."

* * * *

PASS a bill providing for the President to not leave Washington dureing his incumbrance as they are libel to run wild when they get away from home and go to gay Paree and buck the Tiger or something. Presidents of coarse likes to travel because they get 10 cts. per mile which nets them about 2 cts. profit at the present rates minus the amusement tax on an upper but if they claim they can't get along without some such kind of a get rich quick scheme, why allow them a dime for every mile they stay on the fairway and I guess by the end of 4 yrs. they will have enough saved up to buy a ½ interest in a milk chocolate.

I also wished you would put up the names of the different govt. buildings in big letters so as when a man is showing his Mrs. the town she won't act like she had had him subpoenaed.

Borrow a 16 yr. old dependent child somewheres and give it to the bird that figured out the personal exemption allowance on the income tax and make him support it on $200 a yr.

"WILE THE MADAM IS SPOILING BALLOTS."

Pass a rule to permit smokeing in the senate and house so as you boys won't keep asking teacher if you can leave the rm.

So much for local legislations and now we come to matters that effects the whole U. S. States and the 1st. thing to do is pass another amendmunt to the constitution and call it the 37th. amendmunt because it takes in both the 18th. and 19th. amendmunts and have this new amendmunt provide that election day is Kings X from Prohibition so as a man will have some place to hang around wile the madam is spoiling ballots.

Repeal the truants law so a person won't had to go all spring and fall without a caddy.

Repeal the law vs. the rabbit punch in boxing. This punch is a blow that lands at the base of a fighter's brain and it looks to me like the man that lands it instead of being disqualified ought to be give a seat in the hall of fame along with Columbus and Admiral Peary.

* * * *

ALONG these lines it would also be a good move to pass a federal law vs. wrestlers useing a headlock. They ain't no more use for one than on the German treasury bldg.

No ½ fare minded congress wants to show partiality towards either one of the 2 big govt: war schools so another sporting event that should ought to be layed on the shelf is the goal after touchdowns. This helps the Navy but don't do the army no good.

Pass a law vs. men wearing dinner clothes which don't benefit nobody but the Chinaman. Or if it looks like they was too much opposition to abolishing this quaint costume all together, at lease leave us have some govt. regulation so as when you are called up and ast to dinner you won't half to go through no all day battle of the Marne decideing if you will or you won't.

Make some kind of a universal rule in regards to hats in co-ed elevators. The way it is now a man is all right if he stays in one town, but the minute he goes visiting he is all wrong.

For inst. if you are in Chicago you keep your hat on unlest the elevator is in a hotel or a dept. store. In N. Y. City you also take them off in a apt. bldg. elevator provided the lady ain't your own wife or a relative. But in places like Washington you got to expose yourself in elevators of all kinds and when I and the madam was there and I took her on sight seeing trips to the different floors of office buildings, I discovered that I was the only gent in the car with a covered egg and felt even sillier than ever.

These is a few of the needed legislations, Boys, and I wished you would find time to give them your tension but I suppose you will be too busy monking with the words and music of a peace treaty with a country that knows, or at lease has heard rumors, that we ain't been fighting them for 3 yrs.

RING W. LARDNER.

Great Neck April fool.

"GIVE THE TOWN PULLMAN TELEPHONE BOOTHS."

The Gracious Hostess.

Not every woman possesses that inborn graciousness that makes the practice of hospitality a sort of second nature to her. Yet every woman can acquire the manner needed to make her guests welcome.

To begin with guests should be made to feel welcome, not only by the pretty courtesies that are extended to them, but by the words and attitude of every member of the family they visit. Even the glad smile of a child of the house is a welcome that any one might envy. This attitude of welcome is natural to some of us; but all of us can acquire it, and children so quickly copy the manners of their elders and reflect the home atmosphere that they can be depended on to do their part if their parents do theirs.

So much for the general atmosphere that betokens kindly breeding. Now for the actual attentions of a social sort that you may pay your guest.

You may, toward the early part of her stay with you, plan some sort of party—anything from a most informal knitting tea to a formal dinner or dance.

Some very dear friend, perhaps under some social obligation to you, may give this first party for your guest—a tea, perhaps, or a dinner. Such a tea is naturally informal; in these days the guests are quite correctly asked by phone.

The soht of other amusement you furnish your guest must be decided by where you live and the guest's taste. If she comes from a big city, the theater and such citified means of entertainment will not especially appeal to her. She will probably prefer the sort of entertainment she finds in your own home and in the homes of your friends who invite her to come, with you, to luncheon, or dinner, or for the afternon or evening. In most communities the friends whom you invite to meet your guest will plan some sort of entertainment for her, which you need feel no hesitancy about accepting for her.

Old Lady Science.

ORVILLE WRIGHT was talking at a Dayton dinner about the new Caproni biplane, which carries 100 passengers.

"What will the scientists say now?" he laughed. "When my brother and I were trying to fly, the scientists proved time after time that flight was impossible to man. Afterward, when flying was actually accomplished, they proved that aeroplanes would never be more than dangerous toys—big, stable ones couldn't be made—they'd be too heavy to rise.

"Those scientists were like the old lady who was taken to see the first trolley car to start in her village. She looked at the car and sniffed:

"'It'll never go.'

"But the car did go. It went beautifully. Then the old lady, staring after it, shrieked:

"'It'll never stop!'"

A Give-Away.

A JUDGE was talking at a banquet about investigations.

"It is true that one magnate recently got a complete white-washing from the investigating committee," he said, "but that magnate is a very clever man. The other accused had better look out, for they are apt to give themselves away. Like the prisoner, you know."

Smiling, the judge continued:

"A new guard was on duty at a New York prison and was conducting a prisoner to the cells.

"'Look out,' he said as 'they came to a dark corner, 'there's a step there.'

"'G'wan, partner,' muttered the prisoner, 'I know that step before you was born.'"