



THE YELLOW MAN.

A THRILLING STORY OF THE BOXERS IN CHINA.

BY CARLTON DAWE.

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At the time of which I write my uncle was a man just verging on 40, a well set up, powerful creature, with a good natured face, rather inclined to roddiness. He was a man who seemed to enjoy every hour of his life, and I don't believe I ever saw him when his blue eyes had not a merry twinkle in them. Therefore the serious look with which he now greeted me was just a little disconcerting. My mother's troubled face also added a chilliness to the reception.

"Well, Dave, lad," said he, "what is all this that has been troubling your mother?" I told him all I knew, repeating word for word that which had passed between me and the stranger. "I have heard as much," said he, "when I had finished, 'and upon my word I can't see any cause for this uneasiness. Your mother has got a fright, my boy, and nothing I can say will convince her of her folly."

"You may call it folly if you like," she replied, "and I wish I could think so, but I feel sure my husband would not have written in this strain without good cause." Jim shook his head. Out of respect to her feelings he did not say what was on the tip of his tongue. He had not his sister's admiration for my father.

"A man who can leave his wife and child for seven years is capable of writing anything," he growled. "Ah, but you don't understand," she replied. "You don't know the dangers and vicissitudes of a seafaring life. If he does not come, you may be sure it was for very good reasons."

"Humph!" growled Jim, but perhaps even he loved her all the better for her loyalty. No doubt it was foolish, but it is that foolishness which endears women to us. I thought she looked at her best and her prettiest just then, and if Jim hadn't been there to poke fun at me I would have given her a good kiss.

"Well," said he as he slowly began to all his pipe, "I consider vague, terrifying, scraps no excuse for such an absence, and if I were you I should try to think that they were written after I mean under much mental depression, the result of a systematic squaring of the elbow."

"I believe it to be nothing of the kind. Do you imagine that the coming of this stranger right on the top of Bob's letter was all a matter of chance? No; he knew my husband was leaving Australia, and he meant to see him. For what reason? Ah, let me know that and I shall know everything. But, tell me, does it not strike you as being very curious that I should receive Bob's letter on the very day that the stranger arrives here?"

"Well, no. The man could easily have come in the same ship as the letter. Probably he was to meet Bob in London and, disappointed in not finding him there, came on here."

"But don't you see if Bob came in the ship with that letter he would not be here yet (unless he came overland from Brindley) for another eight or nine days. I do not hesitate to say that the last thing he would think of would be to come overland, but those who do not know him so well might reasonably suspect otherwise."

few scattered houses. I hurried round to the back by the side path and searched the garden in vain for the sight of a fluttering petticoat. I passed by Janet's room (Janet was the servant, who had been with us for the past

"Speak, lad! What has happened?" two years), but the window was shut, the blind down, I tapped gently on the glass and then passed on to the back door. Trying the handle, I failed to open it. I knocked; no answer. I knocked loudly; I beat the panels with my open hands; I even used the toe of my boot. But there came no patting of feet, no unbarring of locks. The echo sounded drearily for a moment and then all was still.

And now the fear which had already begun to paralyze me for a moment or two, returned with a vengeance. The horror of which I could not grasp the meaning turned me cold to the finger tips. I seemed intuitively to guess that I was face to face with some dire calamity, and yet I could form no conception of what it really was. I only know that my inner eye gazed upon an inner chaos, and that the sight was so appalling that it froze every drop of gall in my veins. My uncle's voice called to me from the street above like one in a dream I moved to complete the circuit of the house. But as I passed the scullery window I noticed that it was not locked, though it had been so fastened rigidly. The catch, pressed against the pane, was plainly visible above the sash. I leaned against the sill and raised the window, and in a voice which startled even myself, I said: "Mother! Janet! Janet!"

"Good heavens, Dave," he cried, seeing my white face, "what is the matter with you?" and almost before I knew what had happened he had sprung from the chair, opened the gate and was holding my face up to his. "Speak, lad!" he continued excitedly, his face full of anxiety. "What has happened? What have you seen?"

"Nothing," I said. "But they do not answer, and the scullery window is open." Realizing at once the importance of this apparently trivial statement, he dashed round the back of the house, but with a loud knock as I did, and with a like result. He peered through the open window, but only the echo of his voice came back, and this smote upon his heart and lined with anxiety his face.

"Dave," he said, "I fear something has happened. Don't you see that I am clutching you by the arm and turned my terrified face up to his. 'It may be nothing, my dear, but we shall see. Are you afraid to go in through that window and open the back door for me?' I was, but I had no other choice, so I gasped out, 'No.'"

"Good lad," he patted me encouragingly on the back. "Come here and I will help you. There's nothing to be afraid of," he added consolingly. "The mother and the girl have evidently gone out together. We will get in and wait until they return. Now, then, one, two and up."

The window was some five feet from the ground, but with his arms outstretched and his feet on the sill, I managed to scramble across the sill and enter into the room. Reassured by what I saw, which was the scullery in its usual state of perfect tidiness, I got through the window with little difficulty and let myself down upon the table which stood beneath. Then, with nothing more than a hurried glance about me, I dashed through the kitchen, out into the passage and opened the back door. My Uncle Jim immediately entered.

For a moment he seemed to hesitate, looking about him for some sign or token. Then he went along the passage to the front of the house calling loudly, but with no reply save the creak of the stairs and without a word mounted to my mother's room. Arriving there, he stopped for a moment or two and contemplated the closed door; then he knocked gently thereon. No reply came, he knocked louder, and then he turned the handle. Peeping behind him, I saw that the room was still shrouded in gloom, the blinds being closely drawn. He called her name, but his voice sounded hollow and ghostly as it circled round and round the oppressive chamber. No sound came from the bed, no movement. He turned and drew up the blind and let a flood of light into the dark room, and as it lit up the bed, I saw it fall upon a tress of my mother's hair, which dropped back over the pillow. She was lying there enveloped in the counterpane, her form clearly outlined beneath the clothes; but she was so still, so dreadfully still.

Uttering an involuntary cry I sprang across to her, and before my uncle could prevent it I had snatched the covering from her head. A ghastly white face met me, two vague, distorted eyes stared up into mine—eyes in which glared too plainly the hideous placidity of death. "She is dead," I wailed, "she is dead, and, unable to look death in the face, I fell upon my knees by the bed and buried my face in my hands. Presently my uncle touched me on the shoulder. As I looked up at him with blurred eyes it seemed to me that his eyes were full of tears, and that his face was pale as death. "Do you know what has happened?" he said, his voice cold and cutting as death itself. And not waiting for an answer he at once replied to his own query, "Your mother has been murdered!"

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