

The Special Correspondent

CHAPTER XVIII.

The country is fertile and well cultivated, growing wheat, maize, rice, barley and flax, in its eastern districts. Everywhere are great masses of trees, willows, mulberries, poplars. As far as the eye can reach are fields under cultivation, irrigated by numerous canals, also green fields, in which are flocks of sheep, a country half Normandy, half Provence, were it not for the mountains of Pamir on the horizon. But this portion of Kachgar was terribly ravaged by war when its people were struggling for independence. The land flowed with blood, and along by the railroad the ground is dotted with tumuli beneath which are buried the victims of their patriotism. But I did not come to Central Asia to travel as if I were in France. Novelty! Novelty! The unforeseen! The appalling!

It was without the shadow of an accident, and after a particularly fine run, that we entered Yarkand Station at four o'clock in the afternoon.

A few Chinese passengers alighted at Yarkand, and gave place to others exactly like them—among others a score of coolies—and we started again at 8 o'clock in the evening. During the night we ran the three hundred and fifty kilometers which separate Yarkand from Kothan.

A visit I paid to the front van showed me that the box was still in the same place. A certain snoring proved that Kinko was inside as usual, and sleeping peacefully. I did not care to wake him, and I left him to dream of his adorable Romanian.

In the morning Popof told me that the train, which was now traveling about as fast as an omnibus, had passed Kharaglik, the junction for the Killan and Tong branches. The night had been cold, for we are still at an altitude of 1,200 meters. Leaving Guma Station, the line runs due east and west, following the thirty-seventh parallel, the same which traverses it in Europe, Seville, Syracuse and Athens.

We sighted only one stream of importance, the Karakash, on which appeared a few drifting rafts, and flocks of horses and asses at the fords between the pebbly banks. The railroad crosses it about a hundred kilometers from Khotan, where we arrived at 8 o'clock in the morning.

Two hours to stop, and as the town may give me a foretaste of the cities of China, I resolve to take a run through it. As we were about to board the car again, I saw Popof running toward me, shouting:

"Monsieur Bombarnac!"
"What is the matter, Popof?"
"A telegraph messenger asked me if there was any one belonging to the Twentieth Century on the train."

"A telegraph messenger?"
"Yes, and on my replying in the affirmative, he gave me this telegram for you."

"Give it me! give it me!"
I seize the telegram, which has been waiting for me some days. Is it a reply to my wire sent from Merv, relative to the mandarin Yen Lou?

I open it. I read it, and it falls from my hand. This is what it said:
"Clausius Bombarnac, Correspondent Twentieth Century, Khotan, Chinese Turkistan:

"It is not the corpse of a mandarin that the train is taking to Pekin, but the imperial treasure, value fifteen millions, sent from Persia to China, as announced in the Paris newspapers eight days ago; endeavor to be better informed for the future."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Millions—there are millions in that pretended mortuary van!"

In spite of myself, this imprudent phrase had escaped me in such a way that the secret of the imperial treasure was instantly known to all, to the railway men as well as to the passengers. And so, for the greater security, the Persian government, in agreement with the Chinese government, has allowed it to be believed that we were carrying the corpse of a mandarin, when we were really taking to Pekin a treasure worth fifteen millions of francs.

Now the secret is divulged, and we know that this treasure, composed of gold and precious stones, formerly deposited in the hands of the Shah of Persia, is being sent to its legitimate owner, the Son of Heaven.

That is why my lord Faruskar, who was aware of it in consequence of his position as general manager of the company, had joined the train at Douchak so as to accompany the treasure to its destination. That is why he and Ghangir—and the three other Mongols—had so carefully watched this precious van, and why they had shown themselves so anxious when it had been left behind by the breakage of the coupling, and why they were so eager for its recovery.

That is also why a detachment of Chinese soldiers has taken over the van at Kachgar, in relief of the Persians. That is why Pan Chao never heard of Yen Lou, nor of any exalted personage of that name existing in the Celestial Empire!

We started to time, and, as may be supposed, our traveling companions could talk of nothing else but the millions which were enough to enrich every one in the train.

"This pretended mortuary van has always been suspicious to me," said Major Noitz. "And that was why I questioned Pan Chao regarding the dead mandarin."

"I remember," I said; "and I could not quite understand the motive of your question. It is certain now that we have got a treasure in tow."

"And I add," said the major, "that the Chinese government has done wisely in sending an escort of twenty well armed men. From Kothan to Lan Tcheou the train will have two thousand kilometers to traverse through the desert, and the safety of the line is not as great as it might be across the Gobi."

"All the more so, major, as the respectable Ki-Tsang has been reported in the northern provinces."

"Quite so, and a haul of fifteen millions is worth having by a bandit chief."

"But how could the chief be informed of the treasure being sent?"
"That sort of people always know

what it is their interest to know."

"Yes," thought I, "although they do not read the Twentieth Century."

Meanwhile, different opinions were being exchanged on the gangways. Some would rather travel with the millions than carry a corpse along with them, even though it was that of a first-class mandarin. Others considered the carrying of the treasure a danger to the passengers. And that was the opinion of Baron Welaschnitzerdorfer, in a furious attack on Popof.

"You ought to have told us about it, sir—you ought to have told us about it! Those millions are known to be in the train, and they will tempt people to attack us. And an attack, even if repulsed, will mean delay, and delay I will not submit to. No, sir, I will not!"

"No one will attack us," replied Popof. "No one will dream of doing it."

"And how do you know that—how do you know that?"

"Be calm, pray."

"I will not be calm; and if there is a delay I will hold the company responsible."

That is understood; a hundred thousand florins damages to Monsieur le Baron Tour de Monde.

Let us pass to the other passengers. Ephrinnell looked at the matter, of course, from a very practical point of view.

"There can be no doubt that our risks have been greatly increased by this treasure, and in case of accident on account of it the Life Travelers' Society, in which I am insured, will, I expect, refuse to pay, so that the Grand Transasiatic Company will have all the responsibility."

"Of course," said Miss Bluett; "and if they had not found the missing van the company would have been in a serious difficulty with China. Would it not, Fulk?"

"Exactly, Horatia."
Horatia and Fulk—nothing less! The Anglo-American couple were right, the enormous loss would have had to be borne by the Grand Transasiatic, for the company must have known they were carrying a treasure and not a corpse, and thereby they were responsible.

As to the Caterans, the millions rolling behind did not seem to trouble them. The only reflection they inspired was, "Ah! Caroline, what a splendid theater we might build with all that money!"

But the best thing was said by the Rev. Nathaniel Morse, who had joined the train at Kachgar.

"It is never comfortable to be dragging a powder magazine after one."

Nothing could be truer, and this van, with its imperial treasure, was a powder magazine that might blow up our train.

CHAPTER XX.

The first railway was opened in China about 1877, and ran from Shanghai to Fou-Tcheou. The Grand Transasiatic followed very closely the Russian road proposed in 1874 by Tashkend, Kouldja, Kamul, Lan Tcheou, Singan, and Shanghai. This railway did not run through the populous central provinces, which can be compared to vast and humming hives of bees, and extraordinarily prolific bees. As nearly as possible it forms a straight line to Sou-Tcheou before curving off to Lan Tcheou; it reaches cities by the branches it gives out to the south and southeast.

Since we left Kothan, we have covered a hundred and fifty kilometers in four hours. It is not a high rate of speed, but we cannot expect on this part of the Transasiatic the same rate of traveling we experienced on the Transcaspien. Either the Chinese engineers are not so fast, or, thanks to their natural indolence, the engine drivers imagine that from thirty to forty miles an hour is the maximum that can be obtained on the railways of the Celestial Empire.

At 8 o'clock in the afternoon we were at another station, Nia, where General Pevtsoff established a meteorological observatory. Here we stopped only twenty minutes. I had time to lay in a few provisions at the bar. For whom they were intended you can imagine.

The passengers we picked up were only Chinese, men and women. There were only a few for the first class and these only went short journeys.

We had not started a quarter of an hour, when Ephrinnell, with the serious manner of a merchant intent on some business, came up to me on the gangway.

"Monsieur Bombarnac," he said, "I have to ask a favor of you."

"Only too happy, I can assure you," said I. "What is it about?"

"I want you to be a witness. I am going to marry Miss Bluett."

"Marry her?"

"Yes. A treasure of a woman, well acquainted with business matters, holding a splendid commission—"

"My compliments, Mr. Ephrinnell! You can count on me."

"And, probably, on Monsieur Caterana?"

"He would like nothing better, and if there is a wedding breakfast he will sing at your dessert—"

"As much as he pleases," replied the American.

"Then it is to be—"

"Here."

"In the train?"

"In the train."

"But to be married you require—"

"An American minister, and we have the Rev. Nathaniel Morse."

"Bravo, Mr. Ephrinnell! A wedding in a train will be delightful."

It needs not be said that the commercials were of full age, and free to dispose of themselves to enter into marriage before a clergyman and without any of the fastidious preliminaries required in France and other formalistic countries. Is this an advantage or otherwise? The American thinks it is for the best, and, as Cooper says, the best at home is the best everywhere.

It is too late for the ceremony to take place to-day. Ephrinnell understood that certain conventionalities must be complied with. The celebration could take place in the morning. The passengers could all be invited, and Faruskar might be prevailed on to honor the affair with his presence.

During dinner we talked of nothing

else. After congratulating the happy couple, who replied with true Anglo-Saxon grace, we all promised to sign the marriage contract.

"And we will do honor to your signatures," said Ephrinnell, in the tone of a tradesman accepting a bill.

The night came, and we retired, to dream of the marriage festivities of the morrow. I took my usual stroll into the car occupied by the Chinese soldiers, and found the treasure of the Son of Heaven faithfully guarded. Half the detachment were awake and half were asleep.

About 1 o'clock in the morning I visited Kinko, and handed him over my purchase at Nia. He anticipated no further obstacles; he would reach port safely, after all.

"I am getting quite fat in this box," he told me.

I told him about the Ephrinnell-Bluett marriage, and how the union was to be celebrated next morning with great pomp.

"Ah!" said he, with a sigh. "They are not obliged to wait until they reach Pekin."

"Quite so, Kinko; but it seems to me that a marriage under such conditions is not likely to be lasting. But, after all, that is the couple's lookout."

At 3 o'clock in the morning we stopped forty minutes at Tcherchen, almost at the foot of the ramifications of the Kuen Lun. None of us had seen this miserable, desolate country, treeless and verdureless, which the railway was now crossing on its road to the northeast.

Day came; our train ran the four hundred kilometers between Tcherchen and Tcharakly while the sun caressed with its rays the immense plain glittering in its saline efflorescence.

(To be continued.)

RUG MADE OF HUMAN SCALPS.

Seventy-seven Lives the Cost of One Possessed by Iowa Indian.

A rug which took seventy-seven lives in the making is owned by an Iowa Indian living in Stroud, O. T., says the Dallas News. It is 150 years old and consists of seventy-seven scalps torn from the heads of as many human beings. The rug, which is barely five feet square, is of many hues, for the scalps are red, gray, black, white, brown and auburn.

They belonged to peaceful people, too, and are said to have been taken by special command of the Great Spirit from the finest specimens of men, women and children belonging to the white, red and negro races.

As soon as the scalps were secured they were sewn together and the rug was from that time regarded as the remedy for all trouble. When an Indian was taken sick he was laid on this rug and if he did not recover his spirit was assured of a pleasant journey to the happy hunting ground.

This remarkable creation can be seen only once a year.

At the annual wild-onion feast, which comes on April 1, the Iowa Indians make the rug play an important part. The onion is freely used, the Indians saturating themselves from head to foot with the juice. This was their successful way of driving away the evil spirits.

A prayer rug belonging to the shah of Persia is another valuable mat. Though barely two feet square, its design is most elaborate. It is worked throughout in precious stones and the effect is dazzling. The ground is formed of rose diamonds and in the center is a large bird, whose neck is made of amethysts and its body of rubies. The vines, which form a network, through which the bird may be seen as through a cage, are made of emeralds, while the bands which connect the stones are of seed pearl. The floral emblem of Persia is worked out in blue, yellow and pink stones, this design being known as the Mina Khani design.

It is difficult to determine even the approximate value of this small rug, but it has been estimated that if it were sold the proceeds placed at 5 per cent interest would bring in an income of at least \$250,000 per annum.

A STORY OF TWO PAINTERS.

Did Van Dyck and Hals Really Paint Each Other's Portrait?

There is a story related by Houbraken, which may or may not be true, that Van Dyck, passing through Haarlem, where Hals lived, sent a messenger to seek him out and tell him that a stranger wished to see him, and on Hals putting in an appearance asked him to paint his portrait, adding, however, that he had only two hours to spare for the sitting. Hals finished the portrait in that time, whereupon his sifter, observing that it seemed an easy flatter to paint a portrait, requested that he be allowed to try to paint the artist. Hals soon recognized that his visitor was well skilled in the materials he was using. Great, however, was his surprise when he beheld the performance. He immediately embraced the stranger, at the same time crying: "You are Van Dyck! No one but he could do what you have just now done!"

Assuming the story to be true, how interesting it would be if the two portraits existed, that one might see what Frans Hals, accustomed to the heavier type of the Dutch burghers, made of the delicately defined features of Van Dyck, and how the latter, who always gave an air of aristocratic elegance to his portraits, acquitted himself with the bluff, jovial Hans, who was as much at home in a tavern as in a studio. For no two men could be more different, both in their points of view and in their methods, though they were alike in this one particular—that each was a most facile and skillful painter.—St. Nicholas.

About the Size of It.

"Say, paw," queried little Johnny Bumpnickie, "what does a paper mean when it says that further comment is unnecessary?"

"It usually means," my son, that the writer doesn't know what else to say," answered the old gentleman.

BEFRIENDED BY LINCOLN.

Major Evans, of the Interior Department, Got a Position Through Him.

Few persons living have better cause to remember President Lincoln than Major George W. Evans, chief disbursing officer of the Department of the Interior, Washington. When the two first met, Major Evans was a young newsboy lately returned from accompanying the Army of the Potomac in its campaigns. That was in 1864 and



MAJ. G. W. EVANS.

Evans, then in his 17th year, was recalled to Washington by the death of his father. "For three years," he says, in speaking of this period, "I had been with the army selling papers, scouting and fighting whenever I got a chance. I had tried earnestly for enlistment, but my application was rejected on account of my youth. You see I was only 14 in 1861, when I ran away from home and joined the Sickles Excelsior Brigade of the Second Army Corps. I had done the army some service in my limited way, and they knew it. In my pocket, when I went to see President Lincoln, I carried a number of the passes I had used through the lines, and testimonials from those for whom I had rendered service."

"I found Mr. Lincoln in characteristic attitude, his long legs crossed, and his attenuated form erect, but his gaunt face, with its deeply sunken eyes, surveyed me kindly. I told my story and produced my papers, which the President scanned. Then taking a sheet of paper, he addressed the following communication to the Secretary of the Interior:

"Give this lad a job.

"A. LINCOLN."

Evans was made assistant messenger in the Department of the Interior. Later he perfected his education and qualified for the position he now holds. Since becoming disbursing officer he has handled \$200,000,000 without a single mistake. In addition, he is the financial chief of the department and has supervision of other appropriations aggregating \$180,000,000 annually.

Major Evans was at Ford's Opera House the night President Lincoln was assassinated.



THE FAMILY DOCTOR.

In these days of eager search for and rapid dissemination of news, many of the discoveries in medicine, as in other sciences, are prematurely disclosed, and things which are only probable or possible are accepted as established facts by the general public, which is always hungry for marvels and lacks the wise skepticism of the scientist. This remark applies especially to the new "cures" for consumption and for cancer, the publication of which has done so much harm by encouraging false hopes of benefit in the minds of many sufferers from one or the other of these maladies.

Much has been written of the nature of cancer and of its treatment, but nothing has been definitely established in relation to it. The true nature and the cause of cancer are still unknown, for although many believe that it will eventually be found to be a germ-disease, the proof is still lacking. As regards the cure of cancer also, we are still far from the desired certainty. Much has been said of treatment by means of light rays, Roentgen rays, antitoxin serum; and success has apparently followed one or other of these methods in the case of certain superficial cancers or of some of the less malignant forms of growth. But there is nothing definite yet to be said of all these new methods. In some cases, after an apparent cure, the disease has returned and progressed to a fatal termination, in spite of a renewal of the treatment that seemed at first to be so effectual.

The most that can be said is that it seems to have been demonstrated that cancer is not always the inevitably fatal disease that it was believed to be, and that therefore its treatment is not an absolutely hopeless task. But the uncertainty of success in any given case is so great that one is not justified in postponing surgical measures. An early operation is still the most certain means of cure—the only means of which the past results give us any real assurance of cure; and if resort is first made to one or the other of the new methods the danger is that, if they fail, the opportunity for complete removal may be lost beyond recall.—Youth's Companion.

A Laughing Likeness.

Lawyer—How can we use this flash light picture as evidence against the accused? His eyes are shut tight.

Detective—But his mouth is open so wide we can identify the filling in one of his back teeth.—Detroit Free Press.

Every woman is of the private opinion that the only reason her husband has never bought a white elephant is that no pretty woman ever tried to sell him one.

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