

## CHAPTER XXII.

I, who wanted an incident, have had one to perfection. I am thankful enough not to have been one of the victims. I have emerged from the fray safe and sound. All my numbers are intact, barring two or three insignificant scratches. Only No. 4 has been traversed by a bullet clean through--his hat.

At present I have nothing in view beyond the Bluett-Ephrinell marriage and the termination of the Kinko affair. I do not suppose that Faruskiar can afford us any further surprises. I can reckon on the casual, of course, for the journey has another five days to run. Taking into account the delay occasioned by the Ki-Tsang affair that will make thirteen days from the start from Uzun Ada.

Thirteen days! Heavens! And there are the thirteen numbers in my notebook! Supposing I were superstitious?

We remained three hours at Tcharkalyk. Most of the passengers did not leave their beds. We were occupied with declarations relative to the attack on the train, to the dead which the Chinese authorities were to bury, to the wounded who were to be left at Tcharkalyk, where they would be properly looked after. Pan-Chao told me it was a populous town, and I regret I was unable to visit it.

The company sent off immediately a gang of workmen to repair the line and set up the telegraph posts; and in a day everything would be clear again.

I need scarcely say that Faruskiar, with all the authority of the company's general manager, took part in the different formalities that were needed at Tcharkalyk. I do not know how to praise him sufficiently. Besides, he was repaid for his good offices by the deference shown him by the staff at the railway station.

At three in the morning we arrived at Kara Bouran, where the train stopped but a few minutes. Here the railway crosses the route of Gabriel Bonvalot and Prince Henri of Orleans across Tibet in 1889-90, a much more complete journey than ours, a circular trip from Paris to Paris, by Berlin, Petersburg, Moscow, Nijni, Perm, Tobolsk, Omsk, Semipalatinsk, Kouldja, Tcharkalyk, Batong, Yunnan, Hanoi, Saigon, Singapore, Ceylon, Aden, Suez, Marseilles, the tour of Asia, and the tour of Europe.

The train halts at Lob Nor at four o'clock and departs at six. This lake, the banks of which were visited by General Povtsoff in 1889, when he returned from his expedition to Tibet, is an extensive marsh with a few sandy islands, surrounded by two or three feet of water. The country through which the Tarim slowly flows had already been visited by Fathers Hue and Gabet, the explorers Prjevalski and Carey up to the Davana pass, situated a hundred and fifty kilometres to the south. But from that pass Gabriel Bonvalot and Prince Henri of Orleans, camping

sometimes at fifteen thousand feet of altitude, had ventured across virgin territories to the foot of the superb Himalayan chain.

Our itinerary lay eastwards toward Kara Nor, skirting the base of the Nan Chan mountains, behind which lies the region of Tsaidam. The railway dare not venture among the mountainous countries of the Kou-Kou-Nor, and we were on our way to the great city of Lan Tcheou along, the base of the hills.

Gloomy though the country might be, there was no reason for the passengers to be so. This glorious sun, with its rays gilding the sands of the Gobi as far as we could see, announced a perfect holiday. From Lob Nor to Kara Nor there are three hundred and fifty kilometres to run, and between the lakes we will resume the interrupted marriage of Fulk Ephrinell and Horatia Bluett, if nothing occurs to again delay their happiness.

The dining car has been again arranged for the ceremony, the witnesses are ready to resume their parts, and the happy pair cannot well be otherwise than of the same mind.

The Reverend Nathaniel Morse, in announcing that the marriage will take place at nine o'clock, presents the compliments of Mr. Ephrinell and Miss Bluett.

Major Noltitz and I, Caterna and Pan-Chao are under arms at the time stated.

Caterna did not think it his duty to resume his costume, nor did his wife. They were dressed merely for the grand dinner party which took place at eight o'clock in the evening--the dinner given by Ephrinell to his witnesses and to the chief first-class passengers. Our actor, puffing out his left cheek, informed me that he had a surprise for us at dessert. What? I thought it wise not to ask.

A little before nine o'clock the bell of the tender begins to ring. Be assured it does not announce an accident. Its joyous tinkling calls us to the dining car, and we march in procession toward the place of sacrifice.

Ephrinell and Miss Bluett are already seated at the little table in front of the worthy clergyman, and we take our places around them.

On the platforms are grouped the spectators, anxious to lose nothing of the nuptial ceremony.

My lord Faruskiar and Ghangir, who had been the object of a personal invitation, had just arrived. The assembly respectfully rises to receive them. They will sign the deed of marriage. It is a great honor, and if it were my marriage I should be proud to see the illustrious name of Faruskiar figure among the signatures to the deed.

The ceremony begins, and this time the Reverend Nathaniel Morse was able to finish his speech, so regrettably interrupted on the former

occasion.

The young people rise, and the clergyman asks them if they are mutually agreed as to marriage.

Before replying, Miss Bluett turns to Ephrinell, and says:

"It is understood that Holmes-Holme will have twenty-five per cent. of the profits of our partnership."

"Fifteen," said Ephrinell, "only fifteen."

"That is not fair, for I agree to thirty per cent, from Strong, Bulbul & Co."

"Well, let us say twenty per cent., Miss Bluett."

"Be it so, Mr. Ephrinell."

"But that is a good deal for you!" whispered Caterna in my ear.

The marriage for a moment was in check for five per cent.!

But all is arranged. The interests of the two houses have been safeguarded. The Reverend Nathaniel Morse repeats the question.

A dry "yes" from Horatia Bluett, a short "yes" from Fulk Ephrinell, and

the two are declared to be united in the bonds of matrimony.

The deed is then signed, first by them, then by the witnesses, then by Faruskiar, and the other signatures follow. At length the clergyman adds his name and flourish, and that closes the series of formalities according to rule.

"There they are, riveted for life," said the actor to me, with a little lift of his shoulder.

"For life--like two bullfinches," said the actress, who had not forgotten that these birds are noted for the fidelity of their armours.

"In China," said Pan-Chao, "it is not the bullfinch but the mandarin duck that symbolizes fidelity in marriage."

"Ducks or bullfinches, it is all one," said Caterna philosophically.

The ceremony is over. We compliment the newly married pair. We return to our occupation, Ephrinell to his accounts, Mrs. Ephrinell to her work. Nothing is changed in the train. There are only two more married people.

Major Noltitz, Pan-Chao and I go out and smoke on one of the platforms, leaving to their preparations the Caternas, who seem to be having a sort of rehearsal in their corner. Probably it is the surprise for the evening.

There is not much variety in the landscape. All along is this monotonous desert of Gobi with the heights of the Humboldt mountains on the right reaching on to the ranges of Nan Chan. The stations are few and far between, and consist merely of an agglomeration of huts, with the signal cabin standing up among them like a monument. Here the tender fills up with water and coal. Beyond the Kara Nor, where a few towns appear, the approach to China Proper, populous and laborious, becomes more evident.

This part of the desert of Gobi has little resemblance to the regions of Eastern Turkestan we crossed on leaving Kachgar. These regions are as new to Pan-Chao and Doctor Tio-King as to us Europeans.

I should say that Faruskiar no longer disdains to mingle in our conversation. He is a charming man, well informed and witty, with whom I shall become better acquainted when we reach Peking. He has already invited me to visit him at his yamen, and I will then have an opportunity of putting him to the question--that is, to the interview. He has traveled a good deal, and seems to have an especially good opinion of French journalists. He will not refuse to subscribe to the Twentieth Century. I am sure--Paris, 48 francs, Departments, 56, Foreign, 76.

While the train is running at full speed we talk of one thing and another. With regard to Kachgaria, which had been mentioned, Faruskiar gave us a few very interesting details regarding the province, which

had been so greatly troubled by insurrectionary movements. It was at this epoch that the capital, holding out against Chinese covetousness, had not yet submitted to Russian domination. Many times numbers of Celestials had been massacred in the revolts of the Turkestan chiefs, and the garrison had taken refuge in the fortress of Yanghi-Hissar.

Among these insurgent chiefs there was one, a certain Ouali-Khan-Toulla, whom I have mentioned with regard to the murder of Schlagintweit, and who for a time had become master of Kachgaria. He was a man of great intelligence, but of uncommon ferocity. And Faruskiar told us an anecdote giving us an idea of these pitiless Orientals.

"There was at Kachgar," he said, "an armorer of repute, who, wishing to secure the favors of Ouali-Khan-Toulla, made a costly sword. When he had finished his work he sent his son, a boy of ten, to present the sword, hoping to receive some recompense from the royal hand. He received it. The Khan admired the sword, and asked if the blade was of the first quality. 'Yes,' said the boy. 'Then approach!' said the Khan, and at one blow he smote off the head, which he sent back to the father with the price of the blade he had thus proved to be of excellent quality."

This story he told really well. Had Caterna heard it, he would have asked for a Turkestan opera on the subject.

The day passed without incident. The train kept on at its moderate



speed of forty kilometres an hour, an average that would have been raised to eighty had they listened to Baron Weisschnitzerdörfer. The truth is that the Chinese driver had no notion of making up the time lost between Tchertchen and Tcharkalyk.

At seven in the evening we reach Kara Nor, to stay there fifty minutes. This lake, which is not as extensive as Lob Nor, absorbs the waters of the Soule Ho, coming down from the Nan Chan mountains. Our eyes are charmed with the masses of verdure that clothe its southern bank, alive with the flight of numerous birds. At eight o'clock, when we left the station, the sun had set behind the sandhills, and a sort of mirage produced by the warming of the lower zones of the atmosphere prolonged the twilight above the horizon.

The dining car has resumed its restaurant appearance, and here is the wedding banquet, instead of the usual fare. Twenty guests have been invited to this railway love feast, and, first of them, my lord Faruskiar. But for some reason or other he has declined Ephrinell's invitation.

I am sorry for it, for I hoped that good luck would place me near him.

It occurred to me then that this illustrious name was worth sending to the office of the Twentieth Century, this name and also a few lines relative to the attack on the train and the details of the defense.

Never was information better worth sending by telegram, however much it might cost. This time there is no risk of my bringing a lecture down on

myself. There is no mistake possible, as in the case of that pretended mandarin, Yen-Lou, which I shall never forget--but then, it was in the country of the false Smerdis and that must be my excuse.

It is agreed that as soon as we arrive at Sou-Tcheou, the telegraph being repaired at the same time as the line, I will send off a despatch, which will reveal to the admiration of Europe the brilliant name of Faruskiar.

We are seated at the table. Ephrinell has done the thing as well as circumstances permit. In view of the feast, provisions were taken in at Tcharkalyk. It is not Russian cookery, but Chinese, and by a Chinese chef to which we do honor. Luckily we are not condemned to eat it with chopsticks, for forks are not prohibited at the Grand Transasiatic table.

I am placed to the left of Mrs. Ephrinell, Major Noltitz to the right of her husband. The other guests are seated as they please. The German baron, who is not the man to refuse a good dinner, is one of the guests. Sir Francis Trevelyan did not even make a sign in answer to the invitation that was tendered him.

To begin with, we had chicken soup and plovers' eggs, then swallows' nests cut in threads, stewed spawn of crab, sparrow gizzards, roast pig's feet and sauce, mutton marrow, fried sea slug, shark's fin--very gelatinous; finally bamboo shoots in syrup, and water lily roots in sugar, all the most out-of-the-way dishes, watered by Chao Hing wine,

served warm in metal tea urns.

The feast is very jolly and--what shall I say?--very confidential, except that the husband takes no notice of the wife, and reciprocally.

What an indefatigable humorist is our actor? What a continuous stream of wheezes, unintelligible for the most part, of antediluvian puns, of pure nonsense at which he laughs so heartily that it is difficult not to laugh with him. He wanted to learn a few words of Chinese, and Pan-Chao having told him that "tching-tching" means thanks, he has been tching-tching at every opportunity, with burlesque intonation.

Then we have French songs, Russian songs, Chinese songs--among others the "Shiang-Touo-Tching," the Chanson de la Reverie, in which our young Celestial repeats that the flowers of the peach tree are of finest fragrance at the third moon, and those of the red pomegranate at the fifth.

The dinner lasts till ten o'clock. At this moment the actor and actress, who had retired during dessert, made their entry, one in a coachman's overcoat, the other in a nurse's jacket, and they gave us the Sonnettes with an energy, a go, a dash--well, it would only be fair to them if Claretie, on the recommendation of Meilhac and Halevy, offers to put them on the pension list of the Comédie Française.

At midnight the festival is over. We all retire to our sleeping places.

We do not even hear them shouting the names of the stations before we

come to Kan-Tcheou, and it is between four and five o'clock in the morning that a halt of forty minutes retains us at the station of that town.

The country is changing as the railway runs south of the fortieth degree, so as to skirt the eastern base of the Nan Shan mountains. The desert gradually disappears, villages are not so few, the density of the population increases. Instead of sandy flats, we get verdant plains, and even rice fields, for the neighboring mountains spread their abundant streams over these high regions of the Celestial Empire. We do not complain of this change after the dreariness of the Kara-Koum and the solitude of Gobi. Since we left the Caspian, deserts have succeeded deserts, except when crossing the Pamir. From here to Peking picturesque sites, mountain horizons, and deep valleys will not be wanting along the Grand Transasiatic.

We shall enter China, the real China, that of folding screens and porcelain, in the territory of the vast province of Kin-Sou. In three days we shall be at the end of our journey, and it is not I, a mere special correspondent, vowed to perpetual movement, who will complain of its length. Good for Kinko, shut up in his box, and for pretty Zinca Klork, devoured by anxiety in her house in the Avenue Cha-Coual!

We halt two hours at Sou-Tcheou. The first thing I do is to run to the telegraph office. The complaisant Pan-Chao offers to be my interpreter. The clerk tells us that the posts are all up again, and that messages can be sent through to Europe.

At once I favor the Twentieth Century with the following telegram:

"Sou-Tcheou, 25th May, 2:25 P.M.

"Train attacked between Tchertchen and Tcharkalyk by the gang of the celebrated Ki-Tsang; travelers repulsed the attack and saved the Chinese treasure; dead and wounded on both sides; chief killed by the heroic Mongol grandee Faruskiar, general manager of the company, whose name should be the object of universal admiration."

If this telegram does not gratify the editor of my newspaper, well--

Two hours to visit Sou-Tcheou, that is not much.

In Turkestan we have seen two towns side by side, an ancient one and a modern one. Here, in China, as Pan-Chao points out, we have two and even three or four, as at Peking, enclosed one within the other.

Here Tai-Tchen is the outer town, and Le-Tchen the inner one. It strikes us at first glance that both look desolate. Everywhere are traces of fire, here and there pagodas or houses half destroyed, a mass of ruins, not the work of time, but the work of war. This shows that Sou-Tcheou, taken by the Mussulmans and retaken by the Chinese, has undergone the horrors of those barbarous contests which end in the destruction of buildings and the massacre of their inhabitants of every age and sex.

It is true that population rapidly increases in the Celestial Empire; more rapidly than monuments are raised from their ruins. And so Sou-Tcheou has become populous again within its double wall as in the suburbs around. Trade is flourishing, and as we walked through the principal streets we noticed the well-stocked shops, to say nothing of the perambulating pedlars.

Here, for the first time, the Caternas saw pass along between the inhabitants, who stood at attention more from fear than respect, a mandarin on horseback, preceded by a servant carrying a fringed parasol, the mark of his master's dignity.

But there is one curiosity for which Sou-Tcheou is worth a visit. It is there that the Great Wall of China ends.

After descending to the southeast toward Lan-Tcheou, the wall runs to the northeast, covering the provinces of Kian-Sou, Chan-si, and Petchili to the north of Peking. Here it is little more than an embankment with a tower here and there, mostly in ruins. I should have failed in my duty as a chronicler if I had not noticed this gigantic work at its beginning, for it far surpasses the works of our modern fortifications.

"Is it of any real use, this wall of China?" asked Major Noltitz.

"To the Chinese, I do not know," said I; "but certainly it is to our

political orators for purposes of comparison, when discussing treaties of commerce. Without it, what would become of the eloquence of our legislators?"