

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"Pekin!" shouted Popof. "All change here."

And Caterna replied with truly Parisian unction:

"I believe you, my boy!"

And we all changed.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. For people fatigued with three hundred and twelve hours of traveling, it was no time for running about the town--what do I say?--the four towns inclosed one within the other. Besides, I had plenty of time. I was going to stop some weeks in this capital.

The important thing was to find a hotel in which one could live passably. From information received I was led to believe that the hotel of Ten Thousand Dreams, near the railway station, might be sufficiently in accord with Western notions.

As to Mademoiselle Klork, I will postpone my visit till to-morrow. I will call on her before the box arrives, and even then I shall be too soon, for I shall take her the news of Kinko's death.

Major Noltitz will remain in the same hotel as I do. I have not to bid him farewell, nor have I to part with the Caternas, who are going to stay a fortnight before starting for Shanghai. As to Pan-Chao and Dr. Tio-King, a carriage is waiting to take them to the yamen in which the young Chinaman's family live. But we shall see each other again. Friends do not separate at a simple good-by, and the grip of the hand I gave him as he left the car will not be the last.

Mr. and Mrs. Ephrinell lose no time in leaving the station on business, which obliges them to find a hotel in the commercial quarter of the Chinese town. But they do not leave without receiving my compliments. Major Noltitz and I go up to this amiable couple, and the conventional politenesses are reciprocally exchanged.

"At last," said I to Ephrinell, "the forty-two packages of Strong, Bulbul & Co. have come into port. But it is a wonder the explosion of our engine did not smash your artificial teeth."

"Just so," said the American, "my teeth had a narrow escape. What adventures they have had since we left Tiflis? Decidedly this journey has been less monotonous than I expected."

"And," added the major, "you were married on the way--unless I am mistaken!"

"Wait a bit!" replied the Yankee in a peculiar tone. "Excuse me; we are in a hurry."

"We will not keep you, Mr. Ephrinell," I replied, "and to Mrs. Ephrinell and yourself allow us to say au revoir!"

"Au revoir!" replied the Americanized lady, rather more dryly at her arrival than at her departure.

Then, turning, she said:

"I have no time to wait, Mr. Ephrinell."

"Nor have I, Mrs. Ephrinell," replied the Yankee.

Mr.! Mrs.! And not so long ago they were calling each other Fulk and Horatia.

And then, without taking each other's arm, they walked out of the station. I believe he turned to the right and she to the left; but that is their affair.

There remains my No. 8, Sir Francis Trevellyan, the silent personage, who has not said a word all through the piece--I mean all through the journey. I wanted to hear his voice, if it was only for one second.

Eh! If I am not mistaken, here is the opportunity at last.

There is the phlegmatic gentleman contemptuously looking up and down

the cars. He has just taken a cigar from his yellow morocco case, but when he looks at his match-box he finds it empty.

My cigar--a particularly good one--is alight, and I am smoking it with the blessed satisfaction of one who enjoys it, and regretting that there is not a man in all China who has its equal.

Sir Francis Trevellyan has seen the light burning at the end of my cigar, and he comes towards me.

I think he is going to ask me for a light. He stretches out his hand, and I present him with my cigar.

He takes it between his thumb and forefinger, knocks off the white ash, lights up, and then, if I had not heard him ask for a light, I at least expected him to say, "Thank you, sir!"

Not at all! Sir Francis Trevellyan takes a few puffs at his own cigar, and then nonchalantly throws mine on to the platform. And then without even a bow, he walks leisurely off out of the railway station.

Did you say nothing? No, I remained astounded. He gave me neither a word nor a gesture. I was completely dumfounded at this ultra-Britannic rudeness, while Major Noltitz could not restrain a loud outburst of laughter.

Ah! If I should see this gentleman again. But never did I see again Sir

Francis Trevellyan of Trevellyan Hall, Trevellyanshire.

Half an hour afterwards we are installed at the Hotel of Ten Thousand Dreams. There we are served with a dinner in Chinese style. The repast being over--towards the second watch--we lay ourselves on beds that are too narrow in rooms with little comfort, and sleep not the sleep of the just, but the sleep of the exhausted--and that is just as good.

I did not wake before ten o'clock, and I might have slept all the morning if the thought had not occurred to me that I had a duty to fulfil. And what a duty! To call in the Avenue Cha Coua before the delivery of the unhappy case to Mademoiselle Zinca Klork.

I arise. Ah! If Kinko had not succumbed, I should have returned to the railway station--I should have assisted, as I had promised, in the unloading of the precious package. I would have watched it on to the cart, and I would have accompanied it to the Avenue Cha Coua, I would even have helped in carrying him up to Mademoiselle Zinca Klork! And what a double explosion of joy there would have been when Kinko jumped through the panel to fall into the arms of the fair Roumanian!

But no! When the box arrives it will be empty--empty as a heart from which all the blood has escaped.

I leave the Hotel of Ten Thousand Dreams about eleven o'clock, I call one of those Chinese carriages, which look like palanquins on wheels, I give the address of Mademoiselle Klork, and I am on the way.

You know, that among the eighteen provinces of China Petchili occupies the most northerly position. Formed of nine departments, it has for its capital Peking, otherwise known as Chim-Kin-Fo, an appellation which means a "town of the first order, obedient to Heaven."

I do not know if this town is really obedient to Heaven, but it is obedient to the laws of rectilinear geometry. There are four towns, square or rectangular, one within the other. The Chinese town, which contains the Tartar town, which contains the yellow town, or Houg Tching, which contains the Red Town, or Tsen-Kai-Tching, that is to say, "the forbidden town." And within this symmetrical circuit of six leagues there are more than two millions of those inhabitants, Tartars or Chinese, who are called the Germans of the East, without mentioning several thousands of Mongols and Tibetans. That there is much bustle in the streets, I can see by the obstacles my vehicle encounters at every step, itinerating peddlers, carts heavily laden, mandarins and their noisy following. I say nothing of those abominable wandering dogs, half jackals, half wolves, hairless and mangy, with deceitful eyes, threatening jaws, and having no other food than the filthy rubbish which foreigners detest. Fortunately I am not on foot, and I have no business in the Red Town, admittance to which is denied, nor in the yellow town nor even in the Tartar town.

The Chinese town forms, a rectangular parallelogram, divided north and south by the Grand Avenue leading from the Houn Ting gate to the Tien gate, and crossed east and west by the Avenue Cha-Coua, which runs from

the gate of that name to the Cpuan-Tsa gate. With this indication nothing could be easier than to find the dwelling of Mademoiselle Zinca Klork, but nothing more difficult to reach, considering the block in the roads in this outer ring.

A little before twelve I arrived at my destination. My vehicle had stopped before a house of modest appearance, occupied by artisans as lodgings, and as the signboard said more particularly by strangers.

It was on the first floor, the window of which opened on to the avenue, that the young Roumanian lived, and where, having learned her trade as a milliner in Paris, she was engaged in it at Pekin.

I go up to the first floor. I read the name of Madame Zinca Klork on a door. I knock. The door is opened.

I am in the presence of a young lady who is perfectly charming, as Kinko said. She is a blonde of from twenty-two to twenty-three years old, with the black eyes of the Roumanian type, an agreeable figure, a pleasant, smiling face. In fact, has she not been informed that the Grand Transasiatic train has been in the station ever since last evening, in spite of the circumstances of the journey, and is she not awaiting her betrothed from one moment to another?

And I, with a word, am about to extinguish this joy. I am to wither that smile.

Mademoiselle Klork is evidently much surprised at seeing a stranger in her doorway. As she has lived several years in France, she does not hesitate to recognize me as a Frenchman, and asks to what she is indebted for my visit.

I must take care of my words, for I may kill her, poor child.

"Mademoiselle Zinca--" I say.

"You know my name?" she exclaims.

"Yes, mademoiselle. I arrived yesterday by the Grand Transasiatic."

The girl turned pale; her eyes became troubled. It was evident that she feared something. Had Kinko been found in his box? Had the fraud been discovered? Was he arrested? Was he in prison?

I hastened to add:

"Mademoiselle Zinca--certain circumstances have brought to my knowledge--the journey of a young Roumanian--"

"Kinko--my poor Kinko--they have found him?" she asks in a trembling voice.

"No--no--" say I, hesitating. "No one knows--except myself. I often visited him in the luggage-van at night; we were companions, friends. I



took him a few provisions--"

"Oh! thank you, sir!" says the lady, taking me by the hands. "With a Frenchman Kinko was sure of not being betrayed, and even of receiving help! Thank you, thank you!"

I am more than ever afraid of the mission on which I have come.

"And no one suspected the presence of my dear Kinko?" she asks.

"No one."

"What would you have had us do, sir? We are not rich. Kinko was without money over there at Tiflis, and I had not enough to send him his fare. But he is here at last. He will get work, for he is a good workman, and as soon as we can we will pay the company--"

"Yes; I know, I know."

"And then we are going to get married, monsieur. He loves me so much, and I love him. We met one another in Paris. He was so kind to me. Then when he went back to Tiflis I asked him to come to me in that box. Is the poor fellow ill?"

"No, Mademoiselle Zinca, no."

"Ah! I shall be happy to pay the carriage of my dear Kinko."

"Yes--pay the carriage--"

"It will not be long now?"

"No; this afternoon probably."

I do not know what to say.

"Monsieur," says mademoiselle, "we are going to get married as soon as the formalities are complied with; and if it is not abusing your confidence, will you do us the honor and pleasure of being present?"

"At your marriage--certainly. I promised my friend Kinko I would."

Poor girl! I cannot leave her like this. I must tell her everything.

"Mademoiselle Zinca--Kinko--"

"He asked you to come and tell me he had arrived?"

"Yes--but--you understand--he is very tired after so long a journey--"

"Tired?"

"Oh! do not be alarmed--"

"Is he ill?"

"Yes--rather--rather ill--"

"Then I will go--I must see him--I pray you, sir, come with me to the station--"

"No; that would be an imprudence--remain here--remain--"

Zinca Klork looked at me fixedly.

"The truth, monsieur, the truth! Hide nothing from me--Kinko--"

"Yes--I have sad news--to give you." She is fainting. Her lips tremble. She can hardly speak.

"He has been discovered!" she says. "His fraud is known--they have arrested him--"

"Would to heaven it was no worse. We have had accidents on the road. The train was nearly annihilated--a frightful catastrophe--"

"He is dead! Kinko is dead!"

The unhappy Zinca falls on to a chair--and to employ the imaginative phraseology of the Chinese--her tears roll down like rain on an autumn

night. Never have I seen anything so lamentable. But it will not do to leave her in this state, poor girl! She is becoming unconscious. I do not know where I am. I take her hands. I repeat:

"Mademoiselle Zinca! Mademoiselle Zinca!"

Suddenly there is a great noise in front of the house. Shouts are heard. There is a tremendous to do, and amid the tumult I hear a voice.

Good Heavens! I cannot be mistaken. That is Kinko's voice!

I recognize it. Am I in my right senses?

Zinca jumps up, springs to the window, opens it, and we look out.

There is a cart at the door. There is the case, with all its inscriptions: This side up, this side down, fragile, glass, beware of damp, etc., etc. It is there--half smashed. There has been a collision. The cart has been run into by a carriage, as the case was being got down. The case has slipped on to the ground. It has been knocked in. And Kinko has jumped out like a jack-in-the-box--but alive, very much alive!

I can hardly believe my eyes! What, my young Roumanian did not perish in the explosion? No! As I shall soon hear from his own mouth, he was thrown on to the line when the boiler went up, remained there inert for a time, found himself uninjured--miraculously--kept away till he could

slip into the van unperceived. I had just left the van after looking for him in vain, and supposing that he had been the first victim of the catastrophe.

Then--oh! the irony of fate!--after accomplishing a journey of six thousand kilometres on the Grand Transasiatic, shut up in a box among the baggage, after escaping so many dangers, attack by bandits, explosion of engine, he was here, by the mere colliding of a cart and a carriage in a Pekin Street, deprived of all the good of his journey--fraudulent it may be--but really if--I know of no epithet worthy of this climax.

The carter gave a yell at the sight of a human being who had just appeared. In an instant the crowd had gathered, the fraud was discovered, the police had run up. And what could this young Roumanian do who did not know a word of Chinese, but explain matters in the sign language? And if he could not be understood, what explanation could he give?

Zinca and I ran down to him.

"My Zinca--my dear Zinca!" he exclaims, pressing the girl to his heart.

"My Kinko--my dear Kinko!" she replies, while her tears mingle with his.

"Monsieur Bombarnac!" says the poor fellow, appealing for my intervention.

"Kinko," I reply, "take it coolly, and depend on me. You are alive, and we thought you were dead."

"But I am not much better off!" he murmurs.

Mistake! Anything is better than being dead--even when one is menaced by prison, be it a Chinese prison. And that is what happens, in spite of the girl's supplications and my entreaties. And Kinko is dragged off by the police, amid the laughter and howls of the crowd.

But I will not abandon him! No, if I move heaven and earth, I will not abandon him.