

CHAPTER XXVII.

If ever the expression, "sinking in sight of port," could be used in its precise meaning, it evidently can in this case. And I must beg you to excuse me. But although a ship may sink by the side of the jetty, we must not conclude that she is lost. That Kinko's liberty is in danger, providing the intervention of myself and fellow passengers is of no avail, agreed. But he is alive, and that is the essential point.

But we must not waste an hour, for if the police is not perfect in China, it is at least prompt and expeditious. Soon caught, soon hanged--and it will not do for them to hang Kinko, even metaphorically.

I offer my arm to Mademoiselle Zinca, and I lead her to my carriage, and we return rapidly towards the Hotel of the Ten Thousand Dreams.

There I find Major Noltitz and the Caternas, and by a lucky chance young Pan-Chao, without Dr. Tio-King. Pan-Chao would like nothing better than to be our interpreter before the Chinese authorities.

And then, before the weeping Zinca, I told my companions all about Kinko, how he had traveled, how I had made his acquaintance on the journey. I told them that if he had defrauded the Transasiatic Company it was thanks to this fraud that he was able to get on to the train at Uzun Ada. And if he had not been in the train we should all have been

engulfed in the abyss of the Tjon valley.

And I enlarged on the facts which I alone knew. I had surprised Faruskiar at the very moment he was about to accomplish his crime, but it was Kinko who, at the peril of his life, with coolness and courage superhuman, had thrown on the coals, hung on to the lever of the safety valves, and stopped the train by blowing up the engine.

What an explosion there was of exclamatory ohs and ahs when I had finished my recital, and in a burst of gratitude, somewhat of the theatrical sort, our actor shouted:

"Hurrah for Kinko! He ought to have a medal!"

Until the Son of Heaven accorded this hero a green dragon of some sort, Madame Caterna took Zinca's hand, drew her to her heart and embraced her--embraced her without being able to restrain her tears. Just think of a love story interrupted at the last chapter!

But we must hasten, and as Caterna says, "all on the scene for the fifth"--the fifth act, in which dramas generally clear themselves up.

"We must not let this brave fellow suffer!" said Major Noltitz; "we must see the Grand Transasiatic people, and when they learn the facts they will be the first to stop the prosecution."

"Doubtless," I said, "for it cannot be denied that Kinko saved the

train and its passengers."

"To say nothing of the imperial treasure," added Caterna, "the millions of his majesty!"

"Nothing could be truer," said Pan-Chao. "Unfortunately Kinko has fallen into the hands of the police, and they have taken him to prison, and it is not easy to get out of a Chinese prison."

"Let us be off," I replied, "and see the company."

"See here," said Madame Caterna, "is there any need of a subscription to defray the cost of the affair?"

"The proposal does you honor, Caroline," said the actor, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Gentlemen," said pretty Zinca Klork, her eyes bathed in tears, "do save him before he is sentenced--"

"Yes, my darling," said Madame Caterna, "yes, my heart, we will save your sweetheart for you, and if a benefit performance--"

"Bravo, Caroline, bravo!" exclaimed Caterna, applauding with the vigor of the sub-chief of the claque.

We left the young Roumanian to the caresses, as exaggerated as they

were sincere, of the worthy actress. Madame Caterna would not leave her, declaring that she looked upon her as her daughter, that she would protect her like a mother. Then Pan-Chao, Major Noltitz, Caterna, and I went off to the company's offices at the station.

The manager was in his office, and we were admitted.

He was a Chinese in every acceptation of the word, and capable of every administrative Chinesery--a functionary who functioned in a way that would have moved his colleagues in old Europe to envy.

Pan-Chao told the story, and, as he understood Russian, the major and I took part in the discussion.

Yes! There was a discussion. This unmistakable Chinaman did not hesitate to contend that Kinko's case was a most serious one. A fraud undertaken on such conditions, a fraud extending over six thousand kilometres, a fraud of a thousand francs on the Grand Transasiatic Company and its agents.

We replied to this Chinesing Chineer that it was all very true, but that the damage had been inconsiderable, that if the defrauder had not been in the train he could not have saved it at the risk of his life, and at the same time he could not have saved the lives of the passengers.

Well, would you believe it? This living China figure gave us to understand that from a certain point of view it would have been better

to regret the deaths of a hundred victims--

Yes! We knew that! Perish the colonies and all the passengers rather than a principle!

In short, we got nothing. Justice must take its course against the fraudulent Kinko.

We retired while Caterna poured out all the locutions in his marine and theatrical vocabulary.

What was to be done?

"Gentlemen," said Pan-Chao, "I know how things are managed in Peking and the Celestial Empire. Two hours will not elapse from the time Kinko is arrested to the time he is brought before the judge charged with this sort of crime. He will not only be sent to prison, but the bastinado--"

"The bastinado--like that idiot Zizel in *Si j'etais Roi*?" asked the actor.

"Precisely," replied Pan-Chao.

"We must stop that abomination," said Major Noltitz.

"We can try at the least," said Pan-Chao. "I propose we go before the court when I will try and defend the sweetheart of this charming

Roumanian, and may I lose my face if I do not get him off."

That was the best, the only thing to do. We left the station, invaded a vehicle, and arrived in twenty minutes before a shabby-looking shanty, where the court was held.

There was a crowd. The affair had got abroad. It was known that a swindler had come in a box in a Grand Transasiatic van free, gratis, and for nothing from Tiflis to Peking. Every one wished to see him; every one wanted to recognize the features of this genius--it was not yet known that he was a hero.

There he is, our brave companion, between two rascally looking policemen, yellow as quinces. These fellows are ready to walk him off to prison at the judge's order, and to give him a few dozen strokes on the soles of his feet if he is condemned to that punishment.

Kinko is thoroughly disheartened, which astonishes me on the part of one I know to be so energetic. But as soon as he sees us his face betrays a ray of hope.

At this moment the carter, brought forward by the police, relates the affair to a good sort of fellow in spectacles, who shakes his head in anything but a hopeful way for the prisoner, who, even if he were as innocent as a new-born child, could not defend himself, inasmuch as he did not know Chinese.

Then it is that Pan-Chao presents himself. The judge recognized him and smiled. In fact, our companion was the son of a rich merchant in Pekin, a tea merchant in the Toung-Tien and Soung-Fong-Cao trade. And these nods of the judge's head became more sympathetically significant.

Our young advocate was really pathetic and amusing. He interested the judge, he excited the audience with the story of the journey, he told them all about it, and finally he offered to pay the company what was due to them.

Unfortunately the judge could not consent. There had been material damages, moral damages, etc., etc.

Thereupon Pan-Chao became animated, and although we understood nothing he said, we guessed that he was speaking of the courage of Kinko, of the sacrifice he had made for the safety of the travelers, and finally, as a supreme argument, he pleaded that his client had saved the imperial treasure.

Useless eloquence? Arguments were of no avail with this pitiless magistrate, who had not acquitted ten prisoners in his life. He spared the delinquent the bastinado; but he gave him six months in prison, and condemned him in damages against the Grand Transasiatic Company. And then at a sign from this condemning machine poor Kinko was taken away.

Let not my readers pity Kinko's fate. I may as well say at once that everything was arranged satisfactorily.

Next morning Kinko made a triumphal entry into the house in the Avenue Cha-Coua, where we were assembled, while Madame Caterna was showering her maternal consolations on the unhappy Zinca Klork.

The newspapers had got wind of the affair. The Chi Bao of Peking and the Chinese Times of Tien-Tsin had demanded mercy for the young Roumanian. These cries for mercy had reached the feet of the Son of Heaven--the very spot where the imperial ears are placed. Besides, Pan-Chao had sent to his majesty a petition relating the incidents of the journey, and insisting on the point that had it not been for Kinko's devotion, the gold and precious stones would be in the hands of Faruskiar and his bandits. And, by Buddha! that was worth something else than six months in prison.

Yes! It was worth 15,000 taels, that is to say, more than 100,000 francs, and in a fit of generosity the Son of Heaven remitted these to Kinko with the remittal of his sentence.

I decline to depict the joy, the happiness, the intoxication which this news brought by Kinko in person, gave to all his friends, and particularly to the fair Zinca Klork. These things are expressible in no language--not even in Chinese, which lends itself so generously to the metaphorical.

And now my readers must permit me to finish with my traveling companions whose numbers have figured in my notebook.

Nos. 1 and 2, Fulk Ephrinell and Miss Horatia Bluett: not being able to agree regarding the various items stipulated in their matrimonial contract, they were divorced three days after their arrival in Peking. Things were as though the marriage had never been celebrated on the Grand Transasiatic, and Miss Horatia Bluett remained Miss Horatia Bluett. May she gather cargoes of heads of hair from Chinese polls; and may he furnish with artificial teeth every jaw in the Celestial Empire!

No. 3, Major Noltitz: he is busy at the hospital he has come to establish at Peking on behalf of the Russian government, and when the hour for separation strikes, I feel that I shall leave a true friend behind me in these distant lands.

Nos. 4 and 5, the Caternas: after a stay of three weeks in the capital of the Celestial Empire, the charming actor and actress set out for Shanghai, where they are now the great attraction at the French Residency.

No. 6, Baron Weisschnitzerdörfer, whose incommensurable name I write for the last time: well, not only did the globe-trotter miss the steamer at Tien-Tsin, but a month later he missed it at Yokohama; six weeks after that he was shipwrecked on the coast of British Columbia, and then, after being thrown off the line between San Francisco and New York, he managed to complete his round of the world in a hundred and eighty-seven days instead of thirty-nine.

Nos. 9 and 10, Pan-Chao and Dr. Tio-King: what can I say except that Pan-Chao is always the Parisian you know, and that if he comes to France we shall meet at dinner at Durand's or Marguery's. As to the doctor, he has got down to eating only the yolk of an egg a day, like his master, Cornaro, and he hopes to live to a hundred and two as did the noble Venetian.

No. 8, Sir Francis Trevellyan, and No. 12, Seigneur Faruskiar: I have never heard of the one who owes me an apology and a cigar, nor have I heard that the other has been hanged. Doubtless, the illustrious bandit, having sent in his resignation of the general managership of the Grand Transasiatic, continues his lucrative career in the depths of the Mongol provinces.

Now for Kinko, my No. 11: I need hardly say that my No. 11 was married to Zinca Klork with great ceremony. We were all at the wedding, and if the Son of Heaven had richly endowed the young Roumanian, his wife received a magnificent present in the name of the passengers of the train he had saved.

That is the faithful story of this journey. I have done my best to do my duty as special correspondent all down the line, and perhaps my editors may be satisfied, notwithstanding the slip or two you have heard about.

As to me, after spending three weeks in Peking, I returned to France by sea.

And now I have to make a confession, which is very painful to my self-esteem. The morning after I arrived in the Chinese capital I received a telegram thus worded, in reply to the one I had sent from Lan-Tcheou:

Claudius Bombarnac,
Pekin, China.

Twentieth Century requests its correspondent, Claudius Bombarnac, to present its compliments and respects to the heroic Seigneur Faruskiar.

But I always say that this telegram never reached him, so that he has been spared the unpleasantness of having to reply to it.

THE END.