

where the weird, uncanny wailings of restless crouching heathens struck terror and then wonderment to the hearts of many in the crowd. Along the slanting and shaky balconies the visitors ventured now, only to be drawn in different directions where a trap-door in the wall happened to be open and where a peep could be taken of the sight within. There the rank-and-file of the coolie class was sleeping or doddering about—poor wretched wretches, who cared not how they existed in the flesh as long as they could revel in the fancies which their never-idle pipes crowded into diseased and stupefied brains!

A short, piercing shriek, cut short as if the one who set it up had been snatched away—the banging of a door and the startled visitors rushed back to the point of entrance in great alarm. Egbert Thorne had been showing two of his guests the mechanism of the average dope fiend's pipe, which a guide had secured for inspection, and his wife had passed on with others of the party to a bend in the balcony upon which they stood. He walked back hastily and demanded of the guides to know what the cause of the excitement might be.

"Where is Mrs Thorne?" he exclaimed, as he ran his eye madly over the crowd, and then looked about him in desperate haste. "Where is my wife—where is she—come—find her!" He snatched the nearest guide and dragged him down the balcony on the run. The ladies screamed and the men turned pale. A dozen trap-doors flew down and listless faces were stuck out into the court.

"Mrs Thorne! Where can she be! She is gone!" One of the young women faints.

In a perfect fury and insane with apprehension, poor Egbert Thorne raced from point to point in the crazy court, still dragging the protesting guide after him, and shouting like a maniac for the woman he could not find. Along one balcony and down another he raced, calling and cursing, and with each moment his frenzy grew apace. The panic became complete. Every available foot of ground in the place was gone over, and then, like a tiger at bay, the bewildered husband drew himself up at one end of the court and shrieked defiance to the denizens of the chamber. He grabbed the smaller of the three guides and hurled him to the balcony beneath. He struck the other down before him, and threw his weight against a door that fell with a crash and buried a smoking heathen beneath it. Another door, and another, he battered down, and now his friends were helping him, crazed almost as much as he. He cried aloud the name of his wife and tore the flesh of his hands into shreds as he frantically clawed at the doors and partitions about him, and wrestled rotten timbers from their place. He dove into this den and then into that, and swept down whoever stood in his way. He called and called, and hoarsely urged his companions to aid him. He ran from one point to another in blind and desperate helplessness, and pounded at the walls with terrible strength! He begged, threatened, cursed, wept and prayed, and then, with the blood streaming from his face and hands he staggered toward the low door through which he had entered and fell, fainting, as he reached it.

All Hongkong soon knew of the sensational occurrence in the Chinese coolie quarter, and a great public sympathy was shown for Egbert Thorne. A squad of police and detectives had rescued the party that night, and a strong effort had been made to locate Wung Hi and his colleagues, and to frustrate their efforts to abduct the American's wife. But the lion who deals with a snake is at a disadvantage, and thus were the energetic peace officers of Hongkong handicapped in the quarter where treachery was the life's study of every inhabitant—when it came to a matter of contention! Hours lengthened into days, and days into weeks, but Wung Hi was never found, and the men who scoured the city for him could not even carry encouragement to the frenzied husband who searched and waited and aged under the terrible strain!

The Egbert Thorne of former days ceased to be. A bent and frowning fellow with a drawn face that reflected the agony that must have been within his soul passed up the streets of Hongkong now scarcely knowing his best friend. The office in Lower Hongkong passed to other hands, the

pretty cottage in the better quarter, with its quaint angles and dainty settings, went for a low figure, and the environments of old were exchanged for the influences of a solitary, heart-broken existence which had found its beginning in the very heyday of a happy career.

Pitiful friends sought at first to cheer and encourage Egbert Thorne, but their efforts accomplished nothing, and little by little they grew lax and then indifferent—and then drifted away.

The topic was worn threadbare by the gossips, and it took but a short time for the outside world to relegate the whole affair into oblivion. Then almost everybody forgot Egbert Thorne. Prosperity had fed the world's flame of friendship for the man—adversity had put it out!

It was with but momentary interest and mild enthusiasm that the community which ten years ago had been fired and thrown into a state of upheaval over the outrageous abduction of Mrs Egbert Thorne accepted the intelligence one day that a poor wanderer in the country districts, who had reached the home of a missionary, had proved to be the once-loved and lauded leader of Hongkong's most fashionable set. There was one being in the English port, however, who fell upon his knees when he heard of it and thanked God for the restoration—and that was Egbert Thorne, who, aged and embittered, had dragged out a back-street existence—waiting, waiting, waiting! He sped to the point from which the news proceeded—but what cared the world for the meeting and for the story that was at best but the sequel to a strange incident of long ago.

The story, as the press got it, made a most readable item, but where a public fever had once raged but a faint flush now passed, and when the newsmongers had run the thing to earth once more, it was done for—all time to come! Better, perhaps, that things had thus changed, and that but few remembered Egbert Thorne, for the conclusion of that tragic event of years ago which involved two lives could then be worked out, far beyond the range of that lens which public opinion is wont to focus upon incidents of the kind. Perhaps, after all, a divinity, in mercy and forethought had provided for all.

When the deadened eyes of Egbert Thorne gazed upon the saddened face of his wife and his trembling arms held her wasted body close to him once more, the story of years in sorrow and of years in pain had been told—but that was the story of immortal love, and not the commonplace tale which reached the outside world, explaining, as it did, that Wung Hi had shipped his captive out of Hongkong in spite of the vigilance of officials, but had been unable to follow himself, because of a certain opposition to him which arose among the highbinders who looked upon his act with disfavour.

Thorne sat beside a low couch, and his grayed hair all but touched that of his failing, unnerved wife, as he held her withered hand and listened to the details of the awful parting. Wung Hi had seized and bound the helpless woman in an instant, and, aided by others, had carried her through long passageways into the open air. He had sent his companions on then, and had promised to overtake them and pay them well, but had returned to notify his secret society before he himself set out. The captive woman had been conveyed in haste and with due caution to a district far to the north, and there her guards had quarrelled and fought a battle which resulted ultimately in the death of both. Wung Hi had failed to keep his promise, and the conspirators disagreed as to the same, one favouring a plan to liberate the woman, the other declaring that death would be the penalty for the one who failed to wait for powerful Wung Hi. Mrs Thorne had received good treatment from the Chinese, who feared Wung Hi, her "owner," and she had strength enough left to make her way to a village, where a poor Portuguese family had taken her in, and where she had soon afterward fallen ill. A raging fever had been fought by the good-hearted settlers in an ineffectual way, and a terrible sickness had overcome her. When months had gone by, and the faithful nursing of her protectors had baffled the efforts of Death to take her, she had come out of the ordeal—deprived of memory! A lapse of years had followed, of which she remembered nothing, and they had continued to care for her. Then little by little she had regained her better reason, and finally one day she came to realise who and where she was, and she had begged the simple folk about her that they take her back home. They brought her to the missionary then, weak and broken-hearted, and there in turn the good man who greeted her attended to her wants and notified the world of her presence.

The shock—the very joy of meeting after all this—brought on the same dread malady, and this time it preyed not upon a strong and vigorous woman, but upon a weak and failing being who had been torn and seared with misfortune and grief, and left by the plodding years stripped of her womanly strength.

Thorne rallied the remnants of his small means and secured the best medical aid he could get. And when the struggle had finally ended one night, with a blessing from her lips for him, and his great arms holding her up, he had stooped there until those about him had taken him away by force—talking to her and telling her of his love for her, and letting the burning tears that streamed down his wrinkled cheeks fall upon the ruffled gown that hid her pure, white throat, and drop upon her pale and lifeless face.

Of the few who followed the details that led up to Thorne's last and

greatest misfortune, there were some who marvelled much that the crushed and disheartened man should return at once to the scene of his former troubles. But back he did come, and once more the observers saw his bent figure as he hurried up deserted streets and walked by himself in the outskirts of Hongkong. The wise ones said now that he was waiting once more—this time for Wung Hi. But Thorne made a confidant of nobody, and that was mere speculation.

It was early spring, and Thorne had returned one evening from one of his long walks in the country. He found his seat in the cheap restaurant where he had his meals nowadays, and, as he hung his hat upon a peg he noticed a well-dressed man of advanced years, who had taken a place directly opposite him. Thorne ordered his meal and paid no further attention to the stranger, although he inwardly marvelled that a man of such prosperous appearance should have hunted up this remote restaurant. He would, thought Thorne, have much better graced some up-town cafe.

"You will pardon me, sir," remarked the stranger when Thorne had quite dismissed him from his mind, and was busy with his meal. "But you are Mr Egbert Thorne, are you not?"

Thorne eyed the speaker with some suspicion, and replied even cautiously—"Yes."

"Well, it will be difficult perhaps for you to understand just why I address you thus, but I have come a long way to see you, and I hope you will have confidence in my motives. I had a hard time in locating you."

"What do you want?"

"That is not easily explained, Mr Thorne, but I want first to state that I belong to a secret society which has sent me to you, and I would like to have you promise that, in the event of your failing to take an interest in the proposition I am about to make to you, or if you conclude that our attitude is an unwarranted one, you will positively regard this as confidential and say nothing of the interview."

"I fail to see how I could say anything about it when I do not even know who you are—much less the identity of the society you speak of. But why do you come to me?"

"I will set your mind at rest as to who I am. I do not think we ever met, but possibly we have heard of each other." The stranger handed a card to Thorne. "Mr C. J. Manning, Manager, Second Bank of British, Hongkong Branch, China," was engraved upon it in neat lettering.

"Yes, yes. I know who you are, sir. I was once in business here, years ago."

"I recall the fact." "I am pleased to know you. But how comes it that you are hunting me up in an out-of-the-way restaurant?"

"May I have the promise I asked for?"

"Most assuredly—now that I know who you are."

"Then I can explain in part, at least." The man of business poured

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PUBLIC APOLOGY.

10, Howe-gate, Hawick, Scotland,
18th March, 1899.

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(Signed) ROBERT THOMPSON.

Our Agents, Messrs. T. H. HALL & Co., AUCKLAND, have our powers of Attorney to take proceedings against any parties infringing our Trade Mark, "Bermaline."

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