
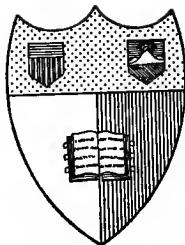


AN 
ARMY
BOY IN
PEKIN



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U. S. ARMY

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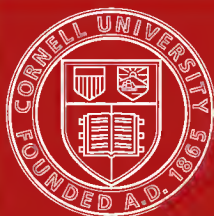
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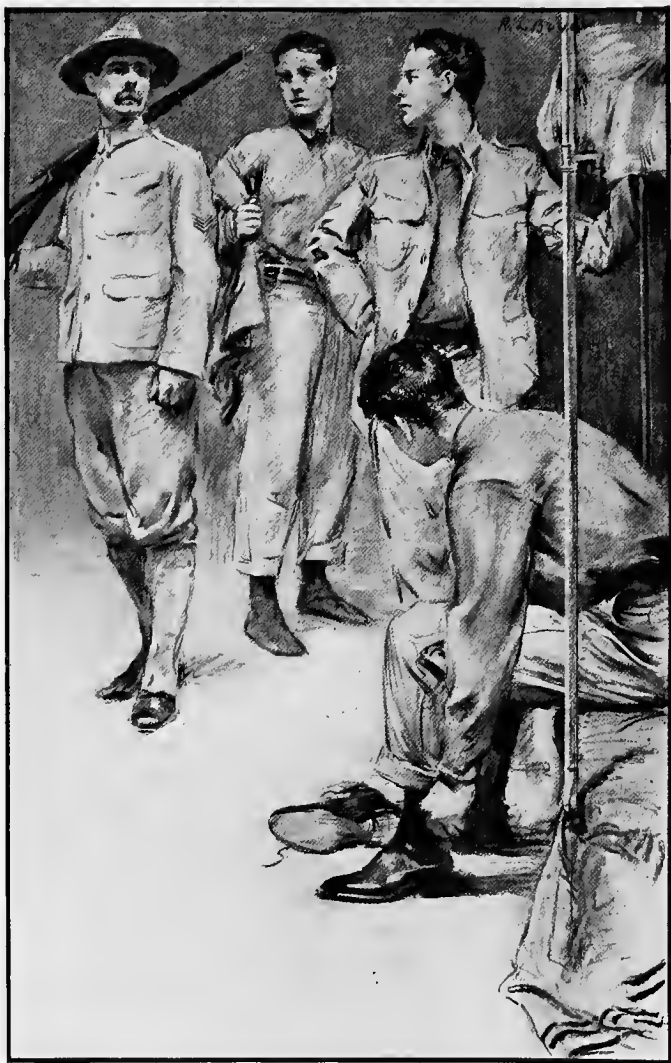
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“GET READY FOR PARADE”

AN ARMY BOY IN PEKIN



By

CAPTAIN C. E. KILBOURNE, U. S. ARMY

Illustrated by R. L. BOYER



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To

*Brigadier-General Aaron S. Daggett,
U. S. Army, formerly Colonel, Fourteenth
U. S. Infantry, whose high principles and
soldierly qualities have left so deep an
impression on those who served under his
command, this story of an expedition, to
the success of which his judgment and en-
ergy so largely contributed, is respectfully
dedicated*

Introduction

THE gathering of the nations for the relief of Peking in 1900, the deeds done and the hardships suffered, form one of the most dramatic incidents of our own or any other period.

In the pages that follow the author has endeavored to tell the story from the point of view of the soldier in the ranks. The call to the front, the enthusiasm of the troops, the difficulties of the march, and the various battles, have all been described from the writer's best recollection of them as they occurred. If any inaccuracy has crept in, the reader is asked to remember that this story is intended to convey only the impressions of one of the many who could see but a limited portion of the field; to that extent it is an accurate description.

It is regretted that the tale could not be told without some reference to the horrors of cruelty inflicted upon the helpless missionaries by the excited Chinese, and that a true picture necessitated some description of the murderous wave of anarchy that swept over Peking as the victorious army approached.

Concerning the personal incidents, it may be

INTRODUCTION

said that few needed any call on the imagination. Not all happened to any one man, but each is founded on fact, and if some have been enlarged, others have been correspondingly reduced. In the Orient, during the opening years of this century, many an American found opportunity for stirring adventure which over thirty years of peace had denied him at home. This story is the first of a series based upon the events of those crowded years.

Contents

I.	ORDERS FOR THE FRONT	11
II.	SERGEANT HOYLE REPORTS FOR DUTY	22
III.	A DAY IN NAGASAKI	34
IV.	THE FIGHT AT MOGI	45
V.	THE GATHERING OF THE HOSTS	55
VI.	A NIGHT IN TIENTSIN	67
VII.	ON TO PEKIN	78
VIII.	A NIGHT ON OUTPOST	91
IX.	THE BAPTISM OF FIRE	104
X.	THE BATTLE OF YANGTSUN	118
XI.	HARRY DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF—TWICE	131
XII.	TREACHERY	144
XIII.	SERGEANT HOYLE SCORES AGAIN	159
XIV.	DON PAGE AT BAY	172
XV.	THE TOWN AT THE CROSSROADS	186
XVI.	THE ENGLISH WAR CORRESPONDENT	198
XVII.	THE HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW	215
XVIII.	THE ODDS BECOME TOO GREAT	229
XIX.	A CHINESE INQUISITION	244
XX.	THE ALLIED ARMIES APPROACH PEKIN	260
XXI.	PEKIN'S ORGY OF BLOOD	276
XXII.	CAPTAIN O'HARA HEARS THE TRUTH	288
XXIII.	A BATTLE WITHIN A BATTLE	303
XXIV.	SUCCESS	317

Illustrations

	PAGE
“GET READY FOR PARADE”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE BOX CAME DOWN WITH A CRASH	30
“AREN’T YOU AMERICANS?”	70
A COLUMN OF EARTH AND SMOKE ROSE	133
THEY CAME ON WITH A RUSH	182
THE CHINAMAN APPROACHED WARILY	239
“BETTER NOT, SERGEANT”	308

An Army Boy in Peking

CHAPTER I

ORDERS FOR THE FRONT

It was an afternoon in July. Manila lay steaming under a sweltering sun which had dispelled the drenching clouds of the forenoon.

In a squad room of the old Cuartel Meisic a section of Company "H," of the Fourteenth Infantry, then forming a part of the provost guard of Manila, were trying to get what rest the heat permitted before the hour set for the evening regimental parade. Brawny figures lay on the bunks, some engaging in desultory conversation, others reading, and a few asleep. At the end of the squad room, cleaning his rifle, sat a weather-beaten old soldier. On the sleeves of his khaki blouse, buttoned to the neck, were the chevrons of a sergeant. Intent on his task, he alone, in spite of being fully dressed, seemed oblivious to the heat and humidity. He paid no attention to the conversation of the men around him, which was of the situation in China, where the Boxer uprising

AN ARMY BOY

and the attacks on foreign ministers, missionaries and others, had resulted in armed intervention by the nations of the world.

There was a brisk step on the graveled walk and a young soldier stepped through the door. He cast smiling glances right and left at his lethargic comrades.

"Well, boys, the old Fourteenth is in it again!"

"What!" yelled twenty different voices at once, as many pairs of khaki-clad legs, whirling through the air, brought stockinged feet to the floor.

"Yes," said the first speaker, "I thought I'd put a stop to some of this bunk fatigue¹ that seems so popular in Company 'H' of late."

"Aw-w, rats," disgustedly, "he's only joshing."

"No, fellows, this is no joke. I don't suppose the commanding officer's orderly should be giving away state secrets, but you'll hear of it in a few hours, anyhow. Not more than ten minutes ago, while I was maneuvering around the colonel's chair, one of the commanding general's aides came over with a memorandum for him. I saw the old man's jaw harden as he read it, and heard him say, 'Please tell the general that the Fourteenth Infantry can be ready to sail for China by this hour to-morrow, if necessary.' The aide seemed right

¹ Bunk fatigue—soldier slang, meaning lying on one's bunk during the day.

IN PEKIN

pleased, and, from what he told the colonel, I judge we are in for a lively time."

"Hooray! This beats police duty in Manila a whole lot. Say, boys, some of these bosque¹ runners will throw fits when they think of the way they've been calling us coffee coolers."²

"Yes," said a sad voice from a corner of the squad room. "It's all right for us to be throwing congratulations at each other, but what I want to know is what these Manila people are going to do without me."

"Reckon they'll do any other easy mark that they find with coin enough to interest them," said the company wag.

"Aw—go on," said the victim, as the laugh died down. "Your wit always was a pretty cheap sort. I've got a brother that can get off a better gag in a minute than you can think up in a day."

"From all I hear of that brother, Willy, and see of you, I figure he got all the wit of the family."

"You men get ready for parade," said the old sergeant, who had listened with leaden countenance both to the news and to the chaffing.

In the comparative silence that followed, the

¹ Bosque—unsettled country, generally densely wooded.

² Coffee coolers—soldier slang, a term of reproach applied to those serving in a city while there is fighting in the field.

AN ARMY BOY

soldier who had brought the news made his way to his bunk. He was a youngster of a figure slight but well set up, and, from his carefully creased campaign hat to his polished tan shoes, his uniform showed the care of a natural soldier. His face was a handsome one, and, in its expression, the repression of a disciplined life struggled with a natural love of fun. No one could fail to appreciate that he was of good parentage, of a class so frequently found in the ranks of the United States Army, especially in stirring times.

"Well, Harry, old chum, what do you think of it?" he asked another young soldier who occupied the bunk next his, as he sat down and removed his hat and spotless gloves.

"It's a fine thing for us," replied the other. "Little enough chance we have as long as the regiment is on duty here in Manila. A fellow cannot attract much favorable attention raiding Chinese gambling joints and running in cocheros¹ for cruelty to animals. I have been sick of police duty for quite a while, and these last six months haven't seemed to advance us an inch toward the commissions we enlisted for. But this is a chance."

"You are right, Kearny," broke in the old sergeant, whose preparations for the parade were

¹ Cochero—Spanish for coachman.

IN PEKIN

completed. "If you two youngsters cannot get your grade now it'll be because you don't deserve it. But remember, boys, it's a big thing you're going up against. I served in Cuba when two weeks made a wreck of our fine army, and, if I don't miss my guess, this China campaign will make us forget all about the Spanish War."

"But, sergeant, I didn't think the Chinese amounted to much as soldiers."

"They haven't so far, but there's millions of them, and the country is aroused for the first time, and seems united. You can't tell me that that foxy old empress isn't favoring those Boxer chaps. No Chink has any use for a foreigner."

"Admiral Seymour's expedition seems to bear out what you say."

"Yes, he started for Peking, but was mighty glad to get back to Tientsin with half his men. The papers say that the Chinks followed him up and are getting thicker every day."

"Do you think the legations can hold out till we get there?"

"Can't say—they've quite a bunch of marines there, and the civilians will fight hard rather than see those wild Chinamen get in among their women and children. A nervy crowd can hold a barricade for a long time. We can only hope and hustle."

AN ARMY BOY

“Isn't it a pity we sent the first battalion home this spring?”

“No, my boy, I don't think so. Remember that it was only the sick fellows who left, though they did call it a battalion. We have two seasoned battalions here of six hundred rifles each. I think the old man will be satisfied with us, and it'll be queer if we don't put the star of a general on his shoulder, where it should have been long ago.”

“You think the colonel will make a good leader?”

“Think? I know it. There's lots of these guard-house lawyers¹ who grumble about him because he has such a heavy hand. But I tell you, Colonel Darnall is a soldier. When he took this regiment it was one of the loosest outfits, officers and men, that I ever served with, and look at it now. We've got discipline here. Those who want to do their duty can do it, and the others mighty soon find they have to. You mark my words—in two months' time there'll be few who won't be willing to go anywhere with the old man.”²

“I'm glad Captain O'Hara is still with the company.”

“And there you talk sense. He's a fine officer

¹ Guard-house lawyers—soldier slang, meaning enlisted men who become acquainted with military law through being continually in the guard house for misconduct.

² Old man—a soldier's term for the commanding officer.

IN PEKIN

and knows his business. He's got a hard eye and the Irish tongue of him is pretty biting at times, but he'll hold the company together where some might fail. If there's rations within ten miles you can bet there'll be full stomachs in Company 'H.'"

"He's from the ranks himself, I've heard."

"He is. I mind when he joined, and an officer who goes through that school is all right. Not that I don't like the West Pointers. They're a fine lot of youngsters, and I'll back them any time. But Captain O'Hara don't need any backing; he's a whole company in himself when he gets started. That's why I like you boys—starting in at the bottom and working up. If it's a helping hand you need in this business, you may look to me. Well—there goes attention. Get out there, men, and line up."

The section streamed from the squad room, united with the others, and, at the sounding of assembly, the eight companies formed ranks. One hundred and fifty seasoned men to each company, neatly dressed in the uniform of the tropics, they made a fine appearance.

Donald Page, the orderly for the day, hastened to place the flags to mark the turning-points for the review, then returned to his post at the commanding officer's quarters. As will have been gathered from his conversation, he was not in the

AN ARMY BOY

ranks with any intention of remaining there. He and his roommate, Harry Kearny, had graduated from the Virginia Military Institute a year before, and failing the influence to secure appointments to West Point, had enlisted in the ranks with the idea of competing for commissions when their two-year probation was over. It had been a hard year, but the boys had stood it cheerfully as a means to an end. Their known position as candidates for commissioned rank had separated them somewhat from their fellows, who were, as a general rule, of lesser education. Jealousy on the part of those of small nature had caused frequent petty annoyances, especially from a few of the poorer non-commissioned officers. But some good friends had been made, notably the old veteran, Sergeant Sypher, and their comrades were, in the main, good-natured, while rough and boisterous.

The hardest thing they had had to bear was the fact that the regiment had been ordered from the line into Manila, on duty with the provost guard, just before they joined. Neither had ever heard a hostile bullet, and the ill-natured among their messmates frequently twitted them with this when referring to their ambitions for the shoulder-straps. Well—that would soon be over. A few weeks more and they would have their chance. Don drew a long breath as the future loomed large so

IN PEKIN

close ahead, and, with the memory of the sweet-faced mother at home, breathed a prayer that he might be steadfast to do his full duty and yet live through it.

The regiment formed. The band counter-marched while the colonel took his place in front of the center. A veteran of the Civil War, of several Indian campaigns, and of the Spanish War, he yet bore himself like a young man. A short gray beard covered an uncompromising jaw; deep-set gray eyes looked steadily out from beneath a broad, high forehead. Conscious strength seemed to surround him, and Don felt a little thrill as he realized that he was to be led on this, his first campaign, by such a man.

The troops presented arms and the adjutant took post behind the regimental commander. Custom required the latter to drill the regiment at this point in the ceremony, but Colonel Darnall brought them at once to the order and addressed them. There was no apparent effort, yet his voice was plainly audible to every soldier.

“Orders have been issued, and will be published to-morrow, directing this regiment to proceed to China, there to join with the Allied Armies in an attempt to capture Peking and raise the siege of the legations. There is much to be done by way of preparation and we have little time. Imme-

AN ARMY BOY

diately after parade all officers will assemble at headquarters for instructions. After supper company officers will supervise the preparations of their companies for the field. The duty put upon us is a serious one, and I wish to impress upon each member of this regiment that the fullest performance of it will be exacted of him. All men who have any physical defect, however trifling, must report the same to the surgeon to-morrow morning. Remember, personal wishes and ambition must give way to the general good, and a sick man is not only useless but takes others from their duty to care for him. This campaign will be one where courage, earnestness of purpose and physical endurance will all be needed ; lacking any one of the three you will fail. I will state also that I have never gone into a campaign with a body of men in whom I had greater confidence."

An irrepressible cheer, sternly and promptly checked, broke from the ranks. The parade was completed, the companies marching in review past the colonel, who uncovered as the colors passed him. As ranks broke, all restraint gave way. Cheer after cheer burst from a thousand throats, hats were thrown in the air, and men danced, hugging each other like bears. Don saw just the ghost of a smile in the colonel's eyes as he turned away, and an almost imperceptible twitching of his lips.

IN PEKIN

“Get your supper, orderly, and report to me again at eight o'clock.”

“Very good, sir.”

Don hurried to the company mess hall, eager to join in the excited talk of his comrades. And there was excitement enough. No one would have dreamed that, of the hundred and fifty laughing men crowded around the tables, certainly more than half, in their secret minds, were thinking of the mother whose heart would sink as she read of the orders to the Fourteenth, or of the wife and little ones whose monthly allotment¹ of pay would cease with the life of the soldier husband and father. Such thoughts, while ever present in an army, are never spoken of in the early stages of a war. Later the soldier, having proven his courage, may dare to acknowledge his fears.

¹ Allotment—an arrangement by which a part of a soldier's pay may, at his request, be paid direct to his family.

CHAPTER II

SERGEANT HOYLE REPORTS FOR DUTY

DON'S spirit was in accord with the animated scene. He looked around for Harry, and found that the latter had reserved a stool next his own.

"The colonel's little talk had a lot in a few words, didn't it?" he remarked, as he took his seat. "And say, he almost smiled when he heard the cheering as the ranks broke. Sergeant Sypher is right about him. He's a martinet in garrison, but I feel sure he'll make a great leader in the field."

"Yes, I reckon if he gets a man killed, the chap will die realizing that it was necessary. How long are you off for?"

"Have to report back at eight. I suppose it will be a busy night at headquarters."

"That's too bad," said Harry. "I had hoped we might get down-town to-night."

"Well, there'll be a couple of hours after supper free; but I guess I'll have to cut out any farewell round of Manila. There will be lots of excitement to-night, too."

Their conversation was interrupted by a stir at

IN PEKIN

one end of the room, as a soldier entered and made his way to where the first sergeant sat. He was a tall man and of powerful build, though a little overfleshy. His head sat well on his broad shoulders. His face was handsome, though coarse, and the heavy, undershot jaw gave him an expression of determination that was not contradicted by the bold black eyes and rather cruel mouth.

"Sergeant Hoyle," muttered Harry.

"Hush!" said Don. "Listen. I hope he is not going with us."

But Sergeant Hoyle's first words dissipated the hope.

"I report for duty with the company, sergeant," he said.

"All right," responded the first sergeant. "How about the others?"

"Same with them. Every man belonging to the regiment who has been detached on special duty is ordered to rejoin the colors."

"We'll need 'em. Stand by to go with me to the captain after supper."

"By Jove! This is hard luck, Harry," whispered Don. "He'll get me into trouble if he can, and you too, for he classes you with me."

"His being told by the first sergeant to go with him to the captain looks as though he might take over his old job as company clerk."

AN ARMY BOY

"I suppose so; and in that position he has the captain's ear and can make things pretty hard if he tries. We have been free of him for so long that I had almost forgotten the way he made our first few months miserable. It rather takes the ginger out of me."

"Pshaw! If we do our duty up to the handle he can't do anything. I figure we'll get along all right."

"Don't be too sure. You know it takes only one court martial to disqualify an enlisted man going up for a commission."

"True enough."

"And with a non-com¹ 'laying for' a private, the latter doesn't stand much show. There are so many little things a fellow may be caught up on."

"Why would you never tell me the full facts of the difficulty between you two?"

"It's an old story—a thing that happened when we were in the same prep school. It wouldn't do me any good to bring it up against him—in fact as long as he is doing his duty to the satisfaction of the captain, I'd get no thanks for doing it. From the way he treats me I'm sure that, were the tables turned, he'd see that the story got out, but I don't care to be a tattler."

¹ Non-com—an abbreviation for non-commissioned officer (sergeants and corporals).

IN PEKIN

“ If you have anything much against him, he takes a long chance in running it over you.”

“ No—he knows me well enough to feel sure that I’ll not try to get even that way. I must take what satisfaction I can in the knowledge that my presence makes him as uncomfortable as his does me.”

“ Was it a fight? ”

“ No. But I can tell you, Harry, if he starts his old hazing tactics again, it may come to that. I want the shoulder-straps, all right, but I value my self-respect a lot more.”

“ That may be his very game. Better keep a clear head and avoid him. I remember that he seemed to want to be friends when you joined, but it surely set him in a rage when you refused to shake hands with him.”

“ He ought to have expected nothing else, considering our last parting. I’d do the same again,” declared Don.

“ It’s a pity, for Hoyle is certainly one of the best non-coms in the company.”

“ Oh, he’s smart all right and, unless he has changed, is brave in a way. But, Harry, the man’s got a crooked nature and I’ll be surprised if it doesn’t show up some day.”

“ He is eyeing us now none too pleasantly.”

“ Yes, I’ve noted that.”

AN ARMY BOY

They left the table and went to the squad room, where many of their comrades had preceded them. With an experienced regiment like the Fourteenth there was no need for detailed instructions as to what was to be left behind and what taken. Each man, as he reached his bunk, began to separate his field kit from his garrison equipment. The former he would carry on his back throughout the campaign; the latter would be packed in his box locker and stored, to be reclaimed later should he return. All knew that personal affairs must be attended to that night; the following day would be given to the loading of the transport, and to the infinity of details incident to the moving of a regiment.

That Sergeant Hoyle had not forgotten his enmity was soon apparent. Don had spread the contents of his locker on the bed but was less than half through the work of separating them when a voice interrupted him.

"Here, Page! You and Kearny come with me."

Don stood up, in his hand a photograph he intended taking with him. Sergeant Hoyle stood looking at them.

"Sergeant Hoyle," he said respectfully, "I am the commanding officer's orderly to-day."

"Oh, you are—are you?" Hoyle's voice settled

IN PEKIN

into a dangerous purr. "And I suppose he detailed you to pack that photograph you have in your hand—eh?"

"No, sergeant, but ——"

"Don't start any 'buts' on me, Page. You are engaged in a personal matter, and I want you for an official duty. If I get another whine out of you, you'll go before the captain."

"I didn't whine, Sergeant Hoyle."

"Call it what you please. You are a fine soldier to be setting yourself up as a candidate for a commission. Simply because you are orderly for the commanding officer, you think to dodge your share of the work during the hours he is not needing you. It's rank laziness, that's all, and I'll not have it—understand? Come on now," and the sergeant turned away.

"Well, Harry, it's started, and started hard," said Don in an undertone as they followed the sergeant toward the company office.

"They're after me—they're after me," hummed Harry. "Keep your shirt on, old boy, and don't get rattled. Words never hurt any one."

"Well, you wait till he tries it on you. That Irish temper of yours won't stand much."

"Big bully," said Kearny, becoming serious. "Wonder what he wants us for. It would be just like him to frame up a job for the sole purpose of

AN ARMY BOY

keeping us here while the rest of the fellows get off."

They entered the office.

"Shut the door," said Hoyle.

Harry closed it.

"Now, Page," said the sergeant, "we'll have an understanding. I heard you two muttering as you followed me. Did what you said have any reference to my orders?"

"Only indirectly, sergeant."

"A cowardly excuse."

Don turned white.

"Sergeant Hoyle!" he protested.

"I repeat it—a cowardly excuse. Give me a man who talks to me and not about me."

"Sergeant Hoyle, I am willing to obey your orders, but there is a limit to the amount of abuse I'll stand. I warn you, you are going too far."

Harry squeezed Don's arm. He could see that the sergeant was trying to goad his chum into a serious breach of discipline.

The two men glared at each other.

For half a minute there was silence, then Hoyle spoke. His voice quivered with suppressed passion.

"You are right, Page, you shall obey my orders. And you'll do it without any back talk or grumbling. And as far as abuse is concerned, my cub,

IN PEKIN

you'll get that, and plenty of it, till you learn some discipline. And, moreover, you'll find that, instead of having gone too far, I have only begun."

For a minute he stood, apparently turning something further in his mind, but evidently thought better of it.

"Now you two men get those boxes down from the shelves, and take the covers off them."

The work of sorting the company records began. Both youngsters realized that Sergeant Hoyle was again in the position of company clerk, which, next to that of first sergeant, is closest to the company commander. And that he was well fitted for it was equally apparent. Quickly he ran over the books and papers, separating them into two piles. The one he told the soldiers to repack, the other he put on the table for arrangement later. Never once did he hesitate nor appear in doubt.

He lost no opportunity for sarcastic comment, and the young men could but acknowledge, in their hearts, that much of it was deserved. Both burning with indignation, they realized they were awkward and were working poorly. It did not help matters any to know that Hoyle appreciated the situation fully, and was gloating over their repeated blunders.

Don was in a state of mental turmoil. Realizing thoroughly how just his purpose and intentions

AN ARMY BOY

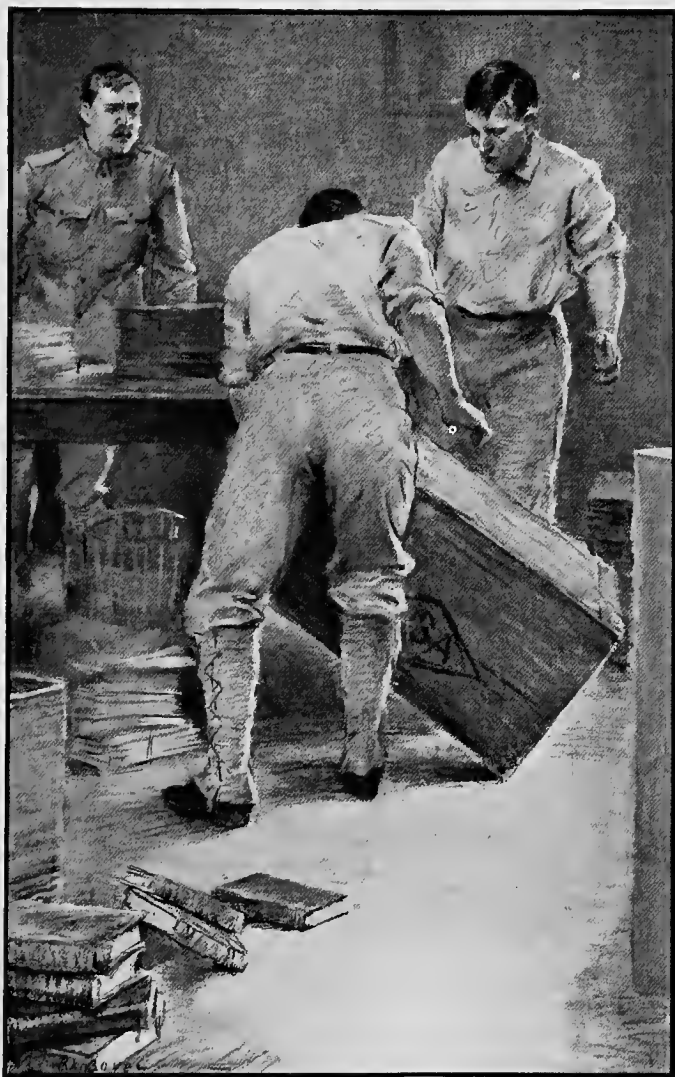
were, nevertheless he knew the sergeant would have a strong case if he reported him for protesting against an order and then muttering about it behind his superior's back. He saw that he would have a hard time to keep his head with a man so bitter and at the same time so cunning.

The climax of their discomfiture came when he and Harry, having finished packing a box, tried to return it to the shelf. Don stumbled over a book lying on the floor, and the box came down with a crash. With a disgusted expression, which only half concealed his enjoyment, Hoyle stepped forward and pushed them aside, muttering "clumsy rookies"¹ in an audible undertone. Though the box weighed fully a hundred and fifty pounds, he tilted it, slipped his hands underneath, and swung it neatly up to the shelf. It was a feat of strength few men would be equal to.

"Next time," he said, "tell me when the two of you are unable to lift a box. We're leaving these barracks, but there's no need for smashing the floor to pieces before we go."

The hands of the clock approached eight, the hour Don was ordered to report back to the commanding officer. He knew that, should he fail to return on time, he would have to make explanation, and that Sergeant Hoyle would be reprimanded.

¹ Rookie—soldier slang, meaning a raw recruit.



THE BOX CAME DOWN WITH A CRASH

IN PEKIN

manded for having put an orderly on fatigue duty. He himself would be excusable since he had simply obeyed the last order given him by a superior, to whom he had stated his special detail for the day. In his anger he was inclined to let the matter go as it was, but his better nature rebelled against any such mean revenge. When it came to that he did not desire the interposition of any higher officer between him and his enemy. Several times he opened his mouth to speak, but catching Hoyle's eye, and not knowing what the latter might say, closed it again. He felt that he could not stand another tongue-lashing.

He was still hesitating when the decision was taken out of his hands. The office door opened and a heavy young officer, in the uniform of a captain, entered.

"Attention!" called the sergeant.

All stood quietly in "the position of a soldier" while the captain gave a quick glance around.

"What are you doing, sergeant?"

"Arranging the company records for the departure, sir."

"H-m-m-m—yes," said the captain, rapidly running over the papers on the desk. "Good work, sergeant. You have saved me a lot of time and thought."

"We are nearly done, sir. I think the captain

AN ARMY BOY

will find everything there that we'll need in the campaign. The older records are repacked, ready for storage, except the few there on the floor."

"Right. I'm glad to have you back with the company, sergeant."

"I thank the captain."

Captain O'Hara looked at the two soldiers.

"I thought you were orderly for the commanding officer to-day, Page."

"I am, sir."

"Then how come you to be here working on fatigue duty?"

"Sergeant Hoyle's orders, sir."

"How about this, sergeant? Couldn't you find some other man?"

"Yes, sir, but for a job like this I wanted first rate men, and these two are more intelligent than most. Page had no duty at the time, so I thought I'd use him."

The two friends exchanged glances. Could it be possible that so plausible a hypocrite existed?

Captain O'Hara looked doubtful. He hesitated to reprove a non-commissioned officer in the presence of private soldiers. Hoyle surmised what was passing in his mind, and as the captain opened his mouth to speak, forestalled him.

"There's so much to be done, sir, that I thought ordinary garrison rules should not apply, and that

IN PEKIN

every one, when not specially engaged, should lend a hand."

The captain's brow cleared.

"Perfectly right, sergeant, perfectly right. What time have you to report back, Page?"

"At eight o'clock, sir."

"Well, you'd better run along. You'll find the first sergeant at the storehouse. As you pass there tell him to send me another good man."

Don saluted and left. As he turned to close the door he met the eye of Sergeant Hoyle, sinister, threatening and triumphant.

CHAPTER III

A DAY IN NAGASAKI

ELEVEN days later the transports "Indiana" and "Flintshire" lay at anchor in Japan's most famous harbor, Nagasaki.

The embarkation of the regiment had been more leisurely than had been expected, as Rathbone's famous battery of field artillery had been ordered to sail at the same time. Hastily summoned from the line, these soldiers had proven themselves worthy companions for the Fourteenth, and had beaten all records in preparing the ship to receive their horses and guns. Still, it was July fourteenth before the vessels sailed, and the voyage had consumed five days.

No further news had reached them before sailing. From Peking, the last advices were of the treacherous murder of Baron von Kettler while he was en route to the empress' palace, and of the final closing in of the line of hostile Chinese. From Tientsin had come word that the Chinese, massed in the walled city, were shelling the European settlements, and that these had all they could do to maintain their position and to keep open the

IN PEKIN

line of communications with the coast. They knew, also, that American and other troops were being rushed forward, and that a battle was imminent. The hope was frequently expressed that it might be deferred until the arrival of the Fourteenth, and old Sergeant Sypher smiled at the enthusiasm of the younger men, assuring them that, even if Tientsin fell, there would be plenty left for them to do. There still remained a hundred miles of country to cross, and many walled cities and other strong positions intervened between Tientsin and Peking, where the isolated whites were holding back hordes of yellow fanatics, thirsting for their blood and for that of their wives and children.

Here in Nagasaki, though, there was news—news that checked the words of the thoughtless and brought a grave look to the faces of responsible officers. The men saw the local quartermaster come aboard and go to the commanding officer's cabin. They waited breathlessly for the message he brought, and, when the chaplain came below, they clustered around him, for they knew that he would tell them all they were to be permitted to know. There was no concealment in this case, however.

“Men,” he said, “Tientsin has fallen before the attack of the Allies. But hold on,” he added, checking the cheer that arose. “It has been ac-

AN ARMY BOY

completed at a fearful cost. You saw the Ninth leave Manila a month ago—well, of those three battalions there remain barely enough to make one such battalion as we have in the Fourteenth. And, among others, the gallant Colonel Liscum is dead, killed leading his regiment in a charge that caused even the reckless Japanese to gasp in admiration.”

“Were so many killed, sir?”

“Yes, probably a hundred fell in the charge, but the greater loss came later. The men found themselves prevented from reaching the wall they were attacking by a deep ditch, beyond which was an open space swept by the enemy. These last were under cover. Our men were unable to advance, but were unwilling to retire, so held their ground all day. Many were killed and wounded there, and the foul mud and water in which they crouched infected the wounds, rendering serious many that would otherwise have been slight. They gained their point, however, for the Chinese, dreading what might be done under cover of darkness by an enemy so determined, abandoned the position at dusk and fled.”

“What was done with the wounded, chaplain?”

“They are on those two ships lying here in the harbor and flying the red cross. The quartermaster says that they are only wrecks of men, with noth-

IN PEKIN

ing left but their nerve. It seems that the Chinese do not hold themselves bound by any international agreement about the character of weapon to be used in war—anything that will kill, from the latest model Mauser to their old three-man gun, firing slugs, appears to suit them. Some of the wounds are fearful.”

Those who visited the hospital ships returned with the word that their comrades had little to say. The usual remark had been, “ You’ll find it different from fighting in the Philippines.”

This experience of the aftermath of a battle, without the memory of its excitement and triumphant ending, was an unusual one, and it is to the credit of the men that the only result was to make the soldiers more eager to reach the front.

And here, at hand, was Japan, a land all had dreamed of and but few seen. Don and Harry leaned over the rail and watched the lighters laden with coal come alongside, and the active men and women rig their ladders to the coal ports. Upon these they took their places and soon the little baskets, filled by those below, were passing upward from hand to hand in a continuous stream. It was hard to believe that it was not the work of some perfect machine.

“ They seem a wonderful people, Harry,” remarked Don. “ Look at that fellow in the sam-

AN ARMY BOY

pan. It's as big as a ship's boat ; yet he handles it alone as easily as a full boat's crew."

"Yes, and he seems able to make it go as fast. It is the way he has his scull arranged—the fellow uses every muscle at the same time."

"That's their principle in everything. They use what the American and European conceives, and are not handicapped, as we are, by a dislike of things originated elsewhere. The Japanese take eagerly every foreign invention, every foreign science, every foreign governmental system, and study it with a view to getting its best ideas and those most adapted to their people. Then they make the necessary changes and put it in use.

"I heard one of our officers say that they had a good army, and if they are recruited from such men as those working below us, I guess he is right."

"That's so. But say, Don, what chance have we to get ashore?"

"Pretty slim, I'm afraid. Only one-third go at a time, and our friend, Sergeant Hoyle, submitted a list to-day beginning with the 'A's.' You can figure on the chances of Kearny and Page."

"Come, old man, don't get morbid. Our chances are better than those of Young and Zimmerman. One would believe that you thought he did it on purpose."

IN PEKIN

“ And I do. You know we just came off guard, and should be entitled to our old guard pass.”

“ We may have better luck to-morrow.”

“ We won't if he can find some reason for preventing. I tell you, Harry, he's a wonder when it comes to thinking up plausible reasons for us to be given special work.”

“ Has he bothered you much this trip?”

“ All he was able to. Of course, with everybody crowded, and with the captain and first sergeant always around, he cannot show his hand and still keep up his pretense of friendship. I believe he is merely watching for an opportunity to get me in a hole, and then his report will have all the more weight for his having appeared to like me.”

“ If it comes to that I can open some eyes. Maybe you had better go to the captain now.”

“ No, I cannot do that. The officers have to support the non-coms, and then, as you know, Sergeant Hoyle always manages to have enough right on his side to make any complaint seem trivial and childish.”

Whatever may have been Hoyle's plan, the matter was decided by the colonel giving orders that all who had been held aboard the first day should have liberty the second. Probably he appreciated that the news from Tientsin was liable to affect the spirits of even the sanguine men he commanded.

AN ARMY BOY

Early the following morning Don and Harry were among a throng on the ship's gangway competing for place in one of the many sampans plying between ship and shore. Securing a boat with half a dozen others, they were soon landed on a little wharf, where were stationed two gendarmes, small, courteous and smiling, but evidently very businesslike, who saw that each soldier paid the boatman his fare. If less were offered, they protested; if more, they insisted that the exact change should be returned.

"These fellows want our money all right," said one of the party, "but they are strictly on the square. I've known American cops who would let a chum stick a foreigner."

At the end of the wharf they were met by a swarm of brawny coolies, each pulling a miniature carriage designed to carry one person.

"Rickshaw, master?—rickshaw, master?" they called, eagerly pushing each other aside.

Here the gendarmes intervened again, calling the attention of the soldiers to a sign, showing, in English and Japanese, the charge for rickshaw service, by the hour and by the trip. Soon all the party were accommodated and the coolies, stepping in between the shafts, started off on a long swinging trot.

"Where are we going?" called a voice from the rear of the column.

IN PEKIN

“Search me,” yelled back the leader, a soldier by the name of Hanlon. “My chap just started off on his own hook and the rest followed. Who cares? Whoopee! *Sigue!*”¹

It soon appeared that the rickshaw men were used to tourists, as all stopped in front of a house bearing the sign “Money Changed.”

“Catch Japanese money,” said one, pointing to the sign.

This done, they were away again, only to be deposited in front of the post-office. A broad grin acknowledged the accuracy of the coolies’ guess, as each soldier pulled one or more letters from his pocket. From here they were taken to the shopping district and shown the bazars. Once in the door, the customer’s attention was attracted and held, and he was coaxed around the end of the first counter—then around the second, until it finally dawned upon him that the clever tradesmen had arranged the shop so that all counters must be passed before the exit was reached. Dainty little Japanese maidens pressed all manner of articles upon the soldiers, and when the bewildered crowd found themselves again upon the street, there was a hearty laugh as they examined their various purchases.

“Yust look at mine,” cried Schultze, exhibiting

¹ *Sigue*—get up, move on.

AN ARMY BOY

a wooden horse, a doll, and several similar toys. "Dot leedle girl must tink I vas the fater of sefen, instead of a pachelor by pirth, training und education. Vell, I'll gif dem to dose leedle kids."

A scramble of Japanese children followed, and the useless purchases were disposed of.

"Wot's the next stunt?" asked Hanlon.

"Let's leave it to our horseless carriages," replied Don. "They seem to know where the fun is."

They were delivered at a tea house, in the midst of a garden about ten yards square. The garden, however, contained a stream with several ponds, a couple of fountains, a rustic bridge, several small flower beds and stunted trees.

"It would tage tage about five acres to get dis much scenery at home," Schultze remarked.

Here they drank tea they didn't want, and fed cakes to the goldfish in the ponds. When the proprietor saw that their interest was flagging, he brought out three young girls who danced the national geisha dance for them. This they found singularly ungraceful, but the old man, the girls, and the surroundings were so winning that they paid liberally.

"Boys," said Don, "let's go over to Mogi for lunch. It's only about three miles over the hill,

IN PEKIN

and I've heard that the trail leads through the most beautiful bamboo grove in the world. And all for seventy-five sen, which, being translated, means thirty cents."

All agreed to this, and when the delighted rickshaw men heard the word "Mogi" they scattered, each soon returning with an extra coolie, whom they pointed out saying, "Push man, twenty sen." And, as they started up the winding trail, the need for the "push man" was evident, even a Japanese rickshaw man being unable to pull a husky American up such a slope.

"How clean everything is," remarked Harry. "One would think they had turned out with scrubbing brushes just before we arrived."

"And isn't it beautiful among these groves? I always thought the colors in Japanese pictures were faked, but I see now that they represent only the truth."

A halt was made at the summit while the panting coolies wiped their streaming faces and fanned themselves. The soldiers could see the harbor on one side, with the transports looking like toy ships, while in the other direction lay the great Yellow Sea they were soon to cross.

"Seems as if the chaplain must 'a' had a nightmare yesterday," said Hanlon. "A feller can't figger that there is battle, murder, and torture

AN ARMY BOY

goin' on just the other side of that bit o' water. I reckon some of us will be thinkin' o' this peaceful scene some yearningly before many days go by."

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT AT MOGI

THE remainder of the trip was a race down-hill, and ten minutes found them in the little cluster of houses that form the town of Mogi. A dozen rickshaws standing around indicated that they were not the first to arrive. In fact, shouts and songs from one of the restaurants showed a boisterous crowd of Americans already on the ground. Harry went to the place and looked in, returning with a disgusted expression on his face.

"It's Hoyle and a crowd of his fellows. They have taken possession and are making a mess of things."

"The sergeant ought to know better than that," said Hanlon. "That's what gives our soldiers a black eye with our own public. Take an outfit with ninety-nine decent fellers, an' one that wants to be tough, an' the people will chew the rag about the whole army—they never notice the bunch that behave themselves."

"Well, they needn't bother us any," said Don. "There seem to be plenty of tea houses around."

"Sure," said Schultze, "but I've had enough tea

AN ARMY BOY

to last me a hundert years. I vonder don't dese people haf anyding lige sauerkraut und pretzels?"

At this point a little Japanese was seen to rush from the house where Hoyle and his party were, and, after an excited argument with one of the rickshaw men, get in and start hurriedly up the trail leading to Nagasaki.

"Goin' for the cops, I suppose," said Hanlon. "Well, they deserve what's comin'. Let 'em take the consequences—it's not up to us to warn them."

A minute later Sergeant Hoyle came out, followed by ten or eleven of the roughest fellows in the company. As they mounted their rickshaws, Hoyle found his man missing. Looking around and failing to locate him, he swaggered over to those of the newly arrived party and, seizing one, motioned him to bring out his rickshaw. The coolie, who happened to be the one who had brought Don, protested vigorously, pointing to where the latter was standing.

Hoyle looked up, then turned back sullenly.

"I don't care," he said, shaking his victim; "let the mutt walk."

"He means Page," said Schultze. "Vot iss a mutt?"

"Hush," said Hanlon. "There'll be somethin' doin' here in a minute, if I don't miss my guess."

"Drop that, Sergeant Hoyle," cried Don. "That's

IN PEKIN

my outfit, and, while I might have loaned it to you, had you asked, I won't stand for your grabbing it; and what's more, you can't abuse the man."

Hoyle paid no attention, but gave the coolie a yank, and thrust him between the shafts, then mounted to the seat.

Don stepped forward.

"I tell you, Sergeant Hoyle, you cannot have that rig."

"Can't I? Well, you'll see, you little whippersnapper."

Don's face went white, but his jaw was set. He saw his opportunity, and had made up his mind to use it. Here was a case of unwarranted abuse, and there were plenty of witnesses. His party approached the two, while Hoyle's followers dismounted and likewise drew near.

"Sergeant Hoyle," said Don, in a voice that trembled slightly in spite of his efforts to control it, "if you are not a coward you'll fight me for that."

"Fight you? Why, if you bother me much more, I'll give you what a saucy child deserves—a good spanking."

"Dare you try it?"

Hoyle was sobered by the crisis. In his efforts to avoid the chance of being arrested (for he guessed

AN ARMY BOY

the errand of the restaurant keeper) he had allowed himself to get into a worse scrape. Though confident of his ability to thrash Don, he knew that a non-commissioned officer should not engage in a fist fight with a private, and, while Captain O'Hara might wink at such a thing under ordinary circumstances, he certainly would not overlook a brawl by any of his men on foreign soil. And then his carefully laid plan to trap this youngster he hated, while seeming all the time to be trying to do the right thing by him, was probably ruined. He cast around in his mind for some way to avoid the encounter. Quickly he glanced over the faces surrounding him, but gained no encouragement. It was evident that they expected to see him accept the challenge, and that he would have to fight or lose his influence in the company.

Dismounting from the rickshaw, he threw off his coat; Don did the same. A ring was hastily formed, the Japanese clustering around outside the circle, peering through, and evidently pleasantly excited.

"Watch yourself, Don," whispered Harry. "He is half again as strong as you, and if he hits you squarely once, you're done for."

"I know my game, Harry. I have been anticipating this for some time."

IN PEKIN

“Remember he has been on office work for a long time, and is probably soft. If you can dodge him for a while, he’ll wear out. Use your head and your legs—worry him, but keep out of his reach. You must beat him, old man, you simply must.”

“Never fear; if I have half-way good luck, I’ll promise you I’ll give him a good licking.”

The two men approached each other warily. There was no pretense of shaking hands. Hoyle was much the larger, and there was a hard, confident look in his eye. Don was plainly the more active, and he began the attack. Suddenly darting in, he feinted at the face with his right, dodged Hoyle’s return by slipping under his arm, then whirled and brought his fist squarely against his opponent’s mouth as the latter turned. With a cry of bitter anger Hoyle charged him, striking right and left.

Any one of these blows would have ended the fight, and Don’s activity and skill were taxed to the utmost. The ring was broken as he gave backward and the cheers from his friends on his temporary advantage died out, while cries of “Kill the dude, sergeant” came from Hoyle’s rough companions. All at once Don was felled by a blow only half warded, and Hoyle sprang forward to finish him as he rose. Fortunately for Don, his

AN ARMY BOY

retreat had carried them near where the rickshaws were standing and Hoyle, not noticing, tripped over the shaft of one of these and fell heavily. Though half dazed, Don gained his feet first, and, though only a fraction of a second ahead of Hoyle, was able to break through the latter's guard and, by a swift blow, to stretch him flat on his back.

"Oh, glory!" shouted Harry, "keep him going, Don—don't let him catch his breath."

"Soak him in the ribs," cried Hanlon. "Go after his wind."

Hoyle, furious beyond caution, tried to rise. Don gave him a fair chance, but as soon as he had gained his feet was after him again. Hoyle, bewildered, was unable to guard the shower of blows directed against him, and was once more knocked to the ground. For a few seconds he lay motionless, then before his intention could be guessed, seized a rickshaw and upset it at Don's feet. In another second he was erect, and, by keeping the rickshaw between himself and his lithe young enemy, was able to recover himself.

Both stood panting. Don's right eye was closing and his breast rose and fell rapidly. Hoyle showed a swelled mouth, and his sleeve was red as he wiped the blood from his nose. His breath came in gasps, and it was evident from his overflushed face that his violent and unusual efforts

IN PEKIN

were causing him distress. But he was by no means beaten, and it was he who closed in and renewed the fight.

Again he started his hammering process, and again Don retreated, ducking and warding, and occasionally getting in an ineffectual blow. It was plainly Hoyle's object to drive him into the water, where his superior activity would count for little, and, in spite of every effort, the smaller man was forced slowly backward. As he felt his feet in the edge of the surf, he essayed a desperate venture. Darting under his adversary's arm, he seized him around the waist and endeavored to throw him. Backward and forward they swayed, Hoyle raining heavy blows on Don's back. Strain as he might, Don could not throw the heavier man, nor could Hoyle force him to loose his grip. How the fight might have ended is a matter for conjecture, as at this point came an interruption.

"That's enough of this, me men. Break away there."

At the voice with just a touch of the brogue in it, the breathless watchers fell back, while Captain O'Hara approached the fighters. These last had halted but were still locked, their glaring eyes showing that the sense of discipline was almost impossible of recovery.

"Did you hear me?" The voice was now tense

AN ARMY BOY

and angry. "Page, break your hold! Sergeant, if you raise your fist the half of an inch, I'll be after finishing the job on your face meself.

"Now, what's all this about?" he demanded, as they reluctantly separated, each still keeping wary eye on the other.

"A personal matter, sir," Don answered.

"Sure you don't suppose I took it for a battle against the Chinese, do you? Now this ends right here. You men have no right to take chances of laying yourselves up on the eve of a campaign. You both understand? I'll court-martial the man who takes it up again before we are in Pekin."

"Yes, sir."

"Now go wash yourselves and fix your faces as decent as you can, then return to the ship—you'll have no more liberty this trip."

At this point Hoyle's rickshaw returned accompanied by two others bearing gendarmes. Finding an officer present, they were very polite, and left it to Captain O'Hara to assess the damage. This he did, and made the men pay, at the same time reprimanding them severely for their misbehavior. He then dismissed them and all started on the return journey. Don's friends had completely forgotten the matter of their lunch in the excitement, and, had they remembered, would not have permitted him to return to the ship without them, as

IN PEKIN

the trip had to be made at the same time as that of Hoyle's friends.

Don had gone about a hundred yards up the trail when he heard his name called. He returned, trembling in his shoes, to his captain. The latter stood with his brows drawn, but the twinkle in his eye belied the stern expression of his other features.

"My boy," he said, as Page halted and saluted, "sure you are a gentleman born, and would never betray the confidence of your captain."

"Why, no, sir," gasped the surprised youngster. "Certainly not."

"Then I'll tell you something. I watched the whole thing from the hill beyond, and only interfered when I saw you had reached a deadlock. 'Twas an elegant fight, and reminded me of me own days in the ranks. How did it start?"

"I challenged him, sir."

"So I supposed—what made you do it?"

"Some trouble over a rickshaw."

"You are very polite in letting me know that you don't mean to tell me. Well, I think none the less of you for that. What I called you back for was this—I'll be needing some lance corporals in the company to be taking command of the extra squads. How'd you like to be one?"

"Oh, Captain O'Hara—you know ——"

AN ARMY BOY

"That's all right. You needn't thank me. It's a job you'll find lots of work and responsibility in, and mighty little reward. Still it's a start. And"—with a broad smile—"could you be giving me the name of another likely lad for promotion?"

"Why, sir, I'd say Kearny——"

The smile became a chuckle.

"I anticipated you'd say Kearny. Well, the name's all right. They say his ancestors and mine were kings in Ireland about the same time. Now go on with you, but remember, no more fighting. The government is paying you to help rescue those besieged in the legations, and you commit a very wrong act when you risk disabling yourself."

"Very good, sir, I'll remember."

"Gee!" muttered Don, as he turned away. "This'll be a surprise for Harry. Lance Corporal Page—Lance Corporal Kearny. Sounds mighty good. And by Jove! I guess we were on the wrong track in the matter of Sergeant Hoyle's influence—it's the captain who is running Company 'H.'"

CHAPTER V

THE GATHERING OF THE HOSTS

“SAIL, ho!”

Four days out from Nagasaki, the cry aroused all on board. Officers with their field-glasses crowded the upper decks, while below the soldiers swarmed forward and strained eager eyes ahead.

Soon a smudge of smoke appeared on the horizon, then another and another. Gradually there took form ahead vessel after vessel. As the transports, with the “Indiana” leading, approached the fleet, a small gunboat met them, and the young ensign commanding, after calling a greeting, announced that he had come to conduct them to their anchorage.

As the vessels steamed forward in column, they passed through probably the largest and most unique gathering of ships that had ever been assembled. Grim battle-ships, slender cruisers, low-lying torpedo boats, and transports of various kinds and sizes, were scattered over the sea as far as the eye could reach. There were dozens and dozens of vessels flying the English flag, the Russian flag, the Japanese flag and so on through all

AN ARMY BOY

the first and some of the second class powers. The regimental band on the deck of the "Indiana" played the various national airs as the flag-ship of each nation was passed. There was a scurrying to quarters on the foreign war-ships, and colors were dipped in compliment. An exchange of hearty cheers usually followed. Finally, after an hour or more, the United States fleet was seen, and then the enthusiasm reached its climax.

"Is General Chaffee aboard?" was signaled from the flag-ship.

"No—probably one or two days behind us," was the reply of Colonel Darnall. "His transport entered Nagasaki as we were leaving."

"Shall send a launch for the commanding officer," was the next message. "Please come to the flag-ship. Important news from Peking."

"Very good."

A little launch left the flag-ship and ran alongside the "Indiana." Don and Harry, aboard the "Flintshire," had read the signals, and watched the colonel and his adjutant enter the launch. An hour later they left the war-ship and returned to the "Indiana." The colonel climbed the gangway alone, and the launch came full speed for the "Flintshire."

"Good," said Don. "Here comes the adjutant. Maybe we shall learn something."

IN PEKIN

The adjutant's face was grave as the launch came alongside.

"Captain Rathbone," he called, "Colonel Darnall's compliments, and he desires that you prepare to disembark without delay. Lighters will be alongside for your impedimenta in an hour's time. At dawn to-morrow there'll be a light draft steamer for the men and horses, and to tow the lighters to Tongku."

"All right, sir. We'll be ready. Any news you can give us?"

"Yes. A friendly Chinaman has reached Tientsin with a message from Pekin, signed by the British minister. The legations are still holding out, but certain kinds of food are running low. The Chinese imperial artillery is shelling them. All foreigners and some Chinese converts are crowded into the British section."

"You say the imperial artillery?"

"Yes—it's no longer a mere uprising. There are rumors that the empress dowager has declared war against the entire world. This use of the imperial troops, of which there is no doubt, would seem to confirm the almost incredible rumor."

"In that case there is the more need for haste."

"Yes, and I hope we may be in time. The missionaries who have made their way to the coast report horrible atrocities against Christians."

AN ARMY BOY

With a wave of his hand the adjutant left.

At dusk the lighters appeared. The soldiers had been divided into sections under non-commissioned officers, and were reported to the commanding officer for assignment to work. When Don brought up his squad he noticed that Captain Rathbone was in earnest conference with the captain of the ship. It was evident that the soldier was angry, and the sailor sullen.

"But, Captain Haines," Rathbone was saying, "you heard what the adjutant said, and see the need for haste. We must work all night and cannot do it without lights."

"It is against the company's rules to permit lanterns in the hold, and, with our electricity out of commission, there can be no work done till morning."

"If you will not supply lanterns we'll break out our own."

"It will do you no good. I had a fire aboard once and came near losing my certificate. There is nothing in the contract with the government authorizing me to violate the rules of the company, and if you do take lanterns below against my will, I'll not put a man on the winches."

"Your action will be reported."

"Suit yourself about that."

Don stepped forward and saluted.

IN PEKIN

“Sir,” said he, “if it’s just a matter of the winches and tackle, I am sure that you will find plenty among our own men who are able to handle them as well as the ship’s crew.”

“Good,” replied the captain. And turning to the ship captain he added, “Captain, I commandeer this ship. Any man who is willing to work may do so, but if any officer or member of the crew interferes, he goes in irons under guard at once.”

Captain Haines opened his mouth to reply, but meeting Rathbone’s determined eye, thought better of it and retired, muttering, to his cabin.

Ten minutes later a soldier guard was in the engine room, a soldier held the lever of each winch, while dozens of lanterns appeared from the troop stores. Soon the work of unloading was under way and proceeding as smoothly as though the ship’s company were in charge. The surly English master came out of his cabin, took one look at this example of American efficiency, then retired disgruntled.

Hundreds of boxes of rations were hoisted from the hold, swung over the side, and lowered into the lighters. Ammunition, tentage, clothing and other military stores followed. Aft, an artillery officer supervised the unloading of the guns, caissons and limbers. Midnight came and still the work was pressed without abatement. One o’clock,

AN ARMY BOY

two o'clock, but there was no cessation of the hoarse commands and the rattling of the winches. Worn with fatigue, the less reliable of the men endeavored to sneak away in the dark and get some sleep, leaving the labor to their more willing comrades, but were remorselessly searched out and driven back. It was Don's first experience in forcing sullen men to do what they did not want to, and he was elated to find that he enjoyed the clash of wills. Dawn found them unloading the last of the baled hay supplied for the horses of the battery.

The river steamer came up and was made fast alongside. Then the animals were transshipped in a swinging stall. It was a difficult task, but was accomplished without accident. After them the men streamed down the gangways, bearing their rifles and full heavy marching order equipment. The officers came last, and the little river steamer, loaded till her deck was almost flush with the water, moved slowly away from the transport, and, with the long line of lighters in tow, headed for the distant shore.

The soldiers, ill-nature of the past night gone, were in high spirits. Canned beef and hardtack were served out, and all ate heartily. The fact that the boat was loaded to the sinking point was a subject for joking.

IN PEKIN

“ Say, you artillery chaps make them horses quit switching their tails—if they all happen to switch one way they’ll upset us.”

“ That’s right,” said Hanlon. “ An’ here’s me eatin’ this heavy food. I hate to load me tummy wid stuff that ’ud sink a life-preserver. They’d ought to serve out omelet an’ floatin’ island.”

“ Shucks—this ain’t nothin’,” broke in another joker. “ I et doughnuts onct on an excursion in New York Harbor.”

“ Allers did suspect you had tendency toward suicidal mania.”

The captain of the steamer, however, was serious enough and it required all his skill to make a safe passage through the long swells that raced in toward the shore. His relief was evident when they entered the river and tied up to the dock.

Here the tired troops had a period of leisure. The artillerymen had to see to the disembarking of their horses, but the local quartermaster had secured a hundred Chinese coolies to unload the lighters, so the infantrymen were free to boil their coffee and to prepare a better breakfast than had been served on the river steamer.

Russian troops were in charge of the restored railway to Tientsin, and it was found that the headquarters, band and one battalion could be transported at once. The Third Battalion was se-

AN ARMY BOY

lected, which left the Second, consisting of Companies "E," "F," "G" and "H" to wait till the afternoon train. Most of the men were soon sleeping, using their blanket rolls for pillows, but Don and Harry, with a few of their friends, decided to visit the forts. Permission to be absent was readily obtained.

"Say, this country 'ud drive a man crazy," said Hanlon, as they halted upon a hill half-way between Tongku and the forts. "It reminds me of a nightmare."

"It's queer, Don," said Harry. "Education may tell a man how to express himself, but our ideas are pretty much the same. I was thinking of Dante's Inferno when old Bill spoke."

It was, indeed, a desolate scene. On all sides stretched broad wastes, here and there a wretched hovel breaking the monotony. Nothing but sand, not a spot of green to attract the eye. And the contrast was the more marked after beautiful Japan.

"Let's get on, fellers; I sure hope the whole country ain't like this."

"It can't be, Bill—remember there are some four hundred million people in China, and they must have good lands to live."

They took up the march again. Harry and Don fell to the rear and, as was customary, soon dropped into talk on personal matters. Their sudden ele-

IN PEKIN

vation to the grade of lance corporal, the first step on the ladder of military promotion, had been discussed between them, and, though Don had followed strictly his promise to the captain, the quick wit of his chum had enabled him to give many a shrewd guess at the true facts.

“Say, Don,” he said, after a silent chuckle, “did it ever occur to you how happy Sergeant Hoyle must have been while he was writing out the order for our promotion?”

“No, Harry.”

“Well, I’ve thought a heap about it. I have waked up laughing over it. Him with his eyes bunged up so he could hardly open them wide enough to see, squinting over a typewriter writing out the promotion of the man who did the job,” and Harry shook with laughter.

Don had to grin a little himself.

“That didn’t strike me particularly, but I have been amused at our worrying over his influence with the captain. And there was some reason for it too, as every one knows Captain O’Hara would rather face a field battery than an official paper, and is rather dependent on his clerk. But it seems that he doesn’t hesitate to go against his office force when the time comes.”

“Oh, Don—any one could tell you come of English people. A drop of Irish blood would have

AN ARMY BOY

told you that once the captain saw you fight the heart of him would be won."

"Well, you haven't been scrapping, but were promoted."

"He knows I'd like to all right. You think over the non-coms. There's First Sergeant O'Leary, Sergeant Phalin, Sergeant Sypher, Sergeant McCarty and so on down to Lance Corporal Kearny. It's true there's a few Hoyles and Pages mixed in, but the company is run either by Irishmen or offshoots of other nations who will fight when forced."

Don laughed at the summing up of his chum. From the well-remembered talk with his captain, he knew it was very near the truth.

"Well, it has cleared up the atmosphere. Sergeant Hoyle has kept his hands off since our promotion. He has seemed to want to be decent."

"Never let him fool you, Don. I have seen him maneuvering around, and don't trust him. A silent snake is worse than one that rattles."

"Well, I ought to know him better than you. But there's some good in every man, Harry, and mighty few there are who don't feel a general lessening of animosity after a fair fight. He may have accepted the situation."

"Don't you believe it. A man like Hoyle hates to get the worst of a scrimmage, especially with a smaller man. If he had licked you, he might

IN PEKIN

have been willing to let things drop, but never now. I have seen him look at you when your back was turned, and if ever malice showed in a man's eye it was in his."

"As long as he takes it out in looks, I'll not mind. And he dare not start anything, for Captain O'Hara won't stand for any lack of coöperation between the non-commissioned officers. But here are the forts."

Personal matters were soon forgotten in the interest of what lay before them. The effect of the short range bombardment was grewsomely evident in the dismounted cannon and the many swollen corpses that lay around. In the interior of the forts this was even more marked than on the outside. Plainly nothing had been done since the Chinese artillerists had abandoned their guns and fled, leaving open to their daring enemies the gateway of their country.

The soldiers averted their eyes from the horrible sights with which they were so soon to become all too familiar, and hurried to the ramparts, where the air was more endurable.

"See," cried Don. "There is where the gunboats lay. It was a nervy thing for them to run in so close under a land fort."

"Guess they knew these fellows couldn't shoot much," said Harry.

AN ARMY BOY

“It doesn’t look as though they’d had much chance to shoot,” ventured another soldier. “There’s not a gun here that hasn’t the parapet all scarred up around it by the shell from the ships, and from the number of dead Chinks, they must have got prompt action.”

“Still, boys, it requires a great emergency to justify the captain of even a battle-ship in going in to tackle a land fort of modern type at close range. That little gunboats should do it proves they considered the situation desperate. Seymour’s expedition shows the same. You remember what the adjutant said yesterday. What we see here proves how nobly the navy have started the work. It’s for us to follow it up.”

“Don’t fret, corporal,” said Hanlon. “I’ve been with Uncle Sam’s Fourteenth ever since we came over to help Dewey. I’ve seen it in a lot o’ messes, and it ain’t never come out second yet. Let’s get home again. The scenery around here don’t appeal to me much.”

CHAPTER VI

A NIGHT IN TIENTSIN

SHORTLY after noon the flat cars were backed up to the siding, and the Second Battalion embarked. Still half asleep, they entered the train, where about two square feet per man was all the space allotted. American sense of humor was all that saved the trip from being a hardship. Fortunately the country over which they passed was enough to keep alive their interest, especially as they approached Tientsin. Here houses gutted by fire and battered by artillery, and trampled fields of corn, dotted with the bodies of the men and animals who had given up their lives in the battles around the city, told of the severity of the struggle. The invaders had, of course, given proper burial to their own dead several days before, and now squads of Chinamen, working under the direction of soldiers, were burying the Chinese and animals where they had fallen.

The ruined station at Tientsin, with its blood-stained platform, completed the picture. The battalion was met here by an orderly to guide them to the regimental camp.

AN ARMY BOY

On the march the men had their first real sight of the foreign soldiers who were their allies. Columns of little Japanese passed, their size tending to provoke a smile until it was noted with what ease they carried their heavy packs and rifles. Soldiers of the British East Indian regiments, tall, slender, black-skinned and with their heads covered with their native turbans, marched, heads erect and square to the front, proud of being soldiers of the empire. Bengal lancers on magnificent horses, gaudily uniformed and grasping their pennoned lances in their right hands, galloped by. Some slovenly-looking French soldiers from the Chinese possessions (the only troops of that nation yet to reach the city) shuffled by, hectoring by exasperated and shamefaced officers. And finally the Russians; Cossacks with matted beards, stolid Tartars from the Siberian steppes and infantrymen from European Russia, stamping their booted feet and singing as they marched, all showing in their arrogant bearing that they deemed themselves masters of the Orient.

"I suppose," said Sergeant Sypher, dropping alongside of Don, as the route step was ordered, "that there never was such an army assembled before."

"Not since the Crusades," replied Don.

"What was that war?"

IN PEKIN

"Oh, it was way back in the Dark Ages, when the Mohammedans had overrun half the world. Religion was the impelling motive—the Christians were trying to wrest the Holy Land from the Moslems."

"Any Americans in it?"

"No—America wasn't discovered then. French and English and Austrians were the main partakers."

"How did they get along together?"

"Not very well. The Crusades generally failed on account of quarreling among the Allies."

"So I supposed," said Sypher. "And mark my words, if we don't carry this job through with a rush, it'll be the same thing here."

"Oh, I guess we are all too civilized now for that."

"Huh! Civilization'll never change human nature. If there's anything to be got out of this war, the Allies will be at each others' throats in no time. Seems to me I read of the Russians swiping some place from Japan that the Japs had conquered in their war with the Chinks only a few years ago—is that right?"

"Yes."

"There you are—it's still take what you can get in this little world. Maybe things'll be better some day."

That night practically the entire regiment was

AN ARMY BOY

given leave to be absent from camp. Don and Harry, accompanied by Hanlon, with whom, despite the difference in education, they had a strong friendship, wandered through the European concessions. This portion of Tientsin resembled in every way, except the stone walls that surrounded each dwelling, a city at home. There were still interesting evidences of the bombardment they had suffered, but the barricades had been cleared away, and the cosmopolitan crowds that filled the streets had more of novelty for the Americans than the place itself.

Tiring of these they decided to visit the Chinese section, within the walls. On the way they were met by an English officer, accompanied by two orderlies, all mounted.

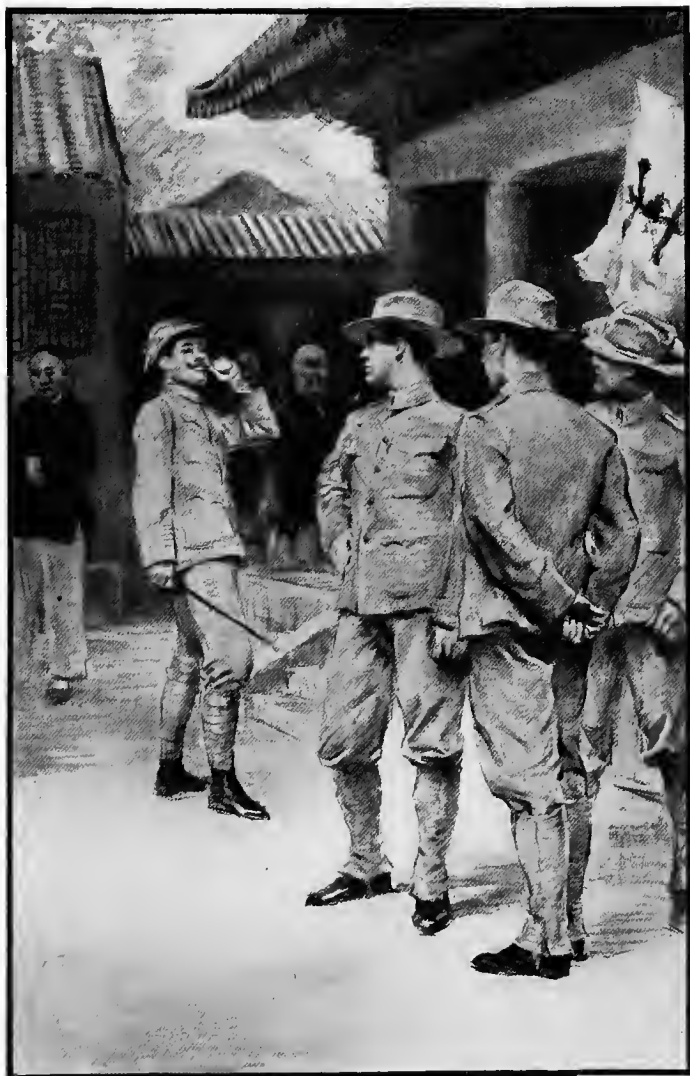
"I say," he called to them, "aren't you Americans?"

"Yes, sir," responded Don, saluting.

"Well, there's one of your chaps over there," pointing to the walled city, "who may be in trouble."

"How is that, sir?"

"It was like this. I was riding along when I saw an American soldier, a sergeant, I think, come out of a house followed by three Frenchmen—ugly-looking beggars, at that. They had evidently had some difference, as one of them stuck his fist



“AREN'T YOU AMERICANS?”

IN PEKIN

up in the American's face and said, like this, 'One—Frenchman—whip—tree—Americaine,' and with that the American knocked him down. The other two set upon him and my fellows started to dismount. 'What are you doing?' I asked. 'We are going to help the American,' they answered. 'Hold on a minute,' I told them; 'maybe he won't need any help.' And, by Jove, he didn't."

"You mean ——"

"Just that; he cleaned up the three of them nicely. They went off muttering, and I caught enough of what was said to feel sure that they were going after help and meant to revenge themselves. You know they are a bad lot, these fellows from Indo-China."

"Did you tell the American what they were up to, sir?"

"I did, and asked him to come back with us, but he would not."

"I thank you, sir. We'll hurry over."

A short walk brought them to the great gate opening into the fortified city. Darkness had fallen, and, as they passed through the gate, they seemed to have stepped into another world. Narrow, ill-paved, crooked streets, with evil smelling alleys running into them, were lined with wretched houses. To the left a building was burning, and a number of soldiers were hastily

AN ARMY BOY

removing boxes and loading them on some mule carts.

“Lootin’,” said Hanlon. “One of the fellers in de Ninth told me there was some rich pickin’s here. He had a couple o’ fur coats hisself.”

Assuring themselves that there were no Americans in the party, the soldiers plunged into the dark street ahead. In the distance they could hear shouts, and in several places a red glare showed the location of other fires. The street was deserted, except for an occasional band of noisy soldiers and a few furtive Chinamen, who scuttled into the nearest alley at the approach of these bands.

Half a mile they penetrated into the city before coming upon the object of their quest. Turning a corner into a somewhat broader street than they had yet seen, they found it lighted by a blazing building on one side, while on the other stood Sergeant Hoyle, a revolver in one hand. Forming a half circle around him were half a dozen Frenchmen, two of whom had drawn bayonets clutched in their right hands. Hoyle was standing on the step of a house rather more pretentious than the average, and was holding his opponents back, as much by his calmness as by his weapon.

One of the French soldiers was working his way around the outskirts of the circle toward Hoyle’s left when the rescue party appeared. Stepping

IN PEKIN

swiftly forward, Bill brought the palm of his hand against the fellow's head before the latter had any idea of the presence of the Americans. It was a resounding slap, and carried the Frenchman off his feet; his head was the first of him to strike the ground.

"See me make him swap ends wid hisself," cried Bill. "Come on, boys, clean 'em up," and he sailed in merrily.

The Frenchmen, surprised, gave back before the rush of the Americans. One of them made a half-hearted attempt to use his bayonet, but Hoyle knocked it from his hand, then taking him by the back of the neck, kicked him down the street after his retreating comrades. The one felled by Hanlon recovered his feet and his bayonet, and scurried around the corner.

"Wretched little beasts," said Hoyle, wiping his face. "You came just in time—I might have had to shoot some of them, and it would have raised an ugly rumpus. How did you happen along?"

"An English officer told us some American was in trouble, so we hurried over."

Hoyle laughed shortly.

"There was more trouble for them than for me; still, I'm obliged. Say, Page, if you want to, I'm inclined to let bygones be bygones."

"That suits me, sergeant, as far as our army life

AN ARMY BOY

is concerned, and I'll add, also, that I have no desire to rake up the past."

"All right, we'll forget it. And if you don't mind, I'll join you. A lone hand is a poor game in Tientsin to-night."

He spoke the truth. The provost guard was entirely inadequate to maintain order in the captured city, and the spirit of license was unleashed. The many nationalities of the army made control the more difficult, the guards of one nation hesitating to interfere with the soldiers of another. All commanders, realizing the depressing influence of the recent battle, and the hardships of the coming campaign, had relaxed the reins of discipline. And then the sufferers were the Chinese, tales of whose atrocious cruelty to the white men, women and children who had fallen into their hands had been heard by all. There was little disposition to sympathize with them in the hour of retribution.

For an hour or more the soldiers rambled through the streets, witnesses to many a wild scene. Occasionally a squad of soldiers, bearing lanterns and acting under direction of an officer, were seen searching from house to house; when a Chinaman was found he was dragged out and secured to other captives by the simple device of tying their queues together. Inquiry developed that these men were being impressed as carriers for the armies during

IN PEKIN

the coming campaign, as the Japanese were the only troops having sufficient transportation at hand.

Many cases of individual cruelty were seen, but it was only when the far wall of the city had been reached that they attempted to interfere. Hearing a woman's shriek and the frightened crying of a child, they hurried forward, and found a crowd of foreign soldiers around a mule cart, beside which cowered a Chinaman holding a lantern. In the cart were a few bundles of clothing, two small children, and a woman hugging a baby to her breast. One of the soldiers had hold of her arm, and as the Americans came up, he pulled her to the ground, causing her almost to lose her hold on the baby.

"This is a little too much for me," said Don. "I won't stand it."

"What's the odds?" asked Hoyle. "They are only Chinks, and we'd better not interfere."

But Don resolutely elbowed his way through, and pushed the foreigner away from the woman. To make his intention clear he motioned her back into the cart and helped her to mount. Angry cries arose from the foreigners, and they rattled out earnest, though unintelligible, protests.

Harry, in the meantime, had displaced the man who was holding the mule and beckoned

AN ARMY BOY

the Chinaman to step forward. Sergeant Hoyle and Hanlon took their places at the sides of the cart, and at a word from Don they started forward. The foreigners followed for a short distance, still grumbling but hesitating to do more in the face of such determination. Evidently deciding that it would be easier to find another cart than to fight for this one, they desisted, and with a few final threats, turned back.

Don went to the front, hoping that the Chinaman might be able to speak some English. But he was disappointed; the man merely shook his head. He was well, even richly, dressed, and in the dim light Don thought his face indicated a man of some refinement. Certainly the hand that grasped the bridle was not that of a coolie.

After a short walk they came to a gate leading out of the city beyond which a road ran to the north. There happened to be an American guard at the gate, and a few words secured a free passage.

"I'm down on Chinks as a principle," said the sergeant of the guard, "but I reckon letting this old geezer and his family through won't strain my sympathy too far, especially as his own people will most probably do him up. There's a lot of killing going on up country."

Don went with the cart a few rods down the road, then waving his left hand to show that it

IN PEKIN

might proceed, offered his right in farewell to the Chinaman. To his surprise, the latter clasped it and, bending his head, broke into sobs as he kissed it. Don felt a lump in his own throat as he slapped the man encouragingly on the back and turned away.

“Well, Harry,” said Don, an hour later, as they curled up on the pile of straw they shared as a bed, “what do you think of Sergeant Hoyle now?”

“Think? Why, the same as ever—I never doubted his pluck.”

“That’s not what I meant. You heard how he spoke to me, man to man, about dropping our difficulties.”

“Do you really want my true opinion?”

“Sure.”

“Then here it is. The man has shown himself too vindictive and too clever to be trusted. It would take more than his smiles or friendly words to make me drop my guard for an instant.”

CHAPTER VII

ON TO PEKIN

“CAN you two youngsters keep a secret for twenty-four hours?”

The speaker was Sergeant Sypher. It was dusk of the second day following their arrival in Tientsin, and Don and Harry were lying in the grass, taking it easy after a hard day's work, when the veteran approached and sat down beside them.

“We surely can,” was the prompt response.

The old man looked from one eager face to the other.

“Yes, I reckon you can. At any rate I'll trust you—we start to-morrow.”

“Bully!” cried Harry. “How do you know?”

“I heard the whole thing. As you know, General Chaffee came up this afternoon, and I was detailed as orderly. I had hardly reported when a council of war was called, and the general, with his aides, hurried over to the Russian camp. I followed, being needed to hold the horses. The commanders of all the armies were there, sitting around a big table under a tree, with maps galore stretched out. No orders being given me, I stood

IN PEKIN

by the horses where the general and his aides had dismounted, which was near enough for me to make out a good deal of what was said. So I know we are going to make the start to-morrow, we and the English and the Japs on the right bank of the river, and the Russians and French on the other."

"Tell us about it, sergeant."

Sergeant Sypher chuckled.

"It was better'n a show," he said. "Being as there was an American and an English general present, and the Jap could make out to talk some in a human language, the council was held in English, there being some civilian chaps there who would jabber off everything that was said to the others. There was a German officer there, a navy man, I think, who was urging delay till their fellows get here. The Frenchman was backing him up, and kept dwelling on the discourtesy of starting before Field Marshall von Waldersee arrives—it seems that he has been sort of elected commander-in-chief. I think the Frenchman really wanted to see some of their own European troops in the campaign; the bunch they have here now being a pretty poor sample, from what I have heard of their army. General Chaffee wanted to know how long it would be, and when they told him a month or so he snorted at them. The Englishman, General Gaselee, seemed to feel pretty

AN ARMY BOY

much as our general did, but the Russian was all for waiting; he expects a lot more troops soon. They argued it for a while, then some one suggested that they have a vote. At this our old war-horse got up and hit the table a crack that made the ink-wells jump.

“ ‘ You may vote anything you please,’ he said, sort of glaring around, ‘ but I’ll tell you this. The Americans start for Peking to-morrow. We’ll be glad of your company, but we won’t wait for it.’

“ Well, talk of your bombshells! The German began to rattle away at the Russian, who looked at him blankly, not understanding a word. The Frenchman started in on the little Jap, General Yamagutchi, who sat there blinking his slanting eyes, plainly tickled to death at the rumpus. General Chaffee still stood on his feet, and, seeing that they didn’t show any signs of settling down, motioned me to bring up the horses.

“ ‘ Hold on a minute, please,’ said General Yamagutchi, half laughing and holding out his hand to General Chaffee. ‘ You shall not go alone. I promise to have my contingent ready to accompany you.’

“ ‘ And I also,’ said General Gaselee, ‘ will have my chaps ready if General Livevitch,’ turning to the Russian, ‘ will have my artillery rushed up from Tongku to-night. I received a telegram from

IN PEKIN

my chief quartermaster just before leaving camp that it was being disembarked.'

"General Chaffee, seeing that the heft of them were with him, sat down again. There was a lot more talk, but they soon decided the main point, that is, a quick get-away."

"Did you learn anything about the Chinese army?"

"Yes, they are only about eight miles north of here at a place called Pietsang. General Yamagutchi has had a bunch of spies out disguised as Chinamen, and they say the enemy is strongly entrenched and mean to put up a good fight. They have had reinforcements from the north—imperial troops, they say, and these, joined with the fellows who retreated from here, make them outnumber us considerably. They seem confident that they can give us the same dose that they gave Admiral Seymour."

"Then you think ——?"

"That by day after to-morrow you'll hear the bullets whiz. And I know just how you feel, boys. I call to mind when I was a youngster how I looked forward to my first fight. You both have it in you to make good soldiers, but the nearer you come to forgetting yourselves, the better you'll do. A soldier has no right to think of himself and his own advancement."

AN ARMY BOY

“ Surely you don’t condemn the military man’s love of glory ? ”

“ Yes, I do ; there’s been more men laid in nameless graves because of some other man’s love of glory than from all other causes combined. Your true leader thinks of only two things—the first is how he can accomplish what he has in hand, the second, how he can do it with the least loss of life among his followers.”

“ Why, sergeant, what you say is right, of course, though I never thought of it in that light before.”

“ Sure, I’m right, son. Just bear in mind what I have said and keep your eye on our old man. I’ve seen him directing an action, where he’d size up the situation and send in a few men to test it—then, if he was sure he could make it a go, slap in the balance with a rush ; but if he thought he was going to sacrifice more than the gain warranted, he’d pull them out, covering the retirement with heavy fire, and then try some other plan. He never turns back, nor gives up, and, as there is only one thing in his mind, success, he is cool enough to call to his aid all his long experience. He’s my idea of what a leader should be.”

“ How long have you served with the colonel ? ”

“ Off and on for many years—I always try to be assigned to whatever regiment he is serving with.”

“ It does me good to hear you talk. Still, some

IN PEKIN

great generals have been careless of their men's lives. Take Napoleon for instance."

"He wasn't careless till the end. There was no man who thought more of his troops than he did till ambition got the best of him. When he no longer had the heart to back up his head, people began to fall away from him. And, though the books don't say so, I'll bet he had his moments of fear after his luck turned. Now our Washington was always calm, always brave. He was master of himself, because he never sought his own glory."

There was a silence for a few minutes, then Don asked :

"Did you learn any more of their plans?"

"Nothing except that we take the outposts on our side of the river to-morrow night. Now remember that all this is to be kept mum. I told you youngsters so that you'd turn in early and get a good night's sleep, and not go rampaging around the city like you did a couple of nights ago. I'm going to my bunk now."

"Good-night, sergeant, and thank you."

"Good-night, boys. If you are given to prayer, it 'ud not be amiss to put in a word for our success. If the enemy does throw us back as they did Seymour, the last chance for those people in Pekin will be gone."

Don and Harry lay a long time in silent thought

AN ARMY BOY

after the sergeant had left them. Finally Harry spoke.

"A mighty fine man, isn't he?"

"Yes he is, A No. 1. Odd that he should be ignorant of certain parts of history and so well up on others. I suppose his reading has been limited, but that he has thought a lot about what he has studied."

"How old do you think he is?"

"Somewhere between fifty-five and sixty."

"Wrong. I looked it up the other day—he is only forty-nine. And he has had thirty years in the ranks."

"The public doesn't appreciate these old soldiers. But for the example and experience of such men as Sypher, our hastily thrown together army wouldn't amount to much. Such characters form the backbone of America. How about turning in, Harry?"

"Go ahead, if you want to—there's about as much sleep in me as in a one-legged dog with fleas. The old man springing this so as to ensure me a good night's sleep is something of a joke. As a narcotic this news is a failure."

Don laughed.

"Here, too. I doubt if I'll close an eye to-night. Say, Harry, how did you feel when he first spoke?"

IN PEKIN

“Felt like my heart was up where my Adam’s apple belongs.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so, because I felt like some one had run a whisk-broom up my back ; I was wondering if there was any streak of yellow in me.”

“Why, it won’t be very different from football. I always felt that way when the opposing team came out onto the field.”

“Same with me—and didn’t they look big ? ”

Harry laughed and the conversation drifted to the old school days back home. This reminded them of the duty of writing letters, and, securing a lantern, each young man wrote to his mother, telling of all that had happened, and of his hopes for the future. Finally they lay down, and Harry, despite his anticipations, was asleep almost immediately.

Don, however, found sleep far from him. The approaching crisis in his career, with its chances for success or failure, was too imminent. His relations with Sergeant Hoyle, also, were never far from the surface of his thoughts, and to-night they pressed especially hard. He remembered the little preparatory school, where Hoyle had been the leader and the boys’ hero. A fine athlete, in his last year he had captained their football team through its most successful season. Then, in the

AN ARMY BOY

winter, came the series of petty thefts that had disrupted the school, and the day when little Tom Wright had come to Don, with tears in his eyes, and told him that they were trying to fasten the guilt upon him. The boy spoke of his widowed mother, who was sacrificing herself in every way to get him an education, and of the broken heart that his disgrace would cause. He assured Don of his entire innocence, and convinced him, though when he enumerated the evidence that had been accumulated, the older boy had seen the difficulty of controverting it. Nevertheless, he had undertaken the task and had laid a trap into which the real thief had fallen. No one's surprise had been greater than his own when it was proven beyond a doubt that the one who had attempted to show young Wright guilty was himself the criminal, and was no other than the most popular and admired boy in the school. He remembered, also, the day that Hoyle had been dismissed in disgrace, and the threat he had made to repay the one who had unmasked him if it took a lifetime.

Six years had passed before they had met again. Hoyle had been prepared for the meeting, for the company had received an advance report of the recruits to be assigned. His cordial greeting, then, might well have been carefully planned, and no weight could be given it in determining his true

IN PEKIN

feelings. On the other hand he may have wished to show that his boyish threat was to be forgotten, and his subsequent actions might be the result of his resentment of Don's refusal to shake hands with him. Six years is a long time, and he may have repented and changed in character; certainly he had made his way and stood high in a community, and in a service, most difficult to satisfy.

"I wonder," thought the restless youngster, "I wonder if the man was true in his attitude toward me night before last."

There is a freemasonry among brave men, and Hoyle's fearless behavior had made a great impression on Don. He recalled the thrill he had felt when the English officer had shown such admiration for the American who had faced three opponents, worsted them, and had been indifferent, later, to their threat of following it up. And the man's brave front when alone, and without thought of aid, or a single call for help, he had calmly faced the odds against him, knowing that the blazing building that illumined the scene would soon be consumed, and that darkness would soon give his enemies the opportunity to use their knives on him, appealed to Don most convincingly.

"I suppose it was ill-advised," the youngster muttered, "not to have shaken his hand when I

AN ARMY BOY

first joined the regiment. But the sight of him took me by surprise, and I could remember nothing but that poor boy whom he tried to make pay the penalty of his own acts. He is a brave man, all right, and may be doing his best to live a true life, but perhaps he isn't, and Harry judges correctly. Perhaps he is trying to lead me on——" and here his thoughts scattered, and the healthy, tired body claimed its repose.

Ringing blasts from the trumpets, sounding the reveille, brought him to his feet. The summer sun was already breaking through the trees, and the first thing that caught the men's eyes, as they hurried to the place of the assembly, was a long column of Japanese troops, moving with short but rapid steps in the direction of the walled city. Silent and stolid, and bearing their heavy packs without apparent effort, company after company, battalion after battalion, passed.

"Wonder what's up?" was the question that passed from mouth to mouth.

Suddenly a part of the column was halted to let some guns and caissons pass on the crossroad which led from the station. The guidons showed them to be of the Royal Light Artillery. When they had passed the Japanese sprang forward in double time and closed the gap in their column.

"Did you see that?" whispered Harry to his

IN PEKIN

chum. "General Gaselee has brought up his artillery, and the last chance of a delay is gone."

"Even without it we should have gone. Those Japs will not stop short of Pietsang."

Soon the plan was a secret no longer, as marching orders were issued after roll-call. A hearty breakfast, the loading of the wagons, the issue of two days' rations to be carried in the haversacks, and of a hundred rounds of ammunition per man, completed the arrangements for the campaign, and the men were at liberty to watch the Russian troops, who were, by this time, filing by.

As the last of their wagon train cleared the road, the American buglers sounded the assembly. When General Chaffee and his staff appeared, the formation had been completed. Their leader rode slowly along the line. Two battalions of the Fourteenth Infantry, each six hundred strong, three battalions of the Ninth Infantry, so weakened by the recent battle as to number only about six hundred men in all, a battalion of marines and the six guns of Rathbone's Battery, made up his command.

Returning, he passed Colonel Darnall, and, with the simple command, "Have your regiment move out following the staff, colonel," took the road to the north.

And so started that remarkable expedition by which the allied nations hoped to save, not only

AN ARMY BOY

their countrymen besieged in China's capital, but the necessity for revising international law to cover the case of a "friendly nation" conniving at the murder of the duly-accredited representatives of all the other powers.

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT ON OUTPOST

“CAPTAIN O’HARA !”

“Here, sir.”

“Your company takes the center of the line of outposts to-night. Establish a line of Cossack posts from the knoll on the right to the cross-roads. Hold a section in support opposite your center. The Third Battalion is in reserve, and Major Scott is outpost commander, with station near where you see the colors. Get your men on the line and familiarize yourself with the ground to your front before dark.”

“How about supper?”

“Mess by squads from haversacks. No fires to be lighted to-night, as the enemy is within a mile of our line. Unless you get other orders, the men may light fires at four o’clock to-morrow morning and make coffee. At half-past four, freshen up the fires so they’ll burn brightly for a while, then assemble your company and join the reserve.”

“Very good, sir. Sergeant, fall in the company.”

AN ARMY BOY

Under Captain O'Hara's experienced direction the line of outposts was soon established. The squads, each under command of its corporal, were stationed at approximately equal intervals along the line. Touch with Company "E" on the right, and with Company "G" on the left, was assured. Each corporal was made to note the special features of the landscape, such as hills and high trees, that would probably be visible during the night, and to make a short reconnoissance of the country to his immediate front.

The Cossack post line is the quickest and simplest method of forming an outpost, and is especially suited to open country. The squads, within easy supporting distance of each other, put out, to the front, each two sentinels. These are relieved at the end of two hours by two other members of the same squad. There being eight men to a squad, including the corporal, there are enough for three reliefs, and the corporal may detail the private of most experience as his assistant, thus getting some rest himself. The forming and marching of reliefs is avoided, and the men are working with those they know best. In event of an alarm, the squads deploy into a thin skirmish line, which falls back slowly, resisting the attack, if one be made; the supports and reserve are absorbed, thus strengthening the resistance and giv-

IN PEKIN

ing the main body time to assemble and deploy into line of battle.

Don found himself in command of one of these posts, and, having made a careful study of the subject of outpost duty, was able to complete his arrangements for the night in a manner to win a word of praise from the captain on his first inspection. His two sentinels were instructed, one to remain standing, his rifle in readiness for instant use, the other to lie down so as to bring the country in front on the sky-line. Knowing that the greater danger of attack, and hence the necessity for vigilance, lay after midnight, and that the natural excitement of the men would guarantee them remaining alert during the earlier hours, he put Harrison, the private of longest service in his squad, in charge, and, after eating a light supper, gouged a little hollow in the ground for his hip to rest in (an old soldier trick shown him by Sergeant Sypher), pillowed his head on his blanket roll and was soon sound asleep.

A touch on his shoulder brought him to his feet.

"Twelve o'clock, corporal; it's your go," said Harrison. "I hope you'll return the favor I've been doing you, and wave the skeeters off me once in a while. They're something fierce around here."

AN ARMY BOY

“ All quiet ? ”

“ Dead quiet—haven’t heard a whisper for half an hour. The captain passed by with the lieutenant about an hour ago. The lieutenant has charge the rest of the night.”

Don went to his sentinels’ post and assured himself that they were wide awake. The night was overcast and densely black, favorable for a surprise by an enemy knowing the country. Warning his men to watch with their ears as well as their eyes, he returned to his squad, and then, in turn, visited each of the neighboring squads. He found Harry at one, and Sergeant Sypher, commanding the section, at the other. The sense of companionship, in the apparent isolation of the night, was grateful, but he put down the temptation to remain for a little chat, and merely notifying the sergeant that all was well, returned to his sentinels, with whom he determined to pass the balance of the night.

Here he got his first idea of the strain a sentinel has to undergo in the presence of an enemy at night. The first to suffer in a successful surprise are the advanced posts, and history is filled with examples of the way a clever enemy can steal upon the men on guard, silently cut them down and then rush upon those in rear. Knowing this, the men’s nerves are strung to high tension, sounds be-

IN PEKIN

come exaggerated, bushes swaying in a light breeze take on the forms of crouching men, stealthily approaching. The effect is greatly lessened when two men are posted together, and this is usually done until an army has become hardened by long usage.

Time dragged. Silence was mandatory—no conversation being permitted except the absolutely necessary orders, and these were given in whispers. When Don thought an hour had passed, he crept back to a sheltered place, and, striking a match, glanced at his watch. He had been awake just twenty minutes.

At one o'clock he aroused the next two men and relieved the sentinels. The new men were half stupefied for a while, and Don found it necessary to increase his own vigilance. He was tempted to explore the front a little, but desisted for fear that, in returning, he might stumble on another post and cause a false alarm.

The night seemed to grow a little lighter as time passed. Trees on the higher ground to the right took on fairly distinct outlines. It was getting toward two o'clock, when Don was startled by a faint hiss from the sentinel on the ground.

“What is it?” he whispered, leaning over.

“I heard a sound like a stick cracking,” was the reply. “Listen!”

AN ARMY BOY

Holding his breath, Don strained his ears. It seemed to him that he could make out a gentle rustling at intervals, as of some one walking through grass.

"Slip back and wake the men," he ordered. "Tell Harrison to send one man to each of the next squads to notify them that I am going out to investigate. Here, take my rifle back—I have a pocket pistol."

Weapon in hand, he crept forward, rapidly but noiselessly. After fifty yards he distinctly heard a twig snap and the sound of a body passing through the brush. The sound was receding and he hastened his pace. A few yards further and he caught sight of a form through the obscurity. Casting caution aside, he sprang forward. Startled, the man turned, hesitated an instant, then dashed off in headlong flight.

Don followed at full speed. His first impulse, to fire, he dismissed, for he had no confidence in his aim while running, and to stop meant the escape of the fugitive. He gained on the fleeing man rapidly, and was about to reach out to grasp him, when suddenly the other dropped to the ground. Unable to avoid him Don tripped and fell headlong. As he went down, clutching, his hand caught a long braid of hair, which did away with his last doubt of his quarry being a Chinaman.

IN PEKIN

He lost his grip on his pistol, but retained the queue, fortunately for him, as his opponent, nimbly rolling over, had his knee on Don's chest, and his long fingers about his throat before the youngster had recovered from the fall. The Chinaman's queue, however, proved his undoing. Using the full strength of both arms, Don gave it a jerk that brought the man's head to the ground, and in another instant their positions were reversed. For a minute more the Chinaman struggled violently, then suddenly relaxed. Don saw one hand slip to his sleeve and with a quick movement transfer a white object to his mouth. Instinctively, Don brought his thumbs to the fellow's cheeks, and, as he endeavored to chew, pried his mouth open. A small roll of paper fell out, and the soldier seized it.

Till now the fight had been silent, except for the heavy breathing of the combatants. At this point, however, the Chinaman raised his voice in a long, piercing shriek. A shot from the nearest outpost followed almost immediately, the bullet cutting the air close to them, and the silence of the night was broken by hoarse commands and the clicking of the breech-blocks as the pieces of the sentinels were loaded.

“ Hold your fire there ! ” Don shouted.

“ Who is that ? ”

AN ARMY BOY

“Corporal Page, Company ‘H’.”

“What are you doing out there in front of Company ‘G’s’ line?”

“I have a Chinaman here who passed my post a few minutes ago, and if you’ll give me a chance I’ll bring him in.”

“All right.”

Don felt around and recovered his revolver. Pressing it to the Chinaman’s head with one hand, he pulled the fellow to his feet by the queue. Holding him thus Don marched him into the lines. To the excited questioning of the sergeant he gave only a short explanation, saying nothing of the paper he had captured, and stating that he must report to Captain O’Hara at once.

He found that the latter had been aroused by the shot and was forming the company in a skirmish line. At the explanation, the captain ordered the posts to be reestablished, and directed Don to bring his prisoner to the support. Here a lantern was lighted and the paper examined. It was a sheet about five inches broad and twelve long.

“H-m-m,” said Captain O’Hara. “Chinese, of course. May mean a whole lot, but it’s beyond me. Come on, we’ll report to the outpost commander.”

The major decided that the matter might be of some importance, and they all repaired to the gen-

IN PEKIN

eral's tent. General Chaffee was asleep, but an aide was routed out and he called an interpreter. This man, a Christian Chinese employed by the army, was visibly excited on seeing the paper.

"Him velly impo'tant—one Chinese gennel tell annoder what do."

"I'll wake the general," said the aide.

In a few minutes the entire party were in the general's tent. The interpreter translated the paper.

"This to Gennel Taifong—it not say where. It tell him foleign devil soldier camp on Pei-ho and extend to gleat paved load. It say order all changed—him not to wait behind earthwolks fo' attack. It say tlee gennels, no say names, but give legiments, will attack foleigners at daybleak. It tell Gennel Taifong, when him hear shooting, to come fast and attack left flank."

"This is a find!" cried the general. "It ruins our plan, but it is fortunate that we got the word in time. Homer," to the aide, "go at once to General Yamagutchi and give him the information. Wake up Ames and Howard before leaving and tell them to report to me. You," to Captain O'Hara, "give my compliments to Colonel Darnall and tell him to put his whole regiment on the line and to strengthen the position by hasty entrenchments. Ask him to permit no fires nor lights of any kind.

AN ARMY BOY

"Now," he continued, when the officers had departed, "how did you capture this man?"

Don explained.

"Ask him," to the interpreter, "who he is."

The question was put, and the trembling captive stammered a reply.

"He say him a fa'mer—live here and know all countly. Chinese soldier make him work. He say to-night one gennel give him paper and tell him go to Gennel Taifong."

"Where is General Taifong?"

Again the question was put.

"Him say at Kai-lao, about tlee mile over dere," pointing to the west.

"Ask him how he happened to start so late."

"He say he get paper only an hour ago—all Chinese gennels have a big talk to-night. Much row wid each odder—some want do one ting—some want do odder. Finally dey send for him and give paper—tell him he know countly velly well and can find way in dark—they tell him dat foleign soldier no hurt if catch because him no is soldier."

"Do you believe him?"

"I not know—maybe him tell tluth—maybe no."

"Search him."

The search brought nothing to light, no weapon

IN PEKIN

or other indication that the man was a soldier. The general made him hold out his hands and examined them. The palms were hard and calloused, the finger nails short and dirty.

“Maybe he is telling the truth—he certainly is no officer. Queer to entrust so important a message to such a man; still, except for good fortune, he would have been successful. It may all be a ruse—if so it’s a clever one. At any rate we cannot afford to risk disregarding it.”

These thoughts passed through the general’s mind while he was examining the Chinaman. This completed, he turned to Don.

“What is your name and rank?”

“Lance Corporal Page, sir, Fourteenth Infantry.”

“Sit down and make several copies of the translation of this paper.”

While Don was so engaged the other aides came in. To them the general explained the situation, and they were given copies of the captured dispatch to take to the commanding generals of the other armies.

“Corporal,” said the general, “you have done very well, and I shall remember it. Turn your prisoner over to the headquarters guard and return to your company.”

Don saluted and led the trembling Chinaman away. The sergeant in charge of the headquar-

AN ARMY BOY

ters guard received him and asked Don what was "up."

"You'll learn pretty soon," was the reply. "What time is it?"

"Five minutes to three."

"Gee whiz! All this in an hour. It's the slowest night I ever passed."

As he hurried back to the line he was astonished at the silence of the camp. If the single shot had disturbed any of the sleepers they had quieted down again. A faint hum from the Japanese camp in rear, and the occasional flash of a lantern, told of activity there. He found the post of the reserve deserted except for a few men who were gathering up camp equipage. The colonel's tent had been struck and was being loaded on a wagon. As he passed, the wagon train started to the rear.

Don's heart beat exultantly. The immediate presence of danger, and the prospect of action, stirred his blood. The knowledge that he himself had been the means of preventing what might have been a disastrous surprise, and that he had attracted the favorable notice of his general exhilarated him, and made him long for further opportunity to distinguish himself.

Arriving on the line, he reported his return to his captain, and rejoined his squad. The regiment was deployed in a single line, the men lying prone

IN PEKIN

behind a low earthwork hastily thrown up with entrenching tools. At intervals stood the officers and sergeants, their eyes and ears strained to catch the first indication of an advancing enemy. Don received his rifle from the soldier with whom he had left it, opened the magazine to assure himself that it contained the five reserve cartridges, then closed it gently, and lay down in his place on the left of his squad.

Half an hour passed in silence, save for the breeze in the trees and the night noises of country places. Six hundred men in readiness to give or receive death, and yet the chirping of a cricket was audible for many yards. Then from the distance came a confused sound, increasing in volume. From the front? Every soldier's grip on his rifle tightened. No, it was from the rear. Soon it developed into the tramping of thousands of men, marching as silently as possible, kits arranged so as to prevent the rattling of cup or canteen against bayonet scabbard. Openings were made in the American line, and through these passed the Japanese army, in line of battalions in columns of fours.

"Bless their brave hearts, and good luck to them," thought Don. "I see that General Yamagutchi has decided to do a little surprising on his own account."

CHAPTER IX

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

As the rear of the Japanese forces passed the line of outposts, the Fourteenth was assembled and marched to the left, where it united with the other American troops.

“We will cover the left flank of the Japanese, who are advancing to assault,” General Chaffee told Colonel Darnall. “If that intercepted message was a hoax, the attack will proceed as originally planned. If not, General Taifong has failed to get his orders unless they have sent a duplicate, and will remain in his trenches. Of course he may start at the first firing, and that is what we must prepare for. It should be dawn in an hour.”

Scarcely had he uttered the words when there came a distant shot, followed by another, then the night's silence was torn by a roar that was continuous and deafening, in spite of the mile that separated the American troops from the contending lines.

The battle was on.

Instinctively the men in ranks drew closer to-

IN PEKIN

gether and held their breath. It was evident to all that the advancing Japanese had met the advancing enemy at close range, and that the two parties were locked in a desperate struggle.

General Chaffee and his staff remained mounted, listening to the increasing uproar of the battle and endeavoring to judge its progress from the sounds. Unfamiliar with the country even in daylight, except from the study of inadequate maps, the task of protecting a flank which he could locate only by sound, against an enemy whose approach might be from any direction within a hundred and eighty degrees, was not a light one. He sent for his ranking officers.

“The Fourteenth Infantry will form on the right in line of squads, its right endeavoring to keep within supporting distance of the Japanese left, though out of the line of fire, if possible. The Ninth will form similarly on the left of the Fourteenth, detaching one company to support the battery. The marines will be the reserve and follow the line about its center. The battery will remain with the reserve till dawn and then push forward and seek a favorable position to open on the enemy. I shall be found near the center of the line. At dawn, unless we are engaged by that time, we shall execute the turning movement originally intended and fall upon the enemy’s left flank.”

AN ARMY BOY

Quietly the formation was taken and the line advanced in a diagonal direction to the north and west. Soon the right was in the zone of fire, and the men were halted under cover of a raised road. It was in that dense blackness that precedes the dawn.

"Seems to me that the firing increases, rather than the reverse," Don remarked to Sergeant Sypher.

"Getting nearer," replied the sergeant, calmly. "I guess the Japanese are badly outnumbered."

"Think it's going badly?"

"No—we'll fix 'em at dawn when we get our artillery in action, that is, if those other Chinks don't come down on us. In that case we'll have a pretty little fight before it gets dark again."

"Well, I'm going to take advantage of the opportunity to fill my stomach."

"Good boy! There's not many who have an appetite with their first battle rolling down upon them. I'll join you."

They squatted on the ground and munched their hardtack. Sypher had a jar of beef extract, and dissolved a spoonful in a tin cup of water, and this they used alternately to wash down their dry breakfast.

"You fellers has a bunch o' nerve," said Bill Hanlon. "Eatin' don't sound good to me. I

IN PEKIN

don't mind fightin', day ner night, but this waitin' gets my goat."

"It gets lots o' people," responded Sergeant Sypher, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "But there's a heap o' waitin' in a big fight, an' maybe before this hike is over you'll learn to appreciate an hour behind cover."

"Gee! I wish they'd let us get into it," exclaimed Harry.

"Keep your shirt on, youngster, and save your strength and nerve. You'll get tireder fretting than you will fighting, and may need all there is in you to-day."

"Where are the other chaps—the Britishers an' so forth?" inquired Hanlon.

"Camped across the river last night, a queer arrangement to my mind, but I suppose the generals knew best and had their reasons. But what's this?"

A party of Japanese had arrived with lanterns and chests. The latter were thrown open, disclosing surgical instruments and dressings. Coolies bearing litters on which were stretched wounded men came up, and the surgeon in charge, removing his blouse and rolling up his sleeves, started his grewsome work. Attendants with basins of antiseptic solutions, bandages and sponges, waited upon him. The smell of ether was strong upon

AN ARMY BOY

the air. A quick examination, a hasty but thorough cleansing of the wound, a little ether to ensure immobility, and then the probing for the bullet. That removed, the patient would be bandaged, his clothing rearranged, and the coolies would carry him to the rear. Occasionally a more severe case, requiring amputation, would be tagged, a hypodermic given, and the patient rushed to the field hospital.

Many of the wounded refused to be carried. Don noted one soldier, with his blanket roll and rifle swung over his shoulder, holding a broken jaw up with his right hand, while his left arm hung limp with blood streaming from the pendant hand.

“Nervy little rascals!” he said. “What glorious fighters they are.”

In the meantime the contending lines had grown closer and closer. It seemed certain that the Chinese were forcing the Japanese back by weight of numbers. From the sound it appeared that the opponents could not be more than five hundred yards distant, and the Americans knew that the bullets must be passing immediately over the protecting road. Yet, in the roar of musketry, their whizz could not be heard.

With the first flush of dawn came a party of Russian Cossacks. After a short parley between their commander and General Chaffee, they opened

IN PEKIN

fan-like, and started in a long thin line to scout the country to the west.

“There’ll be something doing now,” thought Don. “With the flank covered, we shall surely move out.”

He was right, as the orders to carry out the turning movement were issued immediately. A short distance in the direction they were facing cleared the zone of fire. Then, concentrating toward the right and pivoting on the slowly moving Fourteenth, they advanced so as to form line on the flank of the Chinese army.

The movement was not long undetected in the increasing light. As the sun rose a Chinese battery opened upon them.

“After them, Rathbone!” cried the general, and forward to a ridge dashed the field battery. The six pieces were unlimbered in a twinkling, and the roar of artillery fire was added to the tumult.

Hurriedly the infantry deployed, and, charging past the guns, dislodged a Chinese force that was taking up a position behind a dirt wall to protect the threatened flank.

Then from a distance came what seemed the echo of the American guns. Shrapnel was observed bursting over the Chinese position from a different direction to the American line of fire.

“That settles it, men,” shouted Sergeant Sypher

AN ARMY BOY

to his section. "The English artillery has opened from the other flank. They'll break before we can reach them."

The Chinese advance was checked. Threatened on both flanks, with a determined, though weakened, force in their front, and failing the expected diversion from the west, their leaders began to doubt their ability to win the action. New troops were hurried against the American line, but were easily repulsed. Then their artillery was brought into full action against the batteries on their flanks, but the superior marksmanship of the allies soon smothered their fire, and again the deadly shrapnel began to burst over the now hesitating troops.

"Here come the Japanese reserves," cried an officer, as a new line of troops appeared from the rear.

"Sure enough," said Don to Harrison, "and see—even the litter bearers are taking part."

The reinforcement carried forward the Japanese line with a rush. As they advanced to the charge the Chinese began to break. By individuals, by squads, by companies and then in mass, the defeated army began its flight. A fresh line was formed by the reserve to which the artillery retired, and here an effort was made to rally the fugitives. But it was not possible.

Forward surged the Japanese line, and forward,

IN PEKIN

somewhat faster, the fresher Americans. As they approached the new position, its defenders fired a few ragged volleys, then sullenly retired.

The Americans took the lead. The Japanese, waving their hands in a motion which plainly meant, "It's your turn," desisted and sank to the ground. As the Americans passed, most of them had drawn paper packages of boiled rice from their haversacks, and were eating voraciously.

As the resistance of the enemy slackened, the Americans formed column and took up the pursuit. With the passing of the excitement the strain of the past five hours, following on a night of little rest, began to be felt. Still the men pressed willingly forward. As the sun got higher the heat increased. The route was through ploughed fields and standing corn, and not a breath of air was stirring. Though the general rode along the column and endeavored, in person, to urge the men to greater speed, it soon became evident that, without cavalry, the chance of overtaking the enemy and forcing another fight upon him was negligible. When the general saw that the men had done all that was possible a halt was ordered.

The tired men stacked arms and gathered fuel. A near-by well afforded water, and soon a number of small fires were burning, and on them were

AN ARMY BOY

placed the tin cups, with ground coffee and water. The squads pooled haversack rations for a breakfast. Staff officers were sent back to get in touch with the other troops of the allied armies, and to bring up the wagon train.

“By Jove, that’s good!” exclaimed Don, as he washed down a mixture of corned beef, canned tomatoes and hardtack with a swallow of muddy coffee. “I’ve eaten lots of Christmas dinners that didn’t come up to it.”

“I want to congratulate you, Page,” said Sergeant Hoyle, approaching Don’s squad. “I understand that you did a big thing last night.”

“Just a streak of luck, sergeant,” responded Don, modestly. “Any fellow might have stumbled on it.”

“True enough, but he might not have stumbled so successfully. I heard Captain O’Hara speaking to the colonel about it, and you have helped your chance for a commission materially. By the way, may I speak to you privately a minute?”

Don joined him and they moved a few steps aside.

“It’s this way, Page,” said Hoyle, showing a little embarrassment. “I have been thinking of going up for a commission myself. I know I am as good a soldier as most, and believe I can pass the examination. This campaign will give us a

IN PEKIN

big advantage over those who aren't in it. Can I depend on you not to bring up that old thing against me?"

Don hesitated—he was entirely taken aback. Anticipating an unfavorable answer, Hoyle continued hastily:

"I have done my best to live that down, and it's hard to have a boy's—well, call it crime, if you want to—ruin a man's whole life. I had my punishment in losing my education, for, of course, I never dared ask admittance to any other school. Give me your promise."

"Sergeant, I have told you I was willing to let bygones be bygones. I'll not go out of my way to inform against you, as you ought to know by now."

"Yes, I have appreciated that—more than I have shown, maybe. But as we are recorded as being from the same town, the captain, whose recommendation I must have, will be sure to make inquiries of you. What are you going to tell him?"

"Sergeant, you put me in a hard position. If questioned, I must either tell the truth or refuse to answer."

There was a flash of the black eyes, but the lids veiled them instantly. Hoyle drew a deep breath, and when he spoke again, any emotion he may have felt was thoroughly controlled.

AN ARMY BOY

"Either course would lead to investigation that would be fatal to my hopes. Think it over, Page, think it over."

"I am afraid that thinking cannot change me—I see no other course for an honest man. In fact, I think I go over-far in promising not to take active measures to see that the whole truth is known to the authorities, if you try to enter the commissioned force."

"But, man, I tell you that is all a thing of the past."

"I am anxious to believe that, and as I said will not speak unless forced by circumstances."

"Well, thank you for that, anyhow. One thing more—have you ever spoken of it?"

"Certainly not."

"Not even to Kearny?"

"Not to any man."

"All right—I'll talk with you again."

"You two fellers made it up?" asked Harrison as Don rejoined his squad.

"Yes, I hope so."

"H-m-m, I never sized the sergeant up as a feller who'd stay licked. If I was wrong it's to his credit."

"Gosh, but I'm tired and sleepy!" exclaimed Harry. "But Sergeant Sypher has just warned us to clean up our rifles before the smokeless powder

IN PEKIN

gets in its work ; besides, I suppose we'll be moving soon. How did the fight strike you, Don ? ”

“ It was quite a strain while we stood there waiting and listening to the firing coming closer and closer. I was rather strung up by the night's work, so didn't mind it as much as I otherwise might.”

“ Our part of it was scarcely worthy of being called a fight, and the Japs have all the glory. Still, I don't feel a 'rooky' any more.”

“ That first aid station was the worst part of it—the smell of ether, the blood and those knives.”

“ Tell me about that business last night.”

Don complied. “ And, by the way,” he added, “ Sergeant Hoyle just congratulated me about it.”

“ Yes,” said Harry, shortly, “ I heard him. But you know my views as to his newly acquired friendship. I'm thinking you're needing a nurse to care for you, and elect myself to the job. There goes 'attention.' Line up there, you huskies of the eighth squad—here's for a nice little stroll to the river and a swim.”

“ ‘ H ' Company, fall in,” commanded the first sergeant.

Soon the column was reformed and the march resumed. The heat was exceedingly trying, but the frequent rests enabled the men to keep closed up, and there was no straggling. The breakfast had refreshed the men and a four hour march

AN ARMY BOY

brought them to the selected camping site for the night, which was on the bank of the river. Near at hand was a camp of English troops, who had recently arrived on the ground. A joint outpost was established, and, as this duty fell to the Ninth Infantry, Don and Harry were able to enjoy a bath and swim, in which they were joined by a large number of their comrades.

That night, around a roaring camp-fire, the men gathered about the first sergeant, who had secured a map of the surrounding country.

"Here, men," he said, "is where we were this morning, and here is our present position. It's a crying shame that we didn't have a few squadrons of cavalry, and a battery of horse artillery to cut those fellows off this morning. We'd have saved ourselves an ugly job to-morrow if we could have only settled them to-day."

"I thought they had had a pretty good trouncing," ventured Harry.

"Not on your life," replied the sergeant. "They retired in mighty good order, considering. And look here"—putting his finger on the map—"see where the river and railroad come together, this place called Yangtsun. It looks to me like a good position, and unless I miss my guess we'll find the Chinese there in force."

"How far is it, sergeant?"

IN PEKIN

“ About ten miles—a short march in any other country, but this sun seems fiercer than the tropics.”

“ Any orders about the march, sergeant ? ”

“ No, and I don't need any to tell you that it's early to bed for the wise ones. I'll be surprised if we breakfast later than four o'clock. Did your men refill their haversacks, Page ? ”

“ Yes, sergeant.”

“ Yours, Kearny ? ”

“ Yes, sir, we are loaded for two days more.”

“ Good. Well, I'll turn in.”

An hour later Don lay sleeping in the light of a dying fire. A soldier, who had been at work on some papers near the captain's bivouac, and who was passing along the line to where his blanket roll lay, paused an instant and looked down upon him. It was Sergeant Hoyle.

No wonder that the youngster turned uneasily and moaned in his sleep. Or was it the changing shadows of the flickering fire that gave to the watcher's face the expression of malevolent hatred ? Muttering something under his breath, Hoyle passed on, and Don, with a sigh, relaxed again into deep, dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF YANGTSUN

“ TUMBLE out ! Tumble out ! ”

The rattling notes of reveille broke the silence of the camp. Yawning, joking or grumbling, according to individual nature, the recumbent soldiers sat up and made their toilets, which, in most cases, consisted in putting on their shoes, campaign hats and leggins. At the last note of assembly, following closely on the reveille, the brisk voices of the first sergeants were heard calling the rolls of their companies.

An hour later the Americans moved out in column, followed by the English troops. These latter were mostly Sikhs and Bengalese, the artillery alone being manned by white troops.

Crossing the river on a ponton bridge, the column turned to the north and struck across a broad, sandy plain. The rising sun struck the men with a wave of heat that foretold the suffering of the day to come.

“ Ain't there anything in this blooming country but alkali dust ? ” grumbled old Bill Hanlon.

IN PEKIN

“Seems like the Mojave desert has been transferred over here just for our benefit.”

“Yes, except that these Chinks seem to have found a way of making corn grow on it,” responded his rear rank man. “It’s sure soft—I slip back a foot every step I take, an’ my blanket roll seems loaded with lead already.”

A staff officer galloped by.

“Keep the column closed up,” he ordered.

“You are setting too fast a pace in front,” Captain O’Hara called out. “We’ll be double timing back here if the point¹ doesn’t slow down. This business of exhausting the men before the march is fairly started is bad policy.”

“All right, I’ll see to it.”

The pace was lessened and the march became easier. After about three miles a troop of Cossacks rode by and took over the duties of advance guard.

“I wish our own cavalry were here,” remarked Sergeant Sypher to Don. “We needed them yesterday, and will need them again to-day.”

“You think we’ll find the Chinese waiting for us?”

“Sure of it. To-day will be America’s day, as yesterday was Japan’s.”

¹ Point—a few men sent out in advance of a column to discover, and warn the main body against, an ambush.

AN ARMY BOY

The air became more and more oppressive. The heat was reflected from the light, sandy soil. The men struggled along under their heavy burdens.

"Better stop that," Sergeant Sypher said, as one of the men raised his canteen and gulped several times.

"Can't help it, sergeant."

"Try to take only a small swallow at each halt," advised the sergeant. "There's no surer way of knocking yourself out on a march than overloading your stomach with water."

Don, who had raised his canteen, recorked it and let it fall to his hip again.

"Right, my boy," said the sergeant. "My rule is never to take a drink till we are two hours out, and then very little."

That the officers appreciated the situation was shown by their passing along the column and ordering the men to stop drinking.

"We are going into action soon," said the lieutenant. "You'll be able to get no water except what you have in your canteens, and you'll be needing it badly."

Ten miles seems a short distance, when on a pleasure trip, but to the troops advancing on Yangtsun, it was a different matter. Don found himself panting in the unusual heat and exertion. His rifle's weight seemed to increase with every

IN PEKIN

step. The cartridge belt, with its hundred heavy cartridges, galled his hips. The blanket roll slung over his left shoulder bound his chest, while the straps of the haversack and canteen cut into his shoulders. Still he set his teeth and, when forced to speak, did so with a cheeriness which, if forced, was all the more creditable. Sergeant Sypher, plodding along in the file-closers, nodded encouragement to him as he caught his eye. The tough old veteran, with his hardened sinews, and experience in physical suffering, seemed to mind it not at all.

Suddenly a distant boom rang through the air, and the sound seemed to put new life into the men. A second followed, and, after an appreciable interval, there came a nearer and sharper report. The column was forcing its way through a corn field at the time, and, as the stalks were from eight to twelve feet high, nothing to the front could be seen.

Perceptibly the pace increased, the men closing up without command in their excitement and eagerness. As they emerged from the corn, in the distance could be seen a village on a small hill, and, to the right, the embankment of the railroad gradually approaching the river as it neared the town. The larger portion of the Cossacks had halted at the edge of the corn field, but to the front could

AN ARMY BOY

be seen several spurring their horses over the heavy ground, as they raced back to the main body.

The English troops began debouching upon the plain to the left, and taking battle formation.

"It's going to be a race between us, my men," said Captain O'Hara. "We must never let the Johnny Bulls say that they beat us in with their black fellows."

Quickly the colonel's commands were given and the regiment formed for the attack. Nothing was seen of the other American troops, and it developed later that they had crossed the railroad, and were making a gallant attempt to cut in on the line of retreat, and bring the enemy between two fires.

And now followed an hour that seemed unreal to those who went through it. The open country permitted the advancing lines to be plainly seen by the entrenched enemy, while his commanding position enabled him to observe the effect of his fire and to correct the errors.

"Here it comes, boys," shouted Don, as the whole front of the enemy's position became enveloped in smoke. "Steady there," as the line wavered; "forward gamely."

There was a roar, increasing to a discordant shriek, as twenty shell passed overhead to burst a quarter of a mile beyond.

IN PEKIN

"Too high," said Sergeant Sypher; "look out for the next."

"Give way to the right," came along the line. "We are crowding the English to the river."

Again the burst of smoke at the village, and again the increasing roar of the approaching projectiles. This time, however, most of them fell about two hundred yards short, ploughing into the soft earth and throwing clouds of earth from thirty to fifty feet in the air as they exploded, while fragments of steel whirred over the troops.

"I'm hit," gasped a man on Don's right, sinking to the ground and looking stupidly at his leg, on which a spot of red, rapidly widening, appeared.

Instinctively Don stooped to aid him.

"Forward there," came the stern command from the captain. "The Hospital Corps men will look after the wounded."

The enemy, having found the range, kept it. Salvo fire gave way to fire at will, and the air was filled with bursting shell and shrapnel. Vainly the soldiers inclined to the right, then to the left, seeking to avoid the storm of steel. The guns were well directed and followed them inexorably. A booming from the other side of the railroad showed that the American artillery had taken up the duel, but the six pieces were hopelessly outnumbered, and the Chinese had the advantage of knowing

AN ARMY BOY

the range to start with. Still beyond range of the rifles, even the most advanced of the skirmishers were denied the comfort of returning the fire.

At this point the colonel appeared, striding forward on foot. His eyes were snapping.

"Forward briskly, men!" he shouted. "The only place of safety now is the other side of those guns. Keep your men up," he added as he passed toward the advanced lines.

Soon the units became intermingled, and, as the space between the railroad embankment and the river lessened, Sikhs and Bengalese soldiers mixed with the American troops. The fire became hotter and hotter. Men were falling right and left. Then came the rattle of musketry, and the troops knew that the leading files, at least, could strike back.

As the successive lines of attack surged forward, every little mound of earth was seen to shelter one or more shirkers. Harry came upon a group of wretched, white-faced men whose nerve had failed them.

"Get out of there!" he commanded, emphasizing his words with a few vigorous prods with his rifle.

"Can't, corporal—all in," was the reply.

"My water's all gone—I can't take another step."

IN PEKIN

"Here," and Harry offered his canteen. "Now, on with you," as the man handed it back.

But the soldier dropped limply to the ground.

"I'm sorry, men," said Harry, "but I'll have to leave you. You hear that firing to our right. If the Chinese should close in and overcome our flank guards there, you'll all have your throats cut."

The ruse was successful. The men sprang up and hurried, crouching and wild-eyed, to rejoin the line.

"Company 'H' to the right! Company 'H' to the right!" was passed along the line.

Slowly the men, taking a diagonal direction, extricated themselves from the confused center. Near the railroad there was higher ground, and Don could see the first line advancing by rushes, and led by Colonel Darnall in person. They were firing at each halt. Shrapnel were exploding over their heads, shell bursting at their feet. The ground over which they had passed was dotted with figures, some writhing in agony, some motionless.

"Throw off your blanket rolls," yelled the captain. "Now—follow me."

The company advanced at a run, which was answered by a renewed burst of rapid fire from the village, now only nine hundred yards distant. Don saw a streak in the sand in front of him, and

AN ARMY BOY

instinctively fell to the ground. There was a violent explosion, and, as he rose, he glanced behind him and saw one of the corporals, in a sitting posture, endeavoring to regain his feet. His hat was gone, and Don noted, with a thrill of horror, that the top of his head was gone also. Twice he half raised himself, then, with a shudder, slowly settled back.

Others were falling, but there was no stopping here. A ridge ahead promised a little cover, and there the captain halted and reformed his panting men. His quick eye noted that he still had three-fourths of his company intact, and a flash of pride illumined his countenance. It showed excellent discipline that the company should have passed through such confusion and still clung together.

"What's that?" he asked, as a burst of infantry fire sounded near at hand and to the right.

A glance to the front answered him. The charging lines of assaulting troops, who had bravely advanced in face of the deadly artillery fire, were withering under a flank fire of infantry.

"Now is our chance, men. Refill magazines and fix bayonets!"

"There's an opening in the railroad bank ahead, captain," cried Don.

"Good. Follow me, men—under the trestle."

A rush in single file through the opening

IN PEKIN

brought them to the other side of the embankment, and into a dense corn field which reached almost to the village. Through this a body of the Chinese had crept, and, mounting the railroad embankment, had remained hidden till the critical moment, when they had opened the murderous short range flanking fire.

“Now give it to them!” shouted Captain O’Hara.

A burst of rapid fire followed. Under it the surprised Chinese line crumpled. Many of them never moved, except to fall forward on their faces; others rolled inertly down the bank. The remainder sprang to their feet, and, as the cheering Americans charged upon them, the majority sought safety in headlong flight.

Not all, however. Many were dressed in the fantastic costume of the fanatic Boxers, and had been trained in the belief that the cabalistic figures on their uniforms rendered them immune from death. With shouts they turned to meet the Americans, some of them dropping their guns and drawing long, heavy-bladed knives as they sprang forward.

With one of these Don found himself engaged, a gigantic fellow of ferocious appearance. Eluding the thrust Don made at him, he closed in and made a vicious sweep with his knife. Don ducked

AN ARMY BOY

and sprang back. With a leap the Boxer raised his weapon, striking downward for the head. Instinctively the trained soldier interposed his rifle in the "head parry," followed by a lunge. The bayonet met the fanatic's breast over his heart and the force of the lunge carried it through his body. Don saw the fierce expression change to one of wondering surprise. The great body relaxed and fell in a heap, tearing the rifle from the soldier's hands.

The thought that he had just killed a man came over the young man with a shock, but there was no time to dwell upon it. Madly he tugged to release his bayonet, but could not, and had finally to unclasp it from the rifle, and leave it in his late enemy's body.¹

The fight had developed into a number of individual contests, sometimes man to man, sometimes squad against squad. Don saw Sergeant Hoyle engaging half a dozen, using bayonet and butt; his black eyes were ablaze with the lust of battle, and his great strength enabled him to force them back.

To the left Captain O'Hara was rolling over, locked in the arms of a sturdy Boxer. Again and again the captain struck him in the face with

¹ This fault has been remedied in the bayonet now in use by the United States Army.

IN PEKIN

his empty revolver, while the Chinaman struggled to release his right wrist from his adversary's grip, so as to use his wicked-looking knife. Don's heart stood still as he saw a second Chinaman spring forward, knife raised to deliver a mortal blow. Then from the press broke Harry, rifle held by the barrel. A blow that broke the stock off short brained the attacking Chinaman, just as the captain succeeded in stunning his opponent. With a wild yell, Harry turned and charged the flank of Hoyle's enemies, the barrel of his broken rifle rising and falling in heavy blows.

Don rejoined the fray, but there was little more to be done. The Chinamen who could break away fled; the others fell to their knees and raised hands for mercy. Captain O'Hara hastily took account of his men.

"A good job," he said, "and only a few scratches to pay for it. Come back here, corporal," he shouted to Harry, who, in his excitement, was engaged in a single-handed pursuit. "Come back, I say; the shindy is over. And what is this?" he added, taking the young corporal's rifle, a touch of the brogue creeping into his accent. "Here I've been teachin' you bayonet exercises for a year, and the fir-st opportunity ye're after using your rifle like a shillaly."

"The thing seemed to turn around in my hands, captain, when I got excited."

AN ARMY BOY

“Just so,” and the captain’s smile broadened; “it’s in the blood, I suppose. Fall in, men. They’ll be needing this elegant lot of fighters beyond.”

But for once the captain was wrong. As the panting men mounted the embankment, they saw the finish of the battle. Across the broad plain to the north were columns of fleeing Chinese troops. Overtaking them at a gallop were some thirty pieces of their defeated artillery. At the village four pieces remained, covering the retreat with a rapid fire of canister upon the confused mass of American and English troops, now close upon them. A minute later three of these were limbered up and dashed away.

An English officer headed a detachment of their troops; Colonel Darnall and three of his officers led the Americans. The firing had almost ceased. The men saw the colonel raise his arm, then faint but clear across the intervening space came his ringing command:

“Charge!”

A final shot from the cannon, and the crew abandoned it. Springing upon the waiting limber, they madly lashed the horses into a gallop, and, as they made good their escape, Colonel Darnall and his men reached the position—a few feet ahead of their English rivals.

The Battle of Yangtsun was fought and won.

CHAPTER XI

HARRY DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF—TWICE

THERE came over Don a sensation of weakness and nausea. His nerveless hands were scarcely able to support his rifle, which had seemed but a feather weight a few minutes before; his knees shook under him so that he tottered.

A hand grasped his elbow.

“Brace up, Page,” said Sergeant Sypher. “Take a drink of this,” passing his canteen.

Don eagerly gulped the water.

“I’m sick,” he gasped.

“Nothing but reaction from excitement. Keep hold of yourself, however. Don’t faint.”

“Faint?” questioned Don, weakly but contemptuously.

“Sure—look around you.”

Don looked, and for the first time noticed that the ground was covered with men, unconscious or semiconscious, from overexertion, heat exhaustion and reaction after the crowded emotions of the past few hours. Of Company “H,” which had followed the captain over the railroad a minute

AN ARMY BOY

before, eager to join in the final assault, fully half the men were on the ground. Even the captain was lying back against the slope of the embankment, the lieutenant, one of those long, thin fellows on whom heat has little effect, pouring water on his head and fanning him with a campaign hat. The need for effort having passed, the will power that had sustained him through the hard march and terrible strain of the action had collapsed.

The adjutant came up from a group of officers standing near.

“Not wounded, O’Hara?”

“No, just knocked out. I’ll get over it in a few minutes.”

“It was a terror of a fight while it lasted. Colonel Darnall says that rarely in his whole experience has he seen so severe an artillery fire. Any idea of your losses?”

“No,” answered O’Hara. “I have about three-fourths of my men here. I saw several struck, but we got mixed up with other companies and with the English troops, and I suppose many of the men were sunstruck.”

“The colonel wanted to pursue them, but saw that the men had gone to the limit of endurance. They are away again, unless our flanking party cuts them off. As soon as possible organize a de-



A COLUMN OF EARTH AND SMOKE ROSE

IN PEKIN

tachment of your most able men and send them back to help the Hospital Corps men ——”

The sentence was never completed. There was a shriek, a blow against the embankment, and an explosion. A column of earth and smoke rose forty feet in the air. Four men were thrown up and to the sides, falling on their companions.

The shock brought the men to their feet, staring wildly at each other. As they stood, half stunned, a second shell, striking the earth, ricocheted, and, meeting a soldier as he started forward, literally blew him to pieces.

“To cover! To cover!” yelled Captain O’Hara. “They have flanked us.”

“No—no!” cried the adjutant. “Impossible. It must be some of our allies who do not know the town has surrendered.”

The bewildered soldiers rushed for the only cover available, a slight depression from which earth had been dug to make the railroad fill. But the battery, having the range, rained shell and shrapnel in heavily. Three more lifeless forms were added to those already fallen, while one soldier, his jaw torn off by the fragment of a shell, ran ’round and ’round in a circle uttering shrill cries.

The battalion adjutant sprang forward in the

AN ARMY BOY

direction of the battery, calling back—"I'll stop them."

"He'll never make it," said Harry. "No man in this outfit can run two miles after to-day's work. Here, you!" to a Pathan soldier, who was in charge of an English officer's horse, "give me that beast."

The East Indian, trained to follow his master with the horse, and to turn him over to no one else, resisted, but Harry struck him a heavy blow between the eyes, seizing the reins with his other hand. Before the half-stunned Pathan could recover himself, Harry was astride the animal and urging him out of the depression, now fairly ablaze with the bursting shell.

Heading for the battery, he urged the beast into a headlong gallop. It was heavy going, but he was on a thoroughbred, and the animal seemed to appreciate the call upon him. A hundred yards and he passed the form of the battalion adjutant lying unconscious on the ground. Harry had judged rightly—whatever his nerve, the officer's strength had been unequal to the task.

His guide was the thunder of the guns and the shrieking of the shell as they cut the air over him. He knew that after a few hundred yards he would be out of the danger zone, that the projectiles would pass well over his head, except such

IN PEKIN

as might be poorly aimed. And he prayed that nothing untoward might happen to prevent him from stopping the slaughter of the semiconscious men he had left behind.

Fortunately the distance was not so great as he had anticipated. Bursting out of a patch of corn into an open space, he saw a short distance ahead a Russian battery, the officer in command using a pair of field-glasses to watch the ranging of the projectiles.

Harry's appearance caused a moment's cessation of the firing. Then, apparently thinking that he was the first of a retreating force, the cannoneers sprang again to their work. One of them was about to fire when Harry forced his horse in front of the muzzle, holding out his free hand to the officer and crying—"No! No!"

Not a man present could understand English, nor could Harry speak Russian. Explanation was impossible, but by saying—"Americans Yangtsun—English Yangtsun," he managed to bring home to the battery commander the fact that he was firing into friends. Deeply chagrined, though unconscious of the damage he had wrought, the Russian limbered up and marched his battery to the rear.

Sick at heart, Harry returned, delivered the horse over to the relieved Pathan, and reported

AN ARMY BOY

to the captain. Seven lives, two from his own company, to say nothing of several badly wounded, was the price of the Russian's mistake.

The afternoon passed in a daze. A few squads were mustered and went over the field to gather up the equipment and to assist in bringing in the wounded. The regiment was the weaker by sixty odd men killed and wounded, and nine-tenths of the casualties were from artillery fire. There were also many cases, more or less serious, of heat exhaustion. The pride felt by the regiment on its successful and even heroic frontal attack on a strong position was counteracted in part by the gloom due to its losses, and the news received toward dark that the column sent to strike the flank of the demoralized enemy had been unable to reach their goal in time. So once more their efforts had failed to shatter the forces opposing their march.

"If we could only have bagged them," said Sergeant Sypher, "the rest of our campaign would have been easy. Now my greatest hope is that we can keep 'em busy with these daily scraps, so that they can't fall back in good order on Pekin and clean up the legations before we get there."

Retreat was held early so as to get the men in some formation for the night, and a bivouac was established. The flanking column rejoined the

IN PEKIN

main force late in the afternoon, and, though there was little advantage in the matter of fatigue, was ordered to furnish the outpost for the night. A Russian column came up at dusk, bringing word that the Japanese would not be able to reach the camp that night. It was agreed among the leaders that the following day would be spent at Yangtsun to give the troops an opportunity to rest, and to plan the future movements.

"You youngsters come down to the river, and get a wash off," said Sergeant Sypher, after supper. "Bring a change of clothes with you."

"Pretty tired, sergeant," said Harry.

"All the more reason—you'll sleep a lot better for it. Never miss a chance for a bath in a campaign, and when you take off your underwear, wash it then."

"You are right, sergeant," said Don, ten minutes later, as he sank into the cool water of the river. "This is fine."

"You fellows get your permanent grades to-day—two of our corporals were killed."

"Don't speak of the two things together like that, sergeant."

"Why not?"

"We'd rather stay privates all our lives than get promoted this way."

"Nonsense, my boy. Those fellows got killed

AN ARMY BOY

in line of duty, facing the enemy in a hot action. What more can a soldier ask? The Americans have gone loco of late years over individual existence, individual rights, individual everything. Every man's got to go some time, and I sure hope that when my time comes, it'll be like it was with some of ours to-day."

"You don't seek death on the battle-field, sergeant?"

"Not at all. I simply go on doing my duty as I see it. A soldier has no right to risk his life unless he can accomplish something by it, because if he gets wiped out there's one less trained man to hit a blow when something can be accomplished. But I take no pleasure in thinking of the retired list, and a lonely old age. I want to die in harness."

"Well, you probably will. But, sergeant, how does it come that you don't get tired, when men so much stronger, physically, cave in?"

"That's easy. I never worry over the captain's, or the colonel's, or the general's jobs. Lots of Americans wonder why this is done, and why that is not done. They fret themselves because they don't know how long the march is to be—they growl because they tote their outfits in a blanket roll, instead of a knapsack, they're grouchy over the dust in the road and the taste of the

IN PEKIN

water. Those things don't worry me any. I carry the equipment Uncle Sam gives me, drink such water as the country affords, keep my eye on my own section, and march in the same direction as the others and as far as the commander says. I get tired all right, and my legs and back ache considerable, but that's nothing to fret over."

"You are a great philosopher, sergeant, and it does me good to listen to you. You have a point of view that helps a fellow."

"I don't know much about the philosopher business, but I'm glad to help. Now, boys, if you have finished washing your clothing, we'd better turn in. We'll all sleep fine. We relieve the outposts at reveille to-morrow."

At about nine o'clock the following morning, the field officer of the day was making his round of the outposts. These had been established in a way to command all approaches to the camp of the resting army, and the greatest vigilance had been enjoined, in spite of the fact that all felt there was little or no danger of the enemy assuming the offensive. As the field officer passed from post to post, he questioned the sergeant or corporal in charge to assure himself that each knew what was expected of him under all circumstances.

To his surprise, on reaching one post, instead of the usual non-commissioned officer and from six to

AN ARMY BOY

ten privates, he found one private seated on a rock chewing the pulp of a corn stalk.

“Who is in charge here?” demanded the major.

“I am, sir,” responded the sentry, saluting.

“Alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How is that? There was to be at least a squad to every post.”

“Well, sir, I belong to Corporal Kearny’s squad. Things is pretty slow, so the corporal left me here to look out for things, an’ took the other men out on what he called a reconness, or somethin’ like that.”

“Well, I declare—why—this is a pretty state of affairs. Who is this Corporal Kearny?”

“Oh, he’s all right, major. One of the best we’ve got.”

“Bless my soul—he must be. This is a queer departure. Well, keep a strict watch for a few minutes—I’ll send more men here at once.”

“Very good, sir, but I’ll be able to hold down the job till the corporal gets back.”

The major hurried away a short distance, then gave way to hearty laughter. He dispatched a squad from the reserve to the deserted post, then hurried to headquarters, where a thorough enjoyment of the joke was joined with a firm determination to give the leader of the voluntary “reconnaissance” a warm half hour on his return.

IN PEKIN

Noon came and passed with no sign of the scouting party. Some anxiety began to be felt. When, at three o'clock, the outposts still reported that the men had not returned the anxiety became acute.

"Confound the youngster!" said the chief of staff. "I wish we had some cavalry to send out after him. Our infantry cannot be worked to death looking after such a harum-scarum lot, and it is not a case for us to appeal to our allies."

At four o'clock it was decided that something must be done. A volunteer mounted detachment was made up, all the officers' horses and some of the draft mules being used. The odd looking cavalcade caused roars of laughter as it assembled at headquarters for instructions.

"I sincerely hope that you'll meet none of the foreigners," said the general to the major who had assumed command of the rescue party. "That nondescript detachment would ruin the reputation of the American cavalry forever. But," and he grew serious, "find that squad if you can."

"General," cried an orderly, who was stationed on a hillock near by, "there is something coming down the road. It looks like a wagon train, sir."

"Hold on a minute—you men get off those mules. Ride forward, major, and find out what it is."

AN ARMY BOY

In a few minutes the major trotted back, his face flushed.

“Wait!” he gasped.

And then around the bend in the road came a strange procession—six mule carts, laden with vegetables, chickens and eggs, a drove of sheep numbering about thirty, as many hogs, half a dozen cattle. Two soldiers, mounted on mules, herded them from the rear, while leading the van, puffed with pride, was Corporal Kearny, astride of a camel.

All sense of order and discipline deserted the spectators. Men leaned against their horses and mules and gave themselves up to laughter. Officers choked and the tears ran down their cheeks in the effort for self-repression. The general stood for a minute, growing redder and redder, then sank into his camp-chair convulsed.

Harry looked around, bewildered and hurt. He glanced back over his convoy to assure himself that all was in order—yes, the men were in place, all was arranged perfectly. Calling Hanlon from his cart to hold his camel, he dismounted.

“Come here, my man,” said the general, when he was able to command himself. “What do you mean by deserting your outpost?”

“Sir! General!” stammered Harry. “I didn’t desert it—I left a perfectly reliable man in charge.”

IN PEKIN

“But what on earth put such a notion into your head?”

“Why, sir, I heard on all sides that we were short on transportation and fresh meat, and—and—well, look there, sir,” and he waved his hand to his capture.

Once more the spectators broke down. Harry grinned a little himself in sympathy, then turned back to the general.

“Did I do wrong, sir?”

“Did you do wrong? Ha, ha, ha! Well, you might be court-martialed and shot. But I cannot punish you—I simply cannot. Are you the Kearny who rode to that Russian battery yesterday?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I thought so. We’ll call it a balance, and let the breach of discipline pass. Colonel, notify the quartermaster and commissary of the latest acquisitions to the departments of supply. Gentlemen, you may retire.”

CHAPTER XII

TREACHERY

TRAMP-TRAMP. Plod-plod.

Hour after hour, the fine, hot sand below, the burning, merciless sun above—with not a cloud to cover his bright face for a precious moment. Not a hint of a breeze to blow away the clouds of dust, nor to give an instant's sensation of coolness to the superheated, struggling bodies.

A country, flat, densely populated and densely cultivated. No hard ground anywhere; only ploughed fields, into which the feet sank to the ankle with every step. And the dust, churned up by the long column, held to the route by the high, thick growth of corn, entered the nose and throat with every breath; settled on the eyeballs and caused the tears to make dirty streaks down sun-blistered cheeks. The soil was alkaline—there was a sting and a smart in every grain.

Water? Yes, a lukewarm, muddy fluid in the canteens of those strong willed enough to guard it. That also was alkaline, affording a momentary relief, but serving only to moisten the surface of the mouth and throat, and to give a stronger

IN PEKIN

irritating effect to the next dust-laden breath inhaled.

Still onward! Onward! Close up! Close up! And the long tortured column, like a giant centipede, twisting and turning, tottered forward.

And the occasional well—around it the half-maddened men, crowding, struggling, begging. Those nearest gulping down the water to repletion, then staggering back to the column, water-logged, and more often than not overcome by cramps a few minutes later, while others took their places till the bugle call forced all to their places again.

“You should keep your men away from the wells, captain,” said a staff officer as he rode by.

“Look here,” flared up O’Hara. “If you’ll get down off that horse and lug one of these packs for an hour, I’ll bet a month’s pay that you’ll be the first man in the army to reach a well, and that you can’t be dragged away with a mule team.”

Worst of all would be the sight of trees ahead. There was the hope that the halt might be ordered there, that there might be an opportunity to lie down for a few minutes in the blessed shade, to remove the heavy pack and the galling cartridge belt. And then to have the halt sounded one, two, or three hundred yards short of the hoped-for goal, and to know that what rest there was to be had must be taken in the sweltering inferno of

AN ARMY BOY

that August sun, was more than some could endure.

There were those who set their teeth and accepted the situation with courage. There were those who grumbled and growled and raged, thus adding to their sufferings. There were those who lost courage and whimpered. There were others still, whose physical endurance failed, but whose determination not to yield carried them the last possible step—then a sudden darkness, and they fell, and were rolled to the side of the road to be picked up by the ambulances that brought up the rear.

“This is worse than any hike we made in the Philippines,” remarked Captain O’Hara to his lieutenant.

“It is, indeed,” was the reply. “But I suspect that all this fainting is not real. Some men will fight like demons, but haven’t the courage to endure suffering. There’s some malingering here.”

In this the officer was right. Moral weaklings, taking advantage of the knowledge that those who fell out were carried at least a short distance, would feign heat exhaustion. Even if forced to leave the ambulances after a few minutes they were free from the column, could take their own gait, and straggle into camp in the cool of the evening.

Don was of the class who endured without a

IN PEKIN

murmur. That a human being could suffer so, he had no previous idea. He had read of marches and battles, but, where the details of the latter were given in full, the former had merely been mentioned. But he was determined that never a complaint should pass his lips, nor should his face show his distress. He took charge of the rations of his squad, and decided absolutely when they should eat, and how much. He sternly checked the tendency to overindulgence in water, and held his men together at the halts.

In his heart he knew that the march was being poorly conducted, that needless hardships were being put upon the men. He knew that, when a halt was ordered, it was some one's duty to let the men know for how long it was to last. That men should, at one time, remove their packs and lie down, only to have the column start immediately, necessitating their running to catch up, while at another they would stand for fifteen or twenty minutes fearing to rest as the column might start at once—all this he knew was wrong, that some one's ignorance or neglect was at fault. Still he repressed any criticisms by the men under his command and appealed to all that was best in them to keep them steadfast.

In this Sergeant Sypher's actions were his inspiration. The veteran was true to his philosophy.

AN ARMY BOY

"This is nothing new, men," he would say. "Soldiers have been doing this ever since the world began. We are lucky that we are chasing the other fellow, and haven't got him behind us rampagin' to cut us up."

"But, sergeant," asked Hanlon, "why do we start out at ten o'clock an' march till four?"

"Why, man, do you think we are the whole show? The march is arranged according to the numbers of the allies. The Japs, having the most, start first, about six. It is eight before the last of them are on the road. Then come the Russians, an' they stretch out for about two hours. That makes us start about ten and the English at eleven-thirty. They have it as bad or worse than we do."

"Then it can't be helped?"

"I reckon not. If we marched in separate columns, it would throw some too far away from the river. The scheme of marching on both sides was tried at first, you remember, and it lost us the chance of bottling the Chinks at Pietsang."

So the sergeant talked to the men at the various halts. His eyes were sunken and his lips cracked. He probably felt sympathy for the weaklings, but never permitted any to think that it was not all in the day's work—natural and inevitable.

The third day out from Yangtsun the straggling

IN PEKIN

became so great that strenuous action was taken to check it. The officers realized that their men were weakened by two years' service in the tropics, and that the hours of their daily march handicapped them greatly. Still pride of race would not permit them to acknowledge that they could not keep up with the Japanese and Russians, nor was it possible to suggest shorter marches with the enemy, still intact, falling back on Peking with the probable intention of wreaking, on the helpless men, women and children besieged there, a terrible vengeance for their defeats at the hands of the foreign armies. Stern orders were given that any man found to be shamming illness in order to leave the ranks was to be shot on the spot.

This reduced the straggling, but introduced a bitterness into the ranks. Officers and non-commissioned officers found it necessary to use the heavy hand. The sullen spirit of the few bad characters was quelled with the butt of a gun or with the flat of a sword. The last vestige of the spirit of fun departed, but the American army kept its place in the march, and the threatened disgrace of acknowledged inferiority was averted.

It was at Ho-si-wu one night that the English column failed to come up. The comment on the failure was less than it would have been had not the mail come in over the relay post established

AN ARMY BOY

by the Japanese. The worn-out men brisked a little at the idea of news from home, and the less fortunate gathered around those who had letters or papers, for such items of general interest as might have been received.

"Nothing to interest you, boys," said Don. "Personal bad news. Sister sick, father's business involved in the general financial depression. I wish I were making about sixteen hundred, instead of sixteen dollars a month."

"Too bad, corporal."

"Yes, I can't do anything about it. It's a pity I received the letter before this business is over."

"Corporal Page—Corporal Kearny—your squads for headquarters guard to-night. Report to Sergeant Hoyle at retreat."

"Very good, sergeant," replied the two as the first sergeant passed on.

Accordingly the squads were reported to the adjutant at dusk.

"Divide the privates into reliefs, sergeant," commanded the adjutant. "You'll have to take one relief yourself, and put the oldest private in charge of another. Bring one corporal to that tent over there. He will be guard over the regimental records and fund. I'll show you the posts later."

IN PEKIN

“ Yes, sir. Corporal Page, turn your squad over to Harrison and come along.”

Though Don disliked the responsibility, and realized that there was little, if any, sleep for him that night, he was glad of the opportunity to be alone for a while.

He and Sergeant Hoyle were witnesses that the adjutant put the funds in a drawer of a field desk, closed, locked and sealed it. The seal consisted of his name, written on a piece of paper and pasted over the crack of the desk cover.

“ This is done just for convenience, sergeant,” he stated. “ That seal, while unbroken, relieves the guard from any responsibility for the amount of funds in the desk.”

“ Yes, sir, I understand. What are the special orders, sir ? ”

“ No one to be permitted to enter the tent except those from whom the guard properly takes orders. I’ll relieve the corporal to-morrow, myself.”

“ Very good, sir.”

Left alone, Don settled himself in a camp-chair for his long vigil. He loosened his clothing and made himself as comfortable as possible. Soon, in spite of himself, he found his eyes closing, and his head nodding.

“ Here, this won’t do,” he muttered, and for

AN ARMY BOY

a while walked back and forth across the tent. The confined space, and his aching legs soon discouraged him, and he sat down again. Again he dozed off and was startled by the tent flap being raised.

“Who is there?” he challenged.

“Sergeant Hoyle. How is everything, Page?”

“All right, sergeant, except that I am mighty sleepy.”

“The whole guard is. I have instructed the corporal of each relief to walk from post to post every fifteen minutes, so as to keep himself and the men awake. When my relief is on I’ll drop in for half an hour and let you sleep a bit. I am afraid that is all I can do for you.”

“Thank you—even a doze would help.”

“All is quiet and I’m going to turn in for a while. The English haven’t come in yet, and I hear they are anxious at headquarters.”

“I hope nothing’s wrong.”

“Don’t see how there could be. We’d have heard their artillery if they had been attacked. By the way, Page, have you thought over that matter I spoke of the other day?”

“Yes—a great deal, sergeant.”

“Do you feel that you can promise any more than you did then?”

“I’m afraid not, sergeant.”

IN PEKIN

“ Well, I won’t ask you to go against your conscience, and must take my chance, I suppose. Good-night.”

“ Good-night, sergeant.”

“ The man’s got some fine points. I wish I felt justified in promising what he wants,” said Don to himself, after Hoyle’s departure.

Then followed a long fight to keep awake. Don knew that Hoyle had the third relief, and that it would be at least four hours before he could hope for the promised nap. He was too tired to remain standing, so seated himself and adopted the scheme of holding his rifle so that, when he dozed off, his arm would relax, and it would fall against his knee and awaken him. He leaned the chair against the field desk containing the funds and records, so that it could not be disturbed without stirring him.

Time passed. The camp became silent, except for an occasional low challenge. It seemed to Don as though his rifle had fallen against his knee a thousand times when he heard a quick step approaching. The light of a lantern flashed on the tent, the tent flap was raised, and Hoyle entered. His breath was coming fast and his eyes were bright with excitement.

“ Page,” he said, “ I have just come from the general’s headquarters, where I was called by the

AN ARMY BOY

field officer of the day. The English are off the road."

"Great Scott!"

"Yes; the Japanese post relay, when questioned, said that he had met no troops till he reached our camp. The Japanese think that the English must have taken the branch road to Pao-ting-fu."

"Do they consider the situation serious?"

"They do indeed, and consider it of first importance that the English should be headed off. And that is what I wanted to see you about. They ask that an American be sent, on account of the language. The general asked me if I knew a first class man who would take the risk. He said that we were so short of officers that we couldn't spare one, with the men straggling so."

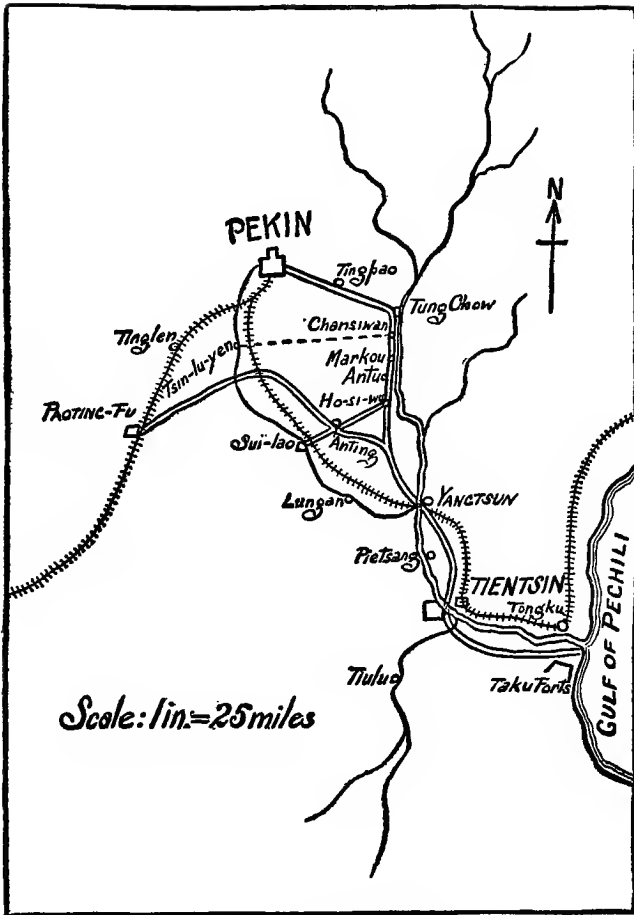
"Yes," said Don, his heart pounding.

"Well, Page, I realized that I had been pretty mean to you. I gave him your name."

"Why, Hoyle, old man," and Don seized the other's hand, "you have covered all you ever did to me and more. You were more than generous. There's a commission in this for the man who does it. I wonder that you did not offer yourself."

"My first thought was of the chance to square myself with you. I own I did think of myself later; but as soon as I mentioned your name, the

IN PEKIN



MAP GIVEN TO DON BY SERGEANT HOYLE

AN ARMY BOY

general spoke up and said that you were the very man for the task. He remembered your capturing that Chinaman at Pietsang."

"I am afraid, under the circumstances, my first impulse would not have been so generous."

"Well, it's settled, and I think for the best. I couldn't have gone without the captain's permission, and there is need for haste. The general wrote out this pass for you."

Don took the paper. It directed that "Corporal Donald Page, Company 'H,' Fourteenth Infantry, U. S. Army, on special mission, was to be passed through any line of sentinels to the American headquarters, at any hour, day or night," and was signed in person by the major-general, commanding.

"I'll preserve that pass as long as I live," said Don.

"And he gave me these, also," added Hoyle, producing a sealed letter addressed to General Gaselee and a map. "This," indicating the letter, "you will give to the English commander, whom you will guide back. The map you will use as your own guide. The road that leaves the main road from the left of our camp, as you see, cuts in on the Pao-ting-fu road, so if you hustle you'll catch them."

"I see," said Don, looking at the map. "We are near Ho-si-wu now. I'm to cut across, by

IN PEKIN

using this road to the southwest, and intercept the English at Anting.”

“Just so—you have the idea,” said Hoyle.

“Well, I’m off. Who relieves me here?”

“Thornton—I woke him up as I came over. He’ll be here soon, and you needn’t wait. I’ll take charge till he comes.”

“Then it’s all fixed. Hoyle, I hope I can square this with you some day.”

“Maybe you can. Have you plenty of rations and ammunition?”

“Yes, two days’ rations in my haversack, and a hundred rounds for my rifle, besides a few extra cartridges for my revolver. Good-bye, Hoyle.”

“Good-bye, Page. Take care of yourself.”

They shook hands, and Don was off. As he left the tent Hoyle staggered back against the desk. The cheerful, kindly look passed from his eyes. Beads of perspiration started on his forehead.

Furtively he slipped from the tent and sneaked after Don, who strode briskly along.

“If he only passes the sentinel without showing that pass or making any explanation,” he muttered, “it will be a sure thing.”

“Halt! Who is there?”

“Corporal of the guard.”

“Advance, corporal of the guard, to be recognized.”

AN ARMY BOY

Hoyle saw Don advance to the point of the bayonet, then saw the sentry swing his rifle back to his shoulder, on recognizing a non-commissioned officer of the guard. Don passed out into the blackness of the night.

Silently, but hastily, Hoyle returned to the tent.

"I've settled your hash, all right—in twelve hours at the most you'll be beyond the possibility of blabbing anything you know. I'd rather fight you openly, but you had to be dished or Sergeant Hoyle couldn't become Lieutenant Hoyle. What an idiot you were not to tell your particular chum! It would have been too much, even for me, to get rid of the two of you."

Then his eye fell on the field desk.

"Aha! Once you sent me out branded as a thief—I'll repay you in full. Not only your life but also your reputation. You'll be known in the regiment as Page, the deserter and thief."

And drawing his bayonet, he inserted it in the crack of the field desk. A steady, increasing pressure spread the side away from the cover, and the lock yielded. The lid opened, tearing the adjutant's seal across. Hoyle opened the drawer and withdrew a package.

"Regimental Fund, 14th Infantry, \$1105.00," he read. "That's it."

Slipping it into his shirt bosom, he left the tent.

CHAPTER XIII

SERGEANT HOYLE SCORES AGAIN

“HELLO! I see the Johnny Bulls are here.”

The Americans, awakened from their night's rest by the ringing bugles, noted that the English camp was in its accustomed place—just to the south of their own.

“Yes; didn't you hear them last night?”

“Nary a sound.”

“They were pretty quiet. I happened to be awake when they marched in, so dropped over to ask what was the matter.”

“What was it?”

“One of them told me that they had given up starting at noon, and would break camp hereafter at four, marching till ten or eleven. ‘Too blooming 'ot,’ the fellow said.”

“So we're not such rank marchers after all.”

“If we are, the English are worse, as they have given up the job. But I'm thinking that even the Japs wouldn't be so frisky if they were up against our hours of march.”

Just then Sergeant Hoyle passed through the camp.

AN ARMY BOY

"Corporal Page! Has any one seen Corporal Page?" he was calling.

"Why, sergeant," answered Sypher, "he went on guard with you last night."

"Yes, I know he did, but has he been over here this morning?"

"I haven't seen him. Any of you men seen Page?"

A silence followed.

"He ain't been around here this morning," said the cook. "I've been lookin' for him to be after the coffee for his squad. He's usually about the first."

At this point Harry appeared.

"Where is Page this morning, Kearny?" asked Hoyle.

"Over in the tent where he was stationed last night, I suppose."

"No, he's not there, and I have been looking all over for him."

Harry's face showed a dawning anxiety.

"I'll go with you and help hunt," he said.

"No use," said Hoyle; "he's not in camp. I'll have to report this to the captain."

Harry, now fully alarmed, insisted on accompanying him.

"I cannot find him, sir," the sergeant reported.

"Looks mighty bad," said Captain O'Hara.

IN PEKIN

“Did Corporal Page speak to you about anything special last night, corporal?”

“No, sir, nothing that I can remember,” answered Harry.

“When did you last see him?”

“When we went on guard.”

“Was that before the mail was delivered?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did he seem to be in any trouble?”

“No, sir—well, come to think of it, he did have bad news from home.”

“Anything that would have made him leave camp?”

“No, indeed, sir.”

“Well, the two of you come over to see the adjutant.”

They found the adjutant and the sergeant-major at the tent where Don had been on guard the night before. The field desk was opened, and had evidently been thoroughly searched.

“A mighty serious case, O’Hara,” said the adjutant. “I personally put the regimental fund in this drawer in the presence of the sergeant here and of Corporal Page. I locked and sealed it. On coming over this morning to relieve the corporal, I find him missing, the seal broken, the lock of the desk forced, and the regimental fund gone.”

AN ARMY BOY

“ Oh, Captain O’Hara !” cried Harry. “ Surely no one can suspect Page of being a thief. Why, I have known him for years. There’s something wrong here. It is impossible.”

A silence followed his outburst.

“ That lock was forced, captain,” said the sergeant-major. “ You can see where the bayonet was inserted and used as a lever. The print of it is still in the edge of the cover.”

“ Yes,” responded the adjutant, “ I see. Sergeant Hoyle, when did you last see the corporal ? ”

“ I inspected here about one o’clock this morning, sir, while my relief was on post.”

“ Was everything all right then ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ What was the corporal doing ? ”

“ He was sitting in the chair there. I stayed a few minutes talking with him.”

“ Was he excited ? ”

“ Well, sir, I’d not say excited. He seemed rather wide awake.”

“ Did he know that you were coming around ? ”

“ I suppose so—yes, he did. I remember now that I had told him earlier in the evening that I would drop in on him while my relief was on and give him a chance for a short nap.”

“ When you left him at one o’clock did he expect you to return again ? ”

IN PEKIN

"No, sir, I am sure he did not. I told him that, as he seemed so wide awake, I'd not be around any more."

"Then he knew he would not be disturbed?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Have you questioned the sentinels?"

"No, sir. I have been looking for Page ever since you reported him missing."

"Call them all here."

Hoyle left.

Harry, in a daze, looked from one officer to the other.

"Captain O'Hara, tell me that you don't believe it. You know Page and know that he is not capable of doing a thing like that."

"I would have sworn by him," responded the captain. "Don't take it so to heart, corporal. Maybe the guard can throw some light on the matter."

"I'm sure he must have been drugged or set upon by some one knowing about the money."

"But where is he? They couldn't have carried him out of camp."

Harry was silent.

Sergeant Hoyle returned with the privates of the guard.

"Did any of you see Corporal Page last night?" asked the adjutant.

AN ARMY BOY

"Yes, sir," answered one of the men.

"At what hour?"

"I dunno exactly—long 'bout half after one, I reckon."

"Where was he?"

"He passed my post and I challenged him."

"What post did you have?"

"Number four, sir, over by that road that leads out to the left."

"What did he say?"

"Nothin', sir. I challenged and he answered, 'Corporal of the guard'; then I advanced him and recognized him, an' he passed out."

"Why did you pass him from the camp?"

The soldier looked surprised.

"Well, sir," he said, "I had no call to stop a non-commissioned officer of the guard."

"True enough—true enough. Did you notice anything about him that you can remember?"

"Nothin', sir. He walked off sort o' brisk. Yes, sir, now I think of it, I do remember figurin' that it was funny he was luggin' his haversack."

"He had on his haversack?"

"Yes, sir, and his canteen."

"O'Hara," said the adjutant, after dismissing the men, "it looks like a plain case."

"I'm afraid so."

"No! No!" protested Harry. "There is some

IN PEKIN

deep plot here, and I believe this sneak," whirling on Hoyle, "is at the bottom of it, assisted by that innocent-looking sentinel. Oh, you cannot pull the wool over my eyes, you unutterable scoundrel."

The young man's head was back, his control was gone, his eyes blazed. Hoyle changed color slightly.

"Captain," he started, "I protest ——"

"You needn't. Corporal Kearny, not another word, or you go into arrest."

"But, captain, this man ——"

"Silence, sir!"

Harry gulped and was silent, but his eyes searched Hoyle's face.

"Can you throw any more light on this matter, sergeant?"

"I am afraid not, sir. I believe, though, that Corporal Kearny could if he would."

"Why—why ——" gasped Harry.

"What d'ye mean, sergeant?"

"I heard Corporal Page saying that he had had bad news from home, and saw him reading a letter to Kearny. I believe that the contents of that letter might throw some light—it might have shown the need for the money."

"How about it, corporal?"

"I decline to answer."

"Your refusal makes a bad impression."

AN ARMY BOY

"I cannot help it, sir. I must decline to tell what was told me in confidence."

"Was there anything about money?"

"I cannot say, sir. I will state, on my honor, that there was nothing which could make Page commit a dishonest act."

"Do you know anything more, sergeant?"

"No, sir; I merely gathered that there was need of money at home."

"Do you believe that Corporal Page has stolen the regimental fund and deserted?"

"Sir, there seems no other explanation."

"There seems none now," broke in Harry. "But there is an explanation, and I mean to find it."

"That is all for the present," said the adjutant. "And it is time we were preparing for the march. You men may retire."

"But are you not going to send out a party to search for him?" asked Harry.

"No, I shall telegraph Tientsin. He cannot get through there without being discovered."

"It's not that, sir. I know he is not trying to escape. Oh, sir, I beg of you to let me take my squad and make an effort to overtake him."

"Impossible. A battalion would not be safe a mile beyond our lines."

"Then let me go alone."

IN PEKIN

“ No, corporal. Your faith in your friend does you credit, and I regret that I cannot share it. In truth, I imagine that any effort would be useless ; probably the Chinese have killed him already.”

Dazed and helpless, Harry left the tent and returned to his company. He found it all excitement, some rumors of Don's disappearance having reached the men. He was besieged with questions. Simply, he told the men of what had happened.

“ Well,” said one of Hoyle's friends, “ I never did think much o' Page, anyhow—settin' hisself up as better'n the rest of us.”

“ You may think such thoughts as your cramped brain is capable of,” said Harry. “ But you'd better keep your opinion mighty quiet.”

“ I reckon I'll talk when I get good an' ready,” blustered the other.

Harry approached him till their faces were separated by only an inch.

“ Look here,” he said, fixing the fellow with his eyes. “ I'll have you to understand that Corporal Page is an honest man, and your superior in every way. If you utter a word against him, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life.”

The man hesitated and turned pale. Then his eyes fell and he turned away, muttering under his breath.

AN ARMY BOY

“Good boy,” said Hanlon. “I’m another that’s got to hear Page’s side o’ the story before I’m agin him.”

Others echoed Hanlon. A large number kept silent; these formed the worst element of the company, and, but for the certainty that an adverse word meant a fight with Harry, whose desperate mood was evident, many of them would have indulged their pleasure in learning of Corporal Page’s downfall. To these the arrival of Sergeant Hoyle with the guard of the preceding night gave an opportunity not to be passed by.

“I say, sergeant,” called an ugly looking fellow, “tell us about this affair last night. I understand that the company is short one of its bright an’ promisin’ young corporals.”

“Yes, Page and the regimental fund have made a mutual disappearance.”

“That’s false,” thundered Harry.

“What’s that?” demanded the sergeant.

“I say that you are a false, black-hearted villain,” and Harry, overcome by his rage, sprang upon him.

Harry was the much lighter man, though nearly as tall as the sergeant, and Hoyle easily pushed him away. But the young man was after him again in an instant. In his excitement he gave no thought to science; he was possessed of just one

IN PEKIN

thought—to punish the man he felt sure was at the bottom of his friend's disgrace.

To all appearances Hoyle desired to avoid the encounter, falling back, and merely warding the blows aimed at him. Twice he ordered Harry to desist, but without avail; the latter was far beyond any attention to orders.

“Well, if you will have it,” said Hoyle. And suddenly swinging with all his strength, he struck Harry full in the face. The youngster fell as if shot.

“What's all this?”

Captain O'Hara forced his way through the press.

“Sir,” said Hoyle, pointing to Harry, who was struggling to his feet, “that man assaulted me.”

“It looks the other way.”

“I have acted only in self-defense, sir.”

“How about it?” asked the captain, turning to the bystanders.

“It's as the sergeant says, sir. Corporal Kearny insulted him when he said Corporal Page had made a get-away, and then jumped on him. The sergeant tried to hold him off, and ordered him to be quiet, but he wouldn't; the sergeant had to hit him.”

“Corporal Kearny, you are under arrest. Turn in your rifle and side arms, and march in rear of

AN ARMY BOY

the company till further orders. No, sir, not a word. We've other things to think about. Sergeant, have the men prepare for the march."

Fifteen minutes later the regiment left the camp. In rear of Company "H," stripped of his command and deprived of the rifle that showed him to be a soldier, marched Harry Kearny. A prey to the deepest depression, he trudged on with his bruised face bowed low. But in his heart was fixed the determination to find the truth, and to save the good name of his friend. His dear chum, who even now might be lying dead somewhere over in that unknown country, or worse, might be fighting for his life against desperate odds, with no one to stand back to back with him.

At the front, as leading guide, marched Sergeant Hoyle. His face was calm, masking his exultation.

"A good twelve hours' work," he was thinking. "One of them down and out, disgraced and probably food for buzzards by now. The other in arrest and to be court-martialed—he'll be convicted, too, the hot-headed Irish mick. The falling out of the English certainly worked into my hands—but I'd have fixed it anyhow. It'll take a smarter man than either of them to stop James Hoyle when he wants anything. There'll be no shoulder straps for the two who bucked me, even if I fail to get

IN PEKIN

a chance to wind up Kearney as thoroughly as the other. In the meantime," and his hand crept to the thin package sewed in the lining of his shirt, "I have the wherewithal to pay for my outfit when my commission comes."

And the burning sun shone down on the long column as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XIV

DON PAGE AT BAY

WHEN Don left the camp he swung boldly off into the country. The road he followed, while a poor one and deep with dust, was plainly marked and could be seen without difficulty. Still with all the sense of companionship he strode along, even whistling softly to himself as he walked. On both sides were corn fields.

In his excitement, the weariness of the night fell from him, and the twelve miles he had marched that day, under the blazing sun, were as if they had not been.

"Let me see," he said to himself. "From the look I got at the map, this road cuts in on the Pao-ting-fu road about a day and a half march from where we camped last with the English. I suppose they would make a reasonable march, then send their mounted men out to see how far we are ahead. When these return with the news that they cannot locate any other troops, they'll probably look things up and discover their mistake. Then they'll camp and hit for the main road to-morrow."

IN PEKIN

He walked on for a few hundred yards further and then another thought struck him.

“If they decide to cut across country, I’ll miss them. But they will hardly do that. They’ll probably continue to the crossroads, then take this road I am on now. If so, I’ll meet them some time to-morrow morning. It’s queer that the generals didn’t figure that out—the English, of course, have the same maps as the rest. Still I suppose they didn’t want to take the chances, so sent a runner out.”

The night was cool. The freedom from the restraint of marching in column, where the gait has to be fixed for the slower men, made walking a positive pleasure. He was not choked and blinded by the dust churned up, nor jostled by his comrades, and could walk at the edge of the road or in the middle, as was most convenient, instead of having to maintain an exact line regardless of the character of the footing.

An hour passed, and his rifle began to seem heavy. The fatigue of the past day began to assert itself, but for a while his pleasure at having been selected for the task enabled him to disregard it. The memory of Hoyle’s description of his conversation with the general was especially gratifying.

“So the general still has me in mind. If I can

AN ARMY BOY

carry this thing through all right, I'm sure of my commission when I come of age. Then I'll be able to help the old folks some."

He came to the outskirts of a village. For a few minutes he hesitated, wondering whether he had better not go around. Fearing, however, that there were two roads leading out and that he might take the wrong one, he decided to chance going through. He started, his heart beating, and was relieved to find the place apparently deserted. Several dogs rushed out, barking savagely, but he pressed on. Once he thought he heard a door opened, but he reached the other side of the settlement without interruption, and was again in the open road.

"Gee!" he muttered, "this is going to be more of a job than I had thought. I may have a nasty time before I meet our wandering English friends."

Till now the knowledge that none of the enemy lay between him and his own comrades had made him thoughtless of the real situation. Now it came home to him with full force that he was alone in a hostile country, a country in which the people were thoroughly aroused against his kind, and all they represented. The memory of the stories of cruelty and torture, done upon those of the whites who had fallen into their hands, recurred to him. Sternly he put the thoughts from

IN PEKIN

him, and sought to bolster up his sinking heart by the consideration that the people must be thoroughly cowed along the line of the march. It was probable that the mere sight of a foreign soldier would put any number of them to flight.

Suddenly his panting breath warned him that he had been hurrying too much. He must overcome this hunted feeling; must calm himself and conserve his strength.

Another village was passed. This time voices calling to the dogs, with which the country seemed to swarm, showed that the inhabitants had not fled. One man came to his door with a lantern and called something after Don, but the latter hurried on, sure that the man had not been able to see him clearly enough to suspect what he was.

By dawn he had covered about eight miles. He was thoroughly tired, but knew there was no sleep for him. Nor did he dare to rest for fear he might fall into a dead slumber and not awake in time to reach the crossroads. It was always possible that the English might fail to discover their mistake, and continue to press on with an idea of overtaking the allies, unless intercepted in time.

"I must reach the junction of the roads by ten o'clock at the latest," he decided.

Retiring a short distance into a corn field, he made a hearty breakfast. The ration, intended for

AN ARMY BOY

use in connection with those issued to several other men, was not suited for one. It consisted of a can of corned beef, a can of tomatoes, and a dozen hardtack. The cans were sufficient for one meal for half a dozen men, but once opened for use of one, all the tomatoes that could not be eaten would be wasted. He put that aside, therefore, and ate part of his corned beef with a couple of hardtack, drinking with it the last of the water in his canteen.

“By Jove!” he muttered. “This is a serious thing. Every one depends on wells in this country, so how am I to get any more water without being seen? Difficulties multiply.”

He took out his map and examined it. No, except for the Pei-ho there was no river or stream indicated. He noticed then that the map was hastily drawn—a piece of rough hand-work. It seemed to him that his road had been more northerly than shown by the map, but he had no compass, so could not be sure. He must await the sun to get the direction with any certainty.

“Well,” he said rising, “I must get on. I certainly have covered nine miles since I started, and five more ought to see the end of it. Here goes.”

He was about to step into the road when he heard voices. Crouching, he let a number of Chinamen pass, all talking volubly; they were

IN PEKIN

going in the direction from which he had come. Then he entered the road, his eyes fixed ahead, ready to take cover at the first indication of other travelers.

Half an hour brought him to another village, which he passed by making a wide *détour*. A little later the sun rose, and he was sure that he was traveling more to the north than he should, if the map were correct. Still, there had been no branch roads, and the rate he was traveling made it all the more certain that he would beat the English to the junction, since such a change in direction would lengthen their distance more than his own.

Rounding a turn in the road, he came suddenly upon a group of Chinamen. His first impulse was to spring for the field at the side, but one of them, looking up, saw him, and gave a little cry of alarm. Instantly they scattered right and left. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Don hurried past, but the hunted feeling of the previous night returned with double force. And it was soon justified, for as he made the next turn he looked back and saw several of the men gathered in the road and talking excitedly.

He went a short distance, then stepped into the field and concealed himself. After a short wait he heard footsteps, which halted opposite

AN ARMY BOY

him. The Chinamen were evidently having an argument, and there was no doubt that he was the subject. Soon, however, they passed on, and he resumed his route, keeping under cover of the corn.

Here the traveling was much more difficult, and, as the sun rose higher, he began to be troubled with thirst. The country had become rolling, and here and there a low hill arose. He hoped to find a stream or a spring in some of the hollows, but did not dare to leave the vicinity of the road for fear he might not be able to find it again. And besides, time pressed.

A house appeared ahead. This he skirted. Then another, and he realized that he was approaching a town, probably the one the Chinamen he had surprised had come from. The field came to a point, and he found that there was another road to his right. One of them must be crossed, and quickly. Deciding to risk the new road rather than the one he had been traveling, as the latter was probably watched, he made a dash to the right.

For a few seconds he was in the open, and a shout told him that he was discovered. A hasty glance to his left showed him a swarm of Chinamen, among them several in the garb of Boxers.

He was in the corn field and running at top speed, the shouts behind him proving that he was

IN PEKIN

being chased. His first intention was to seek a hiding-place, but the baying of dogs, soon added to the yelling of the men, convinced him of the uselessness of such an attempt. For an instant despair overcame him, then his spirit reasserted itself.

“ They may get me, but they’ll remember it for a long time—those who live through it.”

He inclined to the left and made for a high hill. His change of direction threw the pursuers off the track for a minute, but the dogs soon picked up the trail. Some of these came in sight, and as they overtook him, began circling around, snarling, eager to attack but not quite daring to.

He emerged on the open hillside. As he did so a rifle shot rang out and the bullet, whistling over his head, struck the ground ahead of him. Another and another shot, then a fusillade, fortunately poorly aimed, spurred him on. With the last of his strength he gained the top of the hill, and threw himself, panting, behind a large boulder.

A hundred yards down the hill was the edge of the corn field. From it broke about a hundred Chinamen, probably a dozen of them in Boxer uniform, armed with rifles. Some of the others carried knives or clubs, the rest stones.

About half of them started up the hill, the

AN ARMY BOY

others ran around to the other side to intercept his flight. Don waited grimly until the leaders were half-way up the hill, then thrust his rifle forward through the grass. Aiming each shot carefully, he emptied his magazine into them. Three of the Boxers fell before the rush was checked, and another sprawled headlong as they retreated.

“Four out of five,” said Don, hastily reloading. “I ought to be ashamed of missing the last shot at this range.”

He turned to see a body of the enemy creeping up the hill to his rear. When these found themselves discovered they attempted to charge him, not having seen the result of his deadly marksmanship on their friends. Again he waited until they were within fifty yards, and this time there were five writhing figures on the hillside before the last of them reached cover in their flight.

“I think that will hold 'em for a while,” he said, aloud, the excitement dispelling all sense of fear. “Now to prepare for the next move.”

With his bayonet he gouged out a small hollow in the hard soil. The stones and earth he piled up around him in a circle, until he had constructed a fair redoubt. Before the work was finished, the necessity for it was proven, for the enemy had opened a hot fire upon his position.

IN PEKIN

Most of the bullets whistled harmlessly over. Some, however, struck his shelter, and sent showers of broken stone and dirt upon him. He lay quietly, feeling that no rush was imminent as long as they were firing.

Then he remembered the little pocket mirror he carried in his haversack. Holding this above his shelter, he found that, by exposing only one hand, he could lie on his back and get a reflected view of the hillside and village below. It was by this means that he discovered the arrival of reinforcements to the enemy.

A Boxer company had come up, probably fifty men, led by an officer on horseback. He saw them surround the hill, and soon the rapid and accurate fire they delivered made him hug the ground, not daring to risk even his hand above the earthwork. His piece was loaded, five cartridges in the magazine and one in the chamber, six shots. He pulled out his pocket pistol, a thirty-eight caliber bulldog, useless at long range but deadly at short, laid it ready beside him, then loosened his bayonet in its scabbard.

Then he lay quietly waiting. The bullets continued to rain about him, and he knew that they would not continue to fire so low if any were advancing up the uniform slope of the hill. They would have to elevate their pieces or fire into their

AN ARMY BOY

own men, before the latter could get near enough for a final rush, so he would have ample warning.

There came to him the smell of burning grass. The smell became stronger and dense smoke began to pass over him.

"They have fired the grass on the hill, and mean to advance under cover of the smoke," he cried aloud.

As he spoke the shots ceased, and there was a shout below him. Rising to his knee, he strained his eyes through the smoke and flames. A form appeared—he fired; another—he fired again. Gradually turning, he saw, dimly, the Boxers advancing from all sides.

The six shots were fired from his rifle without stopping the rush, and with a yell the Chinamen advanced upon him, sure, as they saw him drop the gun, that they had him at their mercy. To their surprise, he was erect again in an instant, revolver in hand. With this he continued to fire, carefully and with perfect aim. On one side they turned and fled; on the other, led by their officer, they came on with a rush. With his last shot, Don dropped the Boxer leader at ten paces' distance, then threatening the others with the empty pistol, sprang toward them. Terrified at the fall of their leader, whom they had thought invulnerable, they gave back, turned and skurried down



THEY CAME ON WITH A RUSH

IN PEKIN

the hill. The flames died down and the air cleared again.

Heart-sick at the slaughter, and with eyes smarting from the smoke, Don settled back under cover. He breathed a prayer of thanksgiving for the protection granted him thus far and of petition for further aid. His thirst came back, and he held up his canteen in hope that it might still hold a spoonful, but found it dry.

He reloaded his rifle and revolver. Sixteen of his precious cartridges were gone, but he thought, with grim humor, that the remaining eighty-four would last his time.

There was no further attack that day, though an occasional shot assured him that the watchfulness of his enemies had not abated. The sun beat down upon him, heating the rocks so as almost to blister his hands when he touched them. To eat the salt corned beef and the dryhardtack without water was impossible, and he would not open the tomatoes till the last minute. So he suffered through the day, becoming feverish as the moisture of his body became exhausted.

The long afternoon passed and the sun sank below the horizon. He knew that the beaten enemy were merely waiting for darkness to creep upon him, but this was now a secondary matter. Two things he craved—water and sleep. From the

AN ARMY BOY

height, the sight of a ditch of running water had tortured him all the afternoon; it was probably used to irrigate the fields around the village.

As darkness fell he left his cover and crawled carefully down the hill. It was well he had done so, for two-thirds of the way down he heard men moving. Sinking into a slight depression, he lay holding his breath. A shout from the top of the hill, and the flaring of a torch there, probably saved him from discovery, for those around him rose at once and pressed on, ignoring the ground in their immediate vicinity.

Don crawled to the stream and drank deep drafts of the cool water. Then filling his canteen, he crept back to the edge of the field at the foot of the hill.

By now a dozen torches burned and, in their light, he could see that women and children had joined the men. There was great excitement over the escape of the "foreign devil." He watched parties of a dozen or more start in various directions in pursuit. Then others picked up the dead from the hillside and carried them, wailing, back to the village.

In all that neighborhood there was but one safe refuge for Don, and he had the wit to realize it. That one place was where all the village was sure he was not. Climbing up to his trench at the hill-

IN PEKIN

top, the exhausted youngster pillowed his head and back against the boulder, and ate a supper from his haversack.

This finished he curled on his side, placed his head on his haversack, and, with a half-incoherent prayer, slept.

CHAPTER XV

THE TOWN AT THE CROSSROADS

SOME eight hours later Don began to move uneasily in his sleep. The chill of the night was penetrating, and his hands instinctively felt for his blanket. The movement aroused him slightly.

"Gee!" he muttered. "I've slept like a rock. Harry! Oh, Harry! I have had the wildest dream!" He raised himself to his elbow, still heavy with sleep.

"I thought I was alone and had been fighting a horde of——" and his voice trailed off into silence as he noted the boulder at his head. Still incredulous, his eye followed the dim circle of the rampart he had constructed.

"No! It is impossible! It cannot be—but, yes, it is all true. I am alone!"

A shudder ran through him and he settled back, a prey, for the moment, to overwhelming despair. The instinct of the hunted was upon him, and he was impelled to spring to his feet and rush away in unreasoning flight. With a struggle he gathered himself, fighting down the crowding thoughts

IN PEKIN

and sensations that threatened to rob him of his reason.

Striking a match, he looked at his watch. Half-past three—an hour and a half of darkness still, then the daylight would come and expose him to the enemies who sought his life.

What was he to do? Return? The darkness would see him well on the road, and by ten o'clock he should reach the last camp of the allies. There the route would be plainly marked, and he ought to overtake the last of the wagon train before another nightfall.

But what of his mission? Could a soldier turn back when so near his goal? True, the English should have reached the crossroads by noon of the preceding day at the latest. If so, however, they should have passed his hill, and he was sure they had not done so. It was always possible that something might have delayed them, and that he might yet be in time.

The temptation to return to his friends made a hard fight with what he considered his duty. This was not unnatural, as the instinct of self-preservation is strong, and few are so courageous alone as when the eyes of their fellows are upon them.

The struggle was short, however, and passed, leaving him calm and determined.

AN ARMY BOY

"I'll do what I came to do, or die trying," he said. "Things cannot get much worse than they were yesterday, and I saw that through."

He knelt and prayed earnestly for strength, courage and guidance. Then, comforted, he opened his haversack and finished his corned beef, munching hardtack with it. When he had finished an inventory showed the tomatoes and two hardtack left.

"Plenty for to-day," he said, "and I may be with the English by dawn. If I fail to meet them—but time enough to cross that bridge when I get to it."

Slinging his haversack and canteen, and assuring himself that rifle and revolver were loaded, he made his way to the ditch, where he drank all the water he could hold and refilled his canteen. Then he circled around the hostile town, and striking the road on the opposite side, took up a rapid pace, determined to cover all the ground possible while the darkness continued.

The exercise warmed his blood, and as his long sleep had refreshed him, his courage and some of the carelessness of youth returned. He felt a renewed confidence that he would succeed, in spite of all odds, and his mind dwelt upon his triumphant return to his regiment. He even found

IN PEKIN

himself regretting that he could not relate the story of his fight on the hill.

“They’d all think that I was Baron Munchausen come back to life again, and I wouldn’t blame them much. I’d not believe it possible, myself, if it hadn’t happened to me.”

Dawn found him still in this cheerful frame of mind. Taking the chance of any one being abroad so early, he pressed forward. A short half hour later, reaching the top of a rise in the road, he saw ahead of him the clustered dwellings of a fair-sized town, in the center of which rose the graceful tower of a temple.

To the left was the pointed top of a hill not unlike the one he had occupied the preceding day. This he climbed, and, lying down, looked over the surrounding country. To the right lay the road he had traveled, and to the left he saw, with a thrill, a broad highway from the southeastward running into the town.

“I’m there—the hike has ended,” he exclaimed.

Stealthily, and taking advantage of all cover, he crept down to the road. A hasty examination assured him that no large body of men, with the accompanying wagon trains and horses, had passed there recently. Satisfied, he returned to his point of vantage, and with the memory of the battle of yesterday in his mind, went to work and con-

AN ARMY BOY

structed a satisfactory shelter against a possible attack. Then he lay back contented to await the arrival of the English troops.

“ Old Sergeant Sypher, now, would fill that pipe of his and sit here all day without getting the fidgets. For myself, I hope they’ll show up pretty soon. I wish I had some one for company.”

He appreciated that there was a stronger chance than ever of the English having discovered their mistake early the preceding day and having cut across country. But he decided that it was right for him to wait and make sure. He could not be criticized if, having reached his goal, he had stayed there until the last of his food had been consumed, while if he assumed that the troops he had come to intercept had done a certain thing, and acted without proof, and prematurely, he might justly be censured. Besides, his experience had shown that travel during daylight hours was impossible.

The morning passed with incredible slowness. Every hour Don searched the road as far as his eye could reach for the cloud of dust that he knew would herald the advance of the column. Nothing appeared, however, though several times he thought he saw the advance guard, only to find out later that it was merely a party of Chinamen. These last seemed singularly numerous and calm.

IN PEKIN

Surely the presence of a large force of foreign troops in the neighborhood would create more excitement, if known. He could see the people of the village, also, go about their daily avocations as if in no fear of interruption. Many came to work in the fields below him, but fortunately none had business on the rocky hill he occupied.

At noon he ate half of his can of tomatoes, pouring the remainder into his cup to preserve it from the deterioration that canned articles undergo if left in contact with the tin after the air is admitted. One hardtack he took also, leaving the last for the night.

“Pretty short rations,” he thought. “Unless something turns up soon I’ll be foraging to-night.”

Fortunately the sky was mottled with clouds, and though the sun was hot, there were intervals of respite. With ample water and no necessity for exertion, he was not uncomfortable, in fact the heat was welcome.

When the middle of the afternoon arrived and still no sign of the English, Don began to lose hope of their arrival. There seemed little reason to doubt now that his dangerous trip had been all for nothing, and that the very men he had been sent for might be nearer the main force than he himself.

He examined the crude map again. Yes, it

AN ARMY BOY

was certain. Even allowing for the fact that the crossroad, as shown, was more southerly than he believed, it was certainly not more than two short days' march from the point where the English had left the main road to where he was now. This was the afternoon of the third day.

Don thought carefully over what had best be done. He laid off on the map three days' march for his own troops, and calculated that it would bring them nearly to Tungchow. In two days, by cutting across country in a northeasterly direction, he could, by forced marches, make the same point. That is, if he met with no interruptions. He regretted that he had no compass, but the sun would guide him, and he would walk from dawn to dark, avoiding the danger of the roads by traveling through the fields.

It was necessary that he should replenish his food supply, and this he determined to attempt under cover of darkness. He had noted that several times a priest, or one he took to be a priest, had taken persons to a large house on the outskirts of the town, and that, on leaving, he had, on every occasion, locked the door.

"Some appendage of the temple," he decided. "They probably have an idol there and go in to worship. As their religion requires them to put food out for their gods, I may pick up something

IN PEKIN

eatable. It will be pretty fierce, I suppose, but I don't want to raid any dwelling houses if I can help it."

Darkness fell and Don fortified himself with the last of his ration. Waiting till the noises of the town subsided, he stole down the hill to the building he had decided to enter. Two others near by seemed to be deserted, as there had been no lights in them, and Don thought it would be strange if he could not pick up something in one of the three.

His heart beat rapidly as he tried the door. It was locked, but the lock was a cheap padlock of Chinese make, and he succeeded in breaking it, using his bayonet as a lever. Opening the door, he entered, then closed it carefully behind him. Light he must have for the search, but fearing that watching eyes might detect the gleam on the paper paned windows, he thought best to cross to the opposite side of the room and locate the expected altar before risking striking a match.

Four steps he took, then came in sudden contact with a heavy something that yielded before him. He stopped short, when the thing, whatever it was, returned, bumping against him and striking him a heavy blow on the shin. Startled, and with a crawling feeling of horror, he sprang back and crouched low, awaiting the attack.

AN ARMY BOY

Silence! His straining ears could detect no sound right or left. He held his rifle ready to strike, and listened for sounds of breathing. He was certain that his own could be heard all through the room. There was nothing.

Deciding that it was some hanging weight that he had come in contact with he laid his rifle down and struck a match. As the flame leaped up his hair rose in horror.

Suspended by ropes tied to her wrists, the other ends being secured to rings in the walls, in such a manner as to bring the maximum strain on the joints of her arms, was the body of a white woman. Lacking a rack, the Chinese fiends had improvised this means of torture, and to add to it, had tied a heavy weight to her feet, thus increasing the downward pull of her body.

Knowing it was useless, nevertheless Don struck another match and stepped forward to ascertain if a spark of life remained. One look into the staring eyes was sufficient, nor could he endure to gaze longer into that tortured face.

So this was what the priest was bringing the people to see all day. This helpless woman, probably a missionary among them, dragged to this house by the merciless priests of the Chinese and put to a lingering death.

Rage succeeded horror. Careless of discovery,

IN PEKIN

he cut the weight from the feet, and it fell heavily to the floor. Then supporting the body with one arm he cut the ropes binding the wrists. Slings the rifle across his back, he took the body in his arms and left the torture house. Staggering up the hill he had occupied while this cruel thing had happened, he deepened the trench and laid the poor creature in the shallow grave. With his hands he covered the body with earth and stones, then repeated what he could remember of the burial service of his church.

Reckless now of discovery, and not unwilling to give his own life in one last fight, provided he could die killing a goodly number of the fiends who had participated in, or at least had permitted, the torture of a helpless woman, Don strode back to the house. A vicious cur ran out at him; turning, he gave the beast a kick that changed its growling barks into yelps of pain and fright. A Chinaman, evidently the owner of the dog, came to the door of a neighboring hut and called out angrily after him, but Don paid no attention, and entered the torture house. In the darkness he was not distinguishable, and the Chinaman, calling his dog inside, closed his door.

Don made a thorough search of the house, but found nothing that would serve for food. Giving it up, he started for one of the other houses that

AN ARMY BOY

he believed empty. Something of caution was returning, and he took every care to avoid making a sound as he raised the latch and pushed the door open.

Putting his head inside, he listened for a full minute for any sound indicating that the place was occupied. Hearing nothing, he entered quietly and closed the door behind him. Feeling for his matches, he was about to strike one, when he was borne to the floor with a crash.

Half stunned, Don endeavored to roll aside, but his arm was caught and wrenched back, while a hand sought his throat. The man who had attacked him was evidently heavy and powerful, and his knee ground into Don's chest.

Don was able, for the instant, to keep the searching hand away from his throat by interposing one arm, while with his other hand he reached for the queue, but failed to find it. In a minute more he was defending himself with all his strength, and without further thought of being the aggressor.

He struggled fiercely, using all his skill as a wrestler, and, for a time hoped he might be able to throw off his assailant, but the other was equal to every trick he tried. He felt his strength failing him.

Throughout the fight he had momentarily anticipated and feared his enemy might call for

IN PEKIN

help. Such a call would certainly bring a swarm of Chinamen, and his fate would be that of the poor woman, or possibly a worse one. But his attacker was silent, except for the sound of his heavy breathing.

Don made effort after effort to reach his bayonet, but, as he strained his hand toward his hip, the grip on his wrist would tighten, and it would be dragged back again above his head. Finally the man got one knee on Don's right elbow, pinning down that arm; an instant later the left was similarly secured. Then two brawny hands sought his throat.

The first pressure cutting off the air from his lungs startled Don into one more convulsive effort. Striking upward with his knees, into the back of his assailant, he shook him so that one arm was freed. As the hands left his throat to recapture it, Don, forgetting in his agony that there was no help within miles, gasped with the first breath he caught —

“Help! Help! Help!”

CHAPTER XVI

THE ENGLISH WAR CORRESPONDENT

INSTANTLY the grip on Don's arm relaxed.

"Hush! Not another sound! Who on earth are you?" whispered his assailant.

"An American soldier," gasped Don, as he drew the blessed air into his aching lungs. "And you?"

"I'm an English newspaper correspondent. My name is Cameron. I took you for a Chinaman."

"Naturally. I did the same with you, and if I could have gotten at my bayonet, I should have stabbed you."

"And to think that, in a few minutes more, I should have choked you to death." The Englishman shuddered.

"How came you here?" asked Don.

"I'm not sure, but I suspect by treachery. But I say, old chap, shake hands. I'm awfully glad to meet you, and I apologize for the beastly shaking up I gave you."

"Don't mention it," replied Don. "I echo

IN PEKIN

your sentiments about pleasure in the meeting: But tell me what you mean by treachery."

"Time enough for that later. If my suspicions are well founded, we had better get out of here right away."

"I have to hunt up some food. I'm all cleaned out as to rations."

"Never mind that. I have plenty for both. Lead the way to some place, if you know of any, where we can lie concealed, and make our plans for the future."

Don led the way from the house, and turned toward the hill he had occupied during the day.

"Hold on," said Cameron. "We might as well take the mules." And, passing around the house, he returned with two of these patient animals. One he turned over to Don, and they slipped quietly away. After going a hundred yards or so, they entered a patch of corn. Here the mules started to eat, and, certain that they would not bray while so engaged, the two men settled down for a consultation.

"Did you follow the English troops up this road?" asked Don.

"English troops?" questioned the other. "Why, there are no English troops in this neighborhood. They are with the main column, following the river road."

AN ARMY BOY

"Well, they may be," said Don, "but day before yesterday they got off the route and took this branch road."

"I'm sure you are mistaken, old chap. They have not left the column."

"What makes you so sure?"

"When I reached the junction of the roads about fifteen miles back, the end of their wagon train was just leaving. I was told they had decided not to march in the heat of the day any longer, so they had delayed till the late afternoon, and would march by night to overtake the others."

"Queer that the general should not have known that," muttered Don. "He mighty nearly got me killed, and I'm not out of the woods yet, by a long sight. But," he said aloud, "if the English are not on this road, what are you doing here?"

"Why, I came out to see if I couldn't get a 'scoop' for my paper. I heard the Japanese had made a side expedition to clean out some Chinese troops who were concentrating here for an attack on the flank of your column."

"But the Japs are in our advance. Night before last I left them in camp with the other allies. They couldn't have reached here without following the same road I did. Some one has been misleading you."

IN PEKIN

There was a silence for a few minutes, both men thinking deeply.

"See here," said the correspondent, finally. "We are badly mixed up. I'll tell my whole story, then you yours, and maybe we can get at the bottom of this thing. By the way, you haven't given me your name."

"Page, a corporal in the Fourteenth Infantry."

"Good. Now, as I was saying, I left the main road to make a scoop. My Chinese guide told me that he got the information from a Japanese courier that there would be a big fight over here. I trusted him, having had him with me ever since I landed in China. The beggar talks some English and claims to be a Christian convert. I didn't begin to get uneasy till this afternoon, when I realized how far we were off the main road; then I grew suspicious, especially as I thought I noticed a tendency on his part to be a little impudent. Still he seemed as anxious not to be caught by any wandering bands as I myself, and, as I couldn't chance missing any news, I came on. We reached this town an hour or so after dark, and he told me to wait in the house where you and I met, while he went out to find what news there might be. He had been gone quite a while when you crept in. I had begun to believe that he had sold the secret of my where-

AN ARMY BOY

abouts to the local commander, and you were so stealthy that I believed you were the first of those coming to take me. So I started in to make my capture cost them dear. I wondered all the time why you didn't call for help."

"I was wondering the same about you," said Don. "And I guess you were right about the treachery of your guide, only they have haggled longer over the price than you thought, which is fortunate for both of us. Why didn't you make a break for it before?"

"I had just about decided to when you came in. Now give me your yarn."

Don complied, touching as lightly on his fight of the day before as was possible.

"Well, my trip has not been altogether in vain," said the correspondent. "That fight will make a great column of reading matter, if you don't mind your experience netting me a few shillings and pence. You have no objection to my exaggerating it a little?"

"You needn't fear that—I was careful to cut it down considerably. Any imagination you may ring in isn't going to be materially beyond the truth."

"Good. But your story doesn't sound right to me. This is not the road to Pao-ting-fu."

"It's not? What is it then?"

IN PEKIN

"It's a branch road into Pekin, and enters the south gate instead of going around by Tungchow. It used to be traveled quite extensively before the railroad was put through. The railroad is just to the westward of it clear into Pekin."

"But my map shows it to run to Pao-ting-fu."

"Can't help that. I have a first-class map of this section of the country, and, though I don't know much about map reading, there's no doubt of what I say. My map is an official print; what is yours?"

"Just a rough sketch."

"Then we had better take mine as right. Your getting a bad map and erroneous information about the English looks as if your informant were as unreliable as mine. Who sent you on this wild goose chase?"

"The gen ——" started Don, then checked himself. An idea flashed through his brain that made him reel. Could it be possible? He thrust the thought from him, remembering Hoyle's earnest manner and friendly parting hand-clasp. No—such treachery was inconceivable. And yet—

"Mr. Cameron ——" he started.

"Oh, cut out the mister. Call me Cameron and I'll call you Page. What was it you were going to say?"

AN ARMY BOY

“Why, just this. It may be that I was sent on a wild goose chase. But, if so, there exists in this world a scoundrel who would put Satan himself to blush for treachery and cruelty. I’ll have to ask you to excuse my telling you the whole story till I find out the truth. Then I shall tell you, and it will be complete.”

“All right, Page, suit yourself. The main thing now is to get out of this.”

“I wish we dared strike a match, so I could see your map. We might make use of the darkness if we could follow a road, but the only one I know leads through a country I don’t care to renew acquaintance with, and, besides, would land us full two days behind the column.”

“My road is worse—it would put us out of the running altogether, and I simply must be on hand for the assault on Pekin or lose my job. That would be tough on Mary and the kiddies—Mary being my good wife.”

“Then you’ll risk going across country?”

“Surely, old chap. You’ll find me game for anything.”

“Good. We’ll stand watches to-night and start at dawn.”

“Why not to-night? If we can get around this town and strike the road on the other side, we may cover twenty miles to-night on these mules.

IN PEKIN

They have come about fifteen, but they're tough beasts."

"Won't that take us farther and farther away from our destination? My sketch shows the road to curve to the south a bit further on."

"Drat your sketch! This road does incline a little more to the west than the river road, but for every mile we lose in westing we gain ten in northing. I think we should try it."

"I'm willing since you are so sure. Wait till I go up on my hill to recover some things I left there. I can see if everything is quiet in the village at the same time."

Fifteen minutes later Don returned reporting all quiet and dark, except in the center of the village, where there seemed to be considerable excitement.

"They are starting after you, Cameron," he added.

The Englishman chuckled.

"Yes, and if they hunt me they'll naturally go in the opposite direction from the one we take. I imagine that my guide will have a warm half hour with the officials he has stirred up. And the beggar loses all the pay due him and his two mules besides."

Cautiously they circled the village, stumbling over the rough ground, and making many détours to avoid fences and walls. Passing a stream, they

AN ARMY BOY

filled their canteens and allowed the mules to drink. After half an hour of difficult traveling they reached the road.

"Are you armed?" asked Don.

"Yes," responded Cameron. "I have a Mauser pistol that loads ten dum-dum¹ bullets at one clip and is as accurate, up to two hundred yards, as your rifle. Also it will fire about four times as fast. Then I have a pocket pistol besides."

"Good," said Don. "And what kind of a shot are you?"

"Well, I can hit about as far as my gun will reach. I've been a bit of a sportsman in my time."

"What is your idea of the best thing to do in case we meet any of the enemy?"

"That's for you to say," replied Cameron, mounting his mule. "You are the military genius of this army, and I elect you commander-in-chief."

"All right," said Don, as they started on a brisk trot, "I think it's out of the question to turn back. The whole country will be hunting for the two of us. If we discover a party of Chinamen coming, and are certain that they have not noticed us, I propose that we withdraw into one of these

¹ Dum-dum bullet—a bullet in which the lead core projects beyond the steel jacket; on striking, the lead flattens, making a much more severe wound than the ordinary bullet.

IN PEKIN

eternal corn fields, and let them pass. If we think they have seen or heard us we'll ride up to them, and the minute they recognize us for what we are, put these beasts to a gallop and ride through them, giving them the contents of our pistols as we pass. The surprise should carry us through, and unless they are mounted and in large numbers, they'll not be able to overtake us even if they have the stomach for it."

"Very clear and simple, and unanimously adopted by the council of war. And if you go down, old chap, I'll stop and see it out with you. It'll be tough on Mary and the kiddies, but it's both of us or neither this trip."

"Agreed."

Don found himself liking his new friend immensely. There was none of the stiffness he had been led by the popular idea to expect of an Englishman, and there was a solidity about him that made the American sure he would be a valuable man to have at one's back in a tight corner. Remembering his loneliness of the past two days and nights, he blessed the chance meeting, while regretting that another was in so dangerous a situation.

Both men had had a good rest the preceding night, and Don had been under no exertion during the day. So they were in condition to get all the

AN ARMY BOY

travel out of the mules that the animals were capable of. And they spared them little—it was no time to be sentimental.

After about three hours they came to a village, to avoid which they had to take to the fields again. They halted in one of these to take a few bites of food from Cameron's saddle-bags, and to permit the mules to eat some of the ripening corn. Then they resumed their journey.

The Englishman told Don of his home, and of the wife and the little twin boys he had left behind him in the old country. He spoke of his hopes of making good as a war correspondent, and getting a permanent post on the newspaper he was representing. It was this that had induced him to take his dangerous trip off the main road, accompanied only by the treacherous guide.

Don, in turn, spoke of his home and school life, and his ambition to become a commissioned officer. He told of the battles he had participated in, and which his companion had missed. The latter gained his promise to give him notes for a series of articles, if they reached safety.

Company made the hours pass rapidly, but as the night wore away, the two began to feel the fatigue. Already their mounts were thoroughly tired, and it was only by constant urging that they could be kept at a shuffling pace. The road was de-

IN PEKIN

served. Occasionally they passed an isolated mud hut, but had to make a *détour* for only the one village.

At last dawn began to brighten the east. It became lighter, and the companions were able to distinguish each other's features. What Don saw was a tall, muscular man of something under thirty, with large, frank gray eyes, curling brown hair, and a small mustache that did not conceal the smiling mouth. They looked at each other with frank curiosity.

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed Cameron. "I had no idea what a youngster it was who gave me such a fight last night."

"That fight pretty nearly gave me gray hair," laughed Don.

"I guess we both look and feel older than we would had we spent the night between sheets. But there is a town ahead. I suppose we had better turn out here and cut across country."

"You are right," said Don. "I don't want to meet another Chinaman, outside of a laundry, as long as I live. We'll have to turn these poor beasts loose, and I reckon they'll not regret the parting as much as I do."

"We have ridden them without mercy. Mine is shaky at the knees."

They dismounted and led the animals into the

AN ARMY BOY

field, where they took off the saddles and bridles and let them go. The mules lay down at once, and began to tear off the long leaves of corn they could reach.

"It is just as well they are tired," said Don. "If they were found wandering around it might put the natives on our trail. As it is they'll probably be content to pass the day right here."

"Hungry?" asked Cameron.

"Well, I could eat. I'd surely love a cup of coffee."

"That's about the only thing I cannot supply, but we'll make a meal without it."

After breakfast they sorted out the contents of Cameron's saddle-bags, selecting the foods that were the most nutritious for the weight. Realizing that they had the hardest kind of a march ahead, they wished to carry as little as possible.

"Now let's compare maps," said Cameron, spreading a large detailed map of the province on the ground. "We must pick out our route. Do you know anything about traveling by compass?"

"Sure," said Don. "I took an engineering course in school. But I'll have to guide by the sun, having no compass."

"Here is one," and Cameron took a large box compass from his pocket. "I'll have to leave it to you, as I'm green as grass outside of a city."

IN PEKIN

Don opened the sketch given him by Hoyle and laid it beside the map. Though they agreed fairly well in some respects, in one they were radically different. The Englishman's map showed the road they had just left to be an unimproved cart road leading into Peking from the south, and placed Pao-ting-fu to the southwest of Tientsin. Don's sketch indicated that the road bent southward about the middle of its length and ran to Pao-ting-fu, which was shown to the northwest of Tientsin. The Englishman studied the maps with a thoughtful frown.

"Page," he said finally, "I don't want to force any man's confidence, but must ask one question. Was this sketch given you by your general personally?"

"No—it was not."

"Was it given you by an officer in whom you have thorough confidence?"

"No—it was given me by the only enemy I have in the world, to my knowledge, and I was simple enough to trust him."

"That settles it. Had it been given you by an officer, we'd have had to believe it made after a reconnaissance or survey of some kind. As it is, we had better stick to the printed one, and throw this away."

"No, siree!" replied Don, returning the sketch

AN ARMY BOY

to his pocket. "I'll keep it. If we get out of this scrape, some one will have to explain this along with several other things.

"Now here," he added, putting his finger on Cameron's map. "Here is where we met, and this is the road we have been following. That is the village we skirted about two o'clock, and this must be the one we just sighted. So you see we are only about fifteen miles southwest of Tungchow. Our exact course," and he laid the compass on the map, "will be north, twenty degrees east. I figure our troops will be there to-night. In any other country than this we should be able to make it."

"Why not here?"

"Just wait till the sun hits you in these corn fields and you'll find out. We'll do well if we make ten miles to-day, and join them at nine to-morrow."

"Well, lead on, General Page. The sooner we start the better."

Don took a compass bearing and started forward. Cameron followed. He had removed his Mauser pistol from its wooden case, and slipped the socket on the case over two lugs on the handle of the pistol. Arranged thus it made a small rifle, the case being the stock. A leather strap, passing over his right shoulder and buckled to the stock, supported the weapon, allowing it to hang

IN PEKIN

between the right arm and the body. It was out of the way, and could be cocked and brought to the shoulder in a single movement. Don noted the arrangement with approval.

Conversation was out of the question. The ground was soft beneath their feet, making walking very difficult, and they had continually to push the corn aside. Although they were making less than two miles an hour, they were soon breathing hard.

Nevertheless, Don had opportunity to brood over the ideas aroused by what Cameron had said. He was convinced, now, that his map was false, and purposely so. It was difficult for him to comprehend that any one could be so heartless as to condemn even an enemy to such a fate as that to which Hoyle had sent him, if his suspicions were correct. There seemed, however, no other explanation. Waves of bitterness, such as he had never dreamed of, passed over the soul of the naturally kindly young man. He ground his teeth and determined that he would win through, and confront the man who had sought his undoing.

Not the least of his depressing thoughts was that he was not risking his life on an important mission. Till now he had been buoyed up by a sense of duty, and by the thought that the general

AN ARMY BOY

had selected him because of special confidence. His hands clenched as he remembered how he had treasured up the memory of the general's conversation as related by Hoyle.

At the end of fifty minutes he halted and lay down.

"Not tired?" asked Cameron.

"No. But we must rest at least ten minutes in every hour, or we'll soon give out. Lie down, man, and give the blood a chance to get out of your legs."

"How far have we come?"

"About a mile and a half, I suppose."

After ten minutes' rest they were at it again. Occasionally there was a break in the corn fields, and they had to crawl across the open spaces. During the third hour's march they found water-melons planted among the corn, so selected a ripe one and seated themselves to enjoy it. About the middle of the feast there was a distant sound, which made both men pause. Their eyes sought each other's.

"What was it?" asked the Englishman.

"Hush! Listen!"

Then it came again, and this time it was unmistakable. It was the rattle of distant musketry firing.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW

FOR a minute the two men sat looking at each other in silence. Then as the firing again broke out Don spoke.

“There’s a fight over there in the northwest.”

“Sounds so,” responded the Englishman. “But there are apparently not many engaged.”

“No—probably some scouting party. What had we better do?”

“Leave it to you. I’m new to this game; these are the first hostile shots I ever heard.”

“Well, I figure it out like this. It’s one of three things. It may be one of our own scouting parties; if so the sooner we join them the better for all.”

“I’m not so sure as to its being better for us. They may be corralled, and we, at least, are free still. But go on.”

“Then it may be a party of missionaries cut off by the Chinese. If so it’s my plain duty as a soldier to add my rifle to theirs.”

“Mine too; no Englishman ever left the under dog to his fate.”

AN ARMY BOY

"Lastly it may be two hostile bodies of Chinese. I saw the Pei-ho full of floating corpses before we started, and am sure the masterless bands that are roaming the country, looting and murdering, are killing ten Chinamen to our one."

"In that case," said Cameron, "we'll be in between the upper and nether millstones, and may have our throats cut by either side. Well, what is your decision, general?"

"I don't want to influence you in this, Cameron."

"Bosh! I'm game for any venture. As you cast it up there's two chances to one that we'll be needed. If it turns out to be the third, and we are caught, it'll be tough on Mary and the kiddies, but I'd rather not go home at all than to live with the memory that I'd funk'd it."

"Cameron, you are a sport."

"And what is that?"

"Never mind—you're it. Now come on, and watch me. If I raise my hand drop to the ground."

Don started rapidly toward the firing, which was quite irregular. Occasionally there would be a burst such as had first attracted their attention, then spaces of silence, punctuated by single shots. The direction was nearly at right angles to their previous course, and almost directly away from

IN PEKIN

the road traveled by the allied armies. At every rise in the ground Don hoped that they would be out of the dense growth of corn, so that he could see what was taking place, but they had gone full half a mile and the shots sounded very close before he saw a clearing ahead. His heart was pounding with excitement, as well as with exertion, so much hung on the issue. Even if friends were at hand it might well be that they were approaching from the wrong direction, and would find themselves in the midst of the Chinese.

He carried his rifle at the trail, ready for instant use. As he neared the clearing, he crouched low and crept forward, raising his hand to halt his companion.

In a hollow in the center of the clearing there was a small mud house with a grass roof. Surrounding this at a distance of about seventy yards was one of the mud fences so common in that part of China. A corner of the fence was toward the position occupied by Don, who was thus afforded a view of two sides. And he saw that these two sides, at least, were crowded with crouching Chinamen, some in the uniform of the Imperial Army, some dressed as Boxers, but the majority in peasant garb. Most of these last were unarmed, except for the wicked looking knives clutched in their hands.

AN ARMY BOY

A small fire burned against the wall, and as Don was taking in the details of the situation, a Chinaman rose quickly, a bow in his right hand and an arrow, blazing at the point, in his left. His rising was a signal for a rapid fire from those who had guns. Most of them simply rested their pieces on the top of the wall and pulled the trigger, without risking the exposure of their precious heads to aim.

"Must be some crack shots in that house," thought Don. And, indeed, a few limp figures along the wall showed that there was reason for the caution of the besiegers.

The sound of firing completely circled the house, showing the other sides occupied also. When it reached its greatest intensity the man with the bow straightened himself to his full height and bent the bow. At that instant a rifle appeared in a window, and, with its flash, Don caught a glimpse of a white face, drawn and desperate. The archer spun half-way round, but had already released the arrow, which rose in the air and passed in an arc toward the house. Don caught his breath as the flaming thing approached its goal, and gave a gasp of relief as he saw it pass about a foot above the grass roof, to fall, spluttering and harmless, thirty yards beyond.

The archer was seated on the ground, rocking

IN PEKIN

his body backward and forward, and grasping his left shoulder. He was roughly pushed aside as a Boxer crept forward, picking up an arrow, around the point of which he started to wrap a strip of cloth, preparatory to dipping it in the tar bucket that smoked on the fire.

Creeping back a few feet for better concealment, Don motioned Cameron to approach. Quickly he related what he had seen.

“My second guess was right,” he said. “There are white men, and possibly women, in that house. We are just in time. If they get one of those burning arrows into that grass roof, there’ll be a massacre here. The corner of the wall is toward us, and I propose that we separate, going to the right and left till each of us is in position to fire along a wall. This gun of mine will send a bullet through half a dozen men at such short range, and, taking them in the flank that way, if we miss one we’ll be sure to hit another. Let our signal to fire be when that fellow rises to shoot his arrow. They will be firing then, so cannot tell, with the rattle of their own guns around them, how few we are. And, for heaven’s sake, don’t get buck fever and miss. If we don’t startle them into a retreat, the jig’s up, not only for those poor fellows in the house, but for us, too.”

“Trust me,” said Cameron, grimly. “Leave the

AN ARMY BOY

chap with the bow to me; I promise you he'll never fire it."

Hastily the two men separated and slipped through the corn to their positions. Don settled himself prone on his stomach. He found himself trembling with the intensity of the suspense, but there was no thought of self. He was eager for the signal to begin, and it seemed as if the Boxer would never get the arrow soaked with tar to his satisfaction. Finally he removed it from the pot and held it to the fire.

Again the rifles of the besiegers were laid over the wall, and an irregular firing began. From the tail of his eye, Don saw the Boxer rise with the bow and arrow in hand, but before he could even straighten himself, he collapsed, falling into the fire. The tar bucket upset, and the tar, ignited by the flames, ran blazing over the ground and the legs of several of the crouching Chinamen, whose shrieks, as they sprang to their feet, were heard above the tumult of the rifle fire.

But Don gave only a moment to this. Rapidly, but with careful aim, he fired shot after shot into the line of Chinamen massed along the wall in prolongation of which he lay. When his magazine was empty he continued to load and fire, more slowly indeed, but still with the speed of a trained skirmish runner. His fire was accurate and its

IN PEKIN

effect was soon apparent in the number of writhing figures along the wall and the hasty flight of others. Not until these passed at headlong speed did those beyond realize that another element had entered, and, by that time, Don's fire was directed upon them also. The firing from the other sides of the building continued, effectually drowning the sound of the rescuing party's rifles, but even this ceased as the first of the fugitives dashed around the corner, shouting as they ran. Then Don could hear the Mauser pistol of Cameron, rattling like a machine gun.

Don turned his rifle on the swarm retreating before Cameron's fire, as these were nearer his position and were massed. That face of the wall was a shambles which confirmed the Englishman's statement that he was a dead shot and could hit as far as his gun would carry.

A minute more and the last besieger was in full flight, but for a time Don continued to fire into the corn field beyond, to accelerate their retreat. A score of wretches, wounded more or less severely, were limping and crawling away to gain cover. These he allowed to escape, though his blood was up, and the temptation to continue to fire on every living thing in sight was strong.

When the last of them was out of sight, Don rose and ran down the slope toward the house,

AN ARMY BOY

Half-way down he saw Cameron break from the edge of the field to his left. The Englishman was transfigured; his usually smiling face was fierce and grim, and the sight of him would have put a dozen Chinamen to flight.

Paying no attention to the moaning of some mortally wounded Chinamen at the wall, Don leaped over and continued to run toward the house. As he approached, the door was opened, and three men, all wild looking and haggard, appeared.

"Where is the rest of your force?" asked the oldest, a man of about fifty.

"Here he comes," answered Don, as Cameron leaped the wall.

"Only two of you?" gasped the surprised man.

"That's all."

The three men exchanged glances, then shook their heads. The eager look left their eyes and a deep depression settled upon them.

"Come in," said their spokesman, stepping aside.

Don entered. For the instant the comparative obscurity of the low-ceiled room prevented him from taking in the details. The first thing he noted was a fourth man, lying still in death on the floor beneath one of the windows. A bullet hole in his forehead and a large pool of blood

IN PEKIN

showed that one of the besiegers' bullets had gone true. Then he saw another figure huddled in a corner, and thought that a second of the besieged had been killed or wounded, when the crouching figure arose. His heart gave a painful throb, then seemed to stop beating as he saw it was a woman.

She approached him slowly, her eyes fixed, fascinated, on his. There was something in their gaze that made the young man shudder, and feel an inclination to shrink back. Still he could not understand the feeling, for her expression was very gentle.

"Will," she said, softly, "oh, Will, I am so glad you have come home. It is time to put the children to bed."

Then, as she came nearer, a doubt seemed to come over her. She put her hands on Don's shoulders, looked vacantly at him for a moment, then raising both arms, shrieked wildly.

Quickly one of the men seized her arms and brought them to her sides, trying to soothe her with words broken by sobs. Don was sick at heart, and leaned faintly against the wall.

"Mad?" he whispered.

The man nodded.

"Yes, poor soul, poor soul. She saw her two children killed by these fiends, then her husband.

AN ARMY BOY

tortured to death before her eyes. They were the kindest, gentlest souls ever engaged in errands of mercy among those who treacherously turned upon them."

Then raising his head, the man cried out :

"How long, oh, Lord, how long shall the heathen triumph over Thy servants?"

"How came you here?" questioned Don.

"Trying to make the river road. We rescued this poor woman from her captors. We numbered eleven then, and surprised them. For a hundred miles have we been hunted across this country, losing here one brother, there another, finally to be blocked here so near safety."

The woman's shrieks had died away, but her prattling was almost as distressing to hear. Cameron had sunk to the floor, his face in his hands, and from time to time a shudder shook his muscular form.

"Horrible!" Don heard him mutter.

"How long have you been here?" Don asked.

"Three days."

"And have held those men off that long?"

"No; they came only this morning. We had to halt our journey, as one of our party could proceed no further. But who are you, young man?"

"I am Corporal Page of the American Army, and my friend is Mr. Cameron, an English war

IN PEKIN

correspondent. We heard the firing and hurried to investigate."

"You played your parts nobly. My name is Hartmann; that is Brother Sampson attending on Sister Earle, and the other is Brother Peters. We all thank you for your gallant efforts to save us. It is sad that you did not come in greater force."

"Yes, I wish there were more of us," replied Don who had been mechanically taking the cartridges from the rear of his belt and transferring them to the front, where they were more easily accessible. "Especially as I have but nine cartridges left, not enough for another scrimmage. But I think we have driven those fellows well off, and if we start at once may get through without further interruption."

"Yes, you had better start at once. Our best wishes go with you."

"But you ——?"

"No. We remain here. I told you one of our party is ill. It is Brother Peters' father; he was the brains and the life of us all till he received a shot. It was only a flesh wound, but we had no means to care for it, and gangrene set in. He collapsed three days ago."

"Where is he?"

Hartmann motioned Don to follow him, and opened a door leading into a little alcove.

AN ARMY BOY

“ We put him here when the Chinese closed in on us. He has been delirious for three days.”

On a rude couch lay an elderly man, a long white beard falling on his sunken chest. His eyes were closed, and his breathing was irregular.

“ Where is the wound ? ” asked Don. “ I have some slight training, and may be able to do something.”

“ I fear it is too late.”

The old man’s eyes opened.

“ Yes, Brother Hartmann, it is too late, I am sure.”

“ Why, Brother Peters, you must be better ; it has been over two days since you spoke to me.”

“ Two days—so long ? But I am not better. The fever has fallen because my body has no longer the strength to support it. I am sinking fast.”

“ No—no. I beg of you keep up your courage.”

“ There is no lack of courage, dear friend. I fear not death at all, and feel that it is near me. But who are these ? ” he added faintly, as he noticed Don and Cameron.

“ Two young men who have come to our aid and are prepared to lead us to safety.”

“ Then I implore you, as I did when I first began to fail, to make good your escape.”

“ No, brother, we shall not leave you.”

IN PEKIN

“But your lives are needed for the work. What is it that I should be left behind? A few hours is nothing to me, and may mean life to you.”

“No, brother, if it be God’s will that we shall die, let it be so, but we shall never desert you.”

“But Sister Earle?”

“Shall not fall into their hands. We have thought it all out, brother, and we shall do what is right. Calm yourself, I beg of you, and try to get some sleep.”

“Water, please.”

They gave him water, and he tried to speak again, but his eyes were brightening and the words were incoherent. A flush mounted to his face, showing the return of the fever. Don examined the wound and shook his head. The bright red that surrounded it, with the inflamed streaks radiating from the center, told him that the poison had taken hold beyond the possibility of cure.

“You see, my friends,” said the missionary, “how impossible it is for us to leave. I hoped, when I saw the Chinese driven off, that our rescuers might be in sufficient force for us to hold the enemy back and get through to safety after the end had come. And now, good-bye, and may our Father bless and reward you for your courage and kindness.”

AN ARMY BOY

Don's eyes sought Cameron's. He questioned him with a look, and the latter nodded a simple consent.

"We stay by you," said Don.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ODDS BECOME TOO GREAT

To the protests of Mr. Hartmann and his two brother missionaries Don turned as deaf an ear as they had to those of the wounded man. Cameron had little to say; the condition of the demented woman, and the simply told story of the circumstances that had deprived her of her reason, had affected him greatly. Doubtless he pictured his own dear ones in a similar position.

When the missionaries found their urging of no avail, they desisted. To Don's inquiries they replied that their food was practically exhausted, and that their ammunition was almost gone.

"Both easily remedied," he said. "Let one of our party gather as many ears of corn as he can—that with what we have should last us longer than we shall need. Two others, and I suggest Cameron and myself, as being familiar with firearms, will collect the rifles and ammunition abandoned by the Chinese, while the remaining two break pieces off that wall and fill in these windows, leaving only a loophole in each. I am minded to give these fellows a warm reception on their return."

AN ARMY BOY

To this all consented. Mrs. Earle was again seated in her corner, motionless and staring at nothing. As they left the house Cameron asked if it were safe to leave her alone.

“I think so,” replied the missionary, Sampson. “She remains for hours so unless something occurs to arouse her. It is at night that she becomes most excited. There are moments when I fear the poor creature half remembers. Oh, my friend, what I have seen makes me anxious to die that I may forget,” and the man’s voice choked. “I know, of course, that it is my duty to fight to the end—there may yet be work for me to do, and just now in China the death of a martyr would accomplish nothing.”

They separated, each going to his appointed task. That of Don and Cameron was grewsome enough, for it meant removing the ammunition from the dead and dying as well as gathering up the rifles. Some twenty had been abandoned, and these they collected, with a large number of cartridges. There were a few good magazine rifles among them, but most were obsolete Remingtons. Some of the wounded Chinamen looked at them stolidly, others groaned and begged piteously for “sui” (water). The two missionaries at work on the wall stopped long enough to draw a bucket of water from the well, and serve the wretched crea-

IN PEKIN

tures, nor were they deterred by an attempt made by one of the wounded to stab his benefactor.

The rifles collected, Don and Cameron proceeded to load them and distribute them among the four windows.

“ We'll have them ready to hand,” said Don. “ There is one of us for each window, and an extra man to reload. With the number of guns we have we should be able to keep up a continuous fire for some time, even if they rush from all sides.”

By tacit agreement the others obeyed the instructions of the only soldier among them. They even yielded when he objected to the wounded Chinamen being carried into the house, so that they might not have to suffer the heat of the sun with their other pangs.

“ There is a possibility that the Chinese we drove off may not return,” said the soldier, “ but should they do so, our last chance of defense would be gone were any but ourselves inside. The attempt made by one of the wounded to stab Mr. Peters shows that we cannot trust their gratitude. We must remember, too, that our first duty is to this helpless woman.”

The argument was unanswerable, so the missionaries confined themselves to such other acts of kindness as they could think of. The younger Peters spent most of his time in attendance on his

AN ARMY BOY

father, but the others busied themselves carrying water, and constructing sunshades out of cornstalks. Cameron filled in the time getting notes of the missionaries' experiences. To their objections to having them published, he replied that it was the only way that their churches and the families of their dead companions could hope to receive indemnity. Convinced of this, Hartmann told him of the first mutterings of the trouble, of its extending gradually to the quiet valley in which they had lived and worked, of the sudden development of ferocity among those they had always considered most gentle, the treacherous surprise, and the long flight across the country, their party gradually becoming smaller as one after the other was killed. The story made their own experiences seem trivial in comparison. The most wonderful part was that the missionary showed no discouragement, no doubt of the wisdom and ultimate success of his work; certain individuals among the Chinese must be punished, then he and his kind could return to their flocks and continue their efforts.

Exhausted by the night ride and by the exciting events of the morning, Don fell asleep after the noon meal, and awoke refreshed just as the sun was sinking. Cameron, also, had slept, so the two agreed to keep watch for the night. It was little

IN PEKIN

deprivation, as the missionaries could get but little rest. The demented woman became excited as darkness fell, and she and the dying man required almost constant attention.

Don took the first watch, and circled the enclosure again and again, stopping at intervals to listen intently for any signs of a stealthy enemy. The night was absolutely silent, save when the voice of the poor woman, in her almost incessant talking, was raised sufficiently for him to hear. There was not the slightest breeze, and he felt certain that no one could approach through the corn fields without his having ample notice of the fact. The groans of the victims of the morning's action had ceased—death had claimed them all.

The young soldier was in a strange mood. He realized that, in all probability, this was his last night, but the thought brought no sense of shrinking or fear. With death he was all too familiar. There was a keen regret that his parents would never know what had become of him—their anxiety caused him more feeling than any other thought. Something of the calm of eternity had already settled upon him, and it seemed that his parting from those he loved would be a short one, after all.

He thought of Harry back with the struggling column, and of how he would wonder what had

AN ARMY BOY

become of his chum. Should his suspicions of Hoyle's treachery be correct, they would never know why he had left his command.

It was strange that, suspecting Hoyle of falsehood in everything else, it did not occur to him that the statement as to Corporal Thornton coming to complete the night in guard over the regimental fund might also be false. The relief from his duty had been so natural, and so covered up with things of bigger import, that he had almost forgotten that he had been especially detailed to guard the money. Had he dreamed that he was branded as a thief and a deserter, his calm would have deserted him. But his only thought was that his enemy had sent him to his death, and there was the feeling that somewhere, somehow, Hoyle would have to pay the price of his treachery.

Cameron's plight affected him more than his own. The jovial, light-hearted Englishman was making a sacrifice, compared to which his own was small indeed. The correspondent had arrived at the fulness of life, while he was only on the threshold. He thought of the remark—"I'd rather never go home than live with the memory that I'd fuked it."

"It's a pretty good world," he thought, "and the pessimists who condemn human nature must spend their lives in cities, where they never see the

IN PEKIN

human soul in action. A few men like Cameron and dear old Sypher compensate for many like Hoyle."

The night drew on. Twelve o'clock came, but there was no inclination to sleep, and he continued his slow march around the fence. While alert and watchful against surprise, there was none of the tense excitement of his first outpost in the presence of the enemy.

At two he awakened Cameron, and the latter joined him. They watched together for a while, talking in low tones, and decided definitely on their plans for defense. Then Don retired to the house.

All was quiet there. A dim light burned in the sick room, where Mr. Hartmann sat beside the wounded missionary, laying a dampened cloth to his forehead and occasionally putting water to the parched lips. Mrs. Earle was asleep, for which Don was grateful. He offered to help Mr. Hartmann, but the latter told him there was nothing to be done, that he himself had taken charge only a few minutes before, relieving young Peters, who was sleeping exhaustedly on the floor beside the bed.

Don lay down fully dressed, and to his surprise found himself drowsy. In a minute he was asleep.

AN ARMY BOY

Dawn was showing faintly through the loopholes when he was aroused by a hand on his shoulder. He sat up clutching his rifle, but a warning "Hush!" prevented him from speaking. It was Mr. Hartmann.

"Brother Peters has passed away," he said. "He breathed his last a few minutes ago. I thought best to awaken you, as we should arrange to lay him beside the brother we buried yesterday, and to start immediately after. Let us be quiet so as not to disturb Sister Earle till the last minute."

While he was speaking the door opened, and Cameron entered. They told him their plans.

"It is too late, I fear. There are sounds in the corn fields indicating the approach of a large number of men. We'd better man the loopholes, and be prepared for a rush."

Don sprang to the front window, and one look showed him that Cameron was right. Halted at the edge of the corn field was a body of Chinese troops, and he could recognize the Imperial uniform. The report of those driven off the day before had evidently convinced the authorities that a considerable force of the allied armies was in the vicinity, and regular troops had come to attack them.

"To your posts!" cried Don. And thrusting his rifle through the loophole, he opened fire.

IN PEKIN

His first shot was the signal for a burst of return fire. The high power rifles of the enemy splintered the mud bricks in the windows, and a few of the bullets found their way into the room. Protected by this rapid fire, the Chinamen dashed for the cover of the wall ; they gained it, though not without some losses, for the fire of the defenders, thanks to the extra rifles, was unceasing. This had another effect also—it confirmed the belief of the attackers that they had a strong force against them. They were glad to halt under cover of the wall.

The defenders, crouched on the floor at the loopholes, watched for the next move. Mr. Hartmann, who had been assigned no post, crawled from one to the other, reloading the empty guns and leaning them against the wall within handy reaching distance. Mrs. Earle had awakened, and was sobbing in terror, but no one had time to give the poor creature any attention.

Don, eagerly watching for a head to appear, saw the trick of yesterday repeated. Rifle barrels appeared above the wall and the guns were discharged at the house, a method of attack carrying with it only the barest possibility of danger ; but under cover of it others of the enemy raised head and shoulders, and opened fire with more accuracy. The short distance made the fire very effective,

AN ARMY BOY

even with such poor marksmen as the Chinese. But the defenders did not shrink from their posts, and on two sides at least, those of Cameron and Don, the assailants were soon glad to withdraw.

A period of silence and watching followed. Then on a stick, raised above the wall, waved a white cloth.

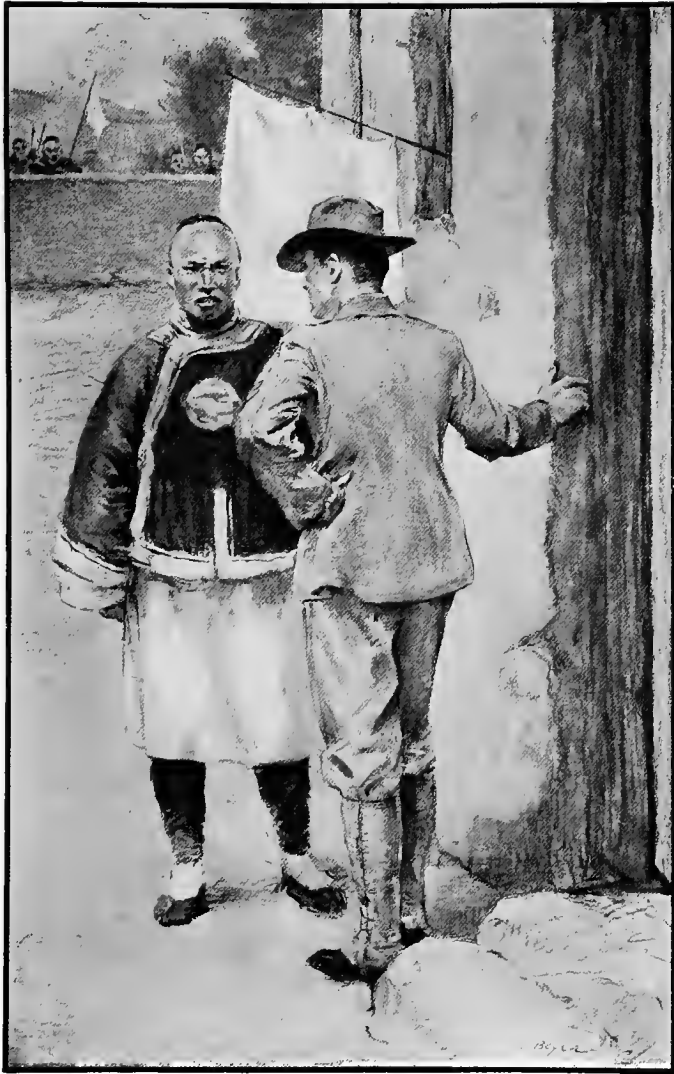
“Flag of truce,” cried Don. “Shall we risk it?”

“Might as well,” replied Cameron. “It’ll serve to delay matters, and while there’s life there’s hope. This firing can be heard for quite a distance, and there’s always a chance that some of our people may be around.”

Don tied his handkerchief to a ramrod and waved it from the loophole. A minute later a large Chinaman stood up, and, with some hesitation, put his leg over the wall. Three others started to follow him.

“Yit! Yit!” yelled Don, who had learned to count to four in Chinese (yit, gee, sum, sa). The Chinamen hesitated, but the rifle barrel which appeared at the loophole convinced them that the enemy’s spokesman was in earnest, and they drew back.

“Being in uniform,” said Don, “I had better be the one to appear. You keep up an animated conversation, all talking at once, so as to give the impression that we are in force.”



THE CHINAMAN APPROACHED WARILY

IN PEKIN

With these words he swung the door open and stepped outside, closing it to within about an inch. The Chinaman approached warily. His eyes wandered from Don to the loophole where Cameron's frowning face appeared. He evidently did not like his task, still he advanced until within three paces of where Don stood.

"Spik Ingles?" he interrogated.

"Yes," said Don, indicating his uniform. "American soldier."

"Amelican? Yes, Amelican shoot stlate. Killy plenty Chinamen yes-te'd'y."

"Going to kill more to-day," replied Don, grimly.

The Chinaman turned pale and looked worried.

"How come you no lun away last night?"

"We are not running these days—the Chinese are doing that."

"You talk velly bold."

"Why not? We are not afraid of you. We are an advance party; we can hold you back till more soldiers come."

"Maybe no more coming," ventured the Chinaman.

"Maybe not—maybe so," replied Don calmly. "We'll wait and see."

"How many soldier you got inside?"

Don laughed in the man's face.

AN ARMY BOY

"You'll have to come and find out for yourself, my man. I have plenty."

"Velly little house—not got many, I think so."

The buzzing of voices from the inside was plainly audible. It sounded as though four or five animated discussions were taking place. Don saw the Chinaman was listening, so was silent a few seconds to let him draw his own conclusions.

"What do you want?" he asked when sure the desired impression had been made.

"My officer send me—he say you must surrender."

"Well, you go back and tell him 'no can do.' My general be heap mad if I surrender. Besides, I don't want to."

"Him say tell you, you no surrender he cut t'roats."

"Tell him he got to catch first."

"How dat?"

"Tell him no can cut throats till has got us."

"Him say you surrender, him gallantee velly kind tleatment. Him say you get plenty chow—him no hurt. Velly good man, my officer."

Don pretended to think. He had no intention of trusting a woman in the hands of these fellows, even if they were regular troops; but he was gaining all the time possible. Finally he spoke.

"No can do. I got plenty men to make big

IN PEKIN

fight, and maybe more American come very soon. You tell your officer American say 'no.' ”

“ All light—plitty soon you find out.”

He retired and Don reëntered the house. The flags of truce were withdrawn, and soon the firing was resumed. It became heavier and heavier, then suddenly a long beam was thrown over the wall and a dozen Chinamen sprang after it. Raising it, they started for the door. The rush brought them half-way, then the fall of the leader tripped those behind. Their rush checked, Don turned his attention to the Chinamen along the wall; those inside were anxious only to escape, so he wasted no cartridges on them.

Just then there was a gasp behind him, and, as he turned to seize another rifle, he saw Peters tottering backward, his hands to his face. Hardly had he fallen when Mr. Hartmann sprang to the vacant loophole and took up the defense of that side.

“ Ah—you will, will you? ” cried Cameron. “ Take that, and that, and that. ” Each word was accompanied by a crack of the Mauser pistol.

“ The beggars tried to rush this side, ” he added. “ I think I showed them their mistake. ”

There was a sharp cry, and Sampson fell to the floor, but he was up in an instant and back at his loophole. A glance showed Don a rapidly widen-

AN ARMY BOY

ing spot of red on his left shoulder ; he was using only his right arm to operate his rifle.

“ Who next ? ” thought Don. “ The end is coming soon. ”

It came, but not as he thought. Suddenly he was conscious of a bright light falling on his face from the left. Hardly had he realized that the door was open when he saw, through the loophole, Mrs. Earle walking across the yard toward the wall. As he turned to go after her Cameron passed him at a run. He followed, and after him came Hartmann and Sampson.

With a wild yell the Chinamen swarmed over the wall. As they did so Mrs. Earle clasped her hands to her breast and sank to the ground, face downward. Cameron cleared her body at a leap, and yelling, “ Carry her in—I’ll hold them, ” charged into the mass.

Don knelt and turned her over. On her face was a smile, and her eyes were bright and clear.

“ Oh, Will, ” she murmured, but this time her eyes were fixed, not on Don, but on the blue vault above. Then an infinite peace settled over her countenance, and her eyes closed.

Don regained his feet. The rush of Cameron and the two missionaries had checked the Chinamen in front, but others were closing in from all sides. He saw the Englishman in a swirl, his rifle rising

IN PEKIN

and falling, his blond curly head towering above the Chinamen who worried around him. Sampson was down already, Hartmann sorely beset. As Don charged into the crush around Cameron, he saw a rifle butt strike the Englishman's head. Down went Cameron, carrying two Chinamen with him. The swarm passed over the gallant fellow, and at that instant a jagged streak of flame seemed to shoot through Don's brain, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XIX

A CHINESE INQUISITION

A RACKING pain in the head was Don's first conscious feeling. His effort to raise his hand to his forehead was resisted. An attempt to turn on his side failed also, and, with a groan, he relaxed again. Then his eyes opened for an instant, to close again as his head swam.

Where was he? What had happened? He endeavored to concentrate his thoughts, and again opened his eyes. A beam of light attracted his attention and he saw a window, barred with iron, high above his head. Then as his gaze wandered around, he found that he was lying on the stone floor of a small room. He tried to sit up, but was unable to stretch out an arm to aid the movement, and realized that he was securely bound. He raised his head and saw that he was fairly swathed in a heavy rope. He permitted his head to fall back and there was an added pang as it came in contact with the floor.

He groaned aloud and lay still. The memory of the massacre returned to him—the most distinct recollection being the fall of Cameron.

IN PEKIN

“Poor fellow!” he thought. “Another brave man gone to his reward.”

But what of himself? Why, when he had gone down, had they not finished their work? He had been fully prepared to die, and there was a queer feeling of resentment at having to resume the burden.

In a few minutes his bodily discomforts became so unendurable as to exclude all other thought. The tight bonds had checked the circulation in his arms and legs, and the throbbing of his head increased in violence. Again he groaned aloud.

There was a sliding sound, and as he looked to the left, he saw that a little slot had opened in the door to that side, and his eyes encountered another pair, slanting and merciless, peering at him. Then the slot closed.

Looking to the other side he saw a second door. Both were of heavy boards strengthened by iron bands. He realized that escape was out of the question, even if his limbs were freed.

For what seemed an endless time he lay, struggling to suppress the tendency to vent his sufferings audibly. Then the door to the left was opened, and a Chinese officer, accompanied by two soldiers, entered.

At a command from the officer the soldiers loosened the ropes and raised Don to his feet. His

AN ARMY BOY

legs would not support him, however, and he collapsed again, half fainting. The officer gave a curt order, and one of the soldiers left, returning in a minute with a cup of water, which he held to the young man's lips. Don drank eagerly.

When he had finished, they again lifted him, and, staggering and stumbling between the two soldiers, who supported him from either side, he was led forth. They passed through another room, where several soldiers stood on guard, then into a stone-flagged courtyard.

A few potted plants, and several metal urns in which strange flowering trees were growing, were scattered about. On the opposite side was a row of rooms similar to those Don had left. To the right a flight of steps led up to a more pretentious structure, while the fourth side was closed by a high wall, the gateway of which was protected by heavy doors.

Don was guided to the right. His returning circulation enabled him to mount the stairs with little assistance, though he still felt very weak and shaky. Placing his hand to the back of his head, he discovered a great lump, partly due to swelling, and partly to blood matted in with his hair.

The officer opened the door at the head of the stairs, and motioned him to enter. The soldiers led him in, and he found himself in what was

IN PEKIN

evidently a temple. In front of him was a gigantic figure, richly dressed and ornamented, seated on a carpeted dais. On either side were figures, nearly as large, evidently guards for the great idol, as one threatened the door with a spear and the other with a battle-axe. Along the wall were seated many smaller idols, their expressionless eyes staring.

These details were absorbed by Don, rather than seen. His attention was focussed upon a figure seated on a chair in front of the low steps leading to the idol's throne. It was a Chinaman richly dressed, and as motionless as any of the idols, for one of which he might have been taken but for the slight rise and fall of the silk vest that covered his chest.

From the silence and rigidity of his guard Don realized that he was in the presence of an important personage. He studied the impassive face, and was impressed with its strength and coldness. The total absence of human interest and emotion told him that no mercy was to be expected from this man.

Finally the slanting eyes were raised and fixed on Don's. A somber fire dwelt in their depths, and the young soldier felt a shudder pass through him. He tried to shift his gaze, but it was as though he had been fascinated by a snake.

AN ARMY BOY

Then a voice, soft and musical, came to him. The words were in English, the pronunciation faultless.

“ You are an American ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ An officer ? ”

“ No.”

“ What is the signification of the marks on your sleeve ? ”

“ They mark my grade ; though not an officer, I am above the rank of private soldier.”

“ What force did you expect to come to your aid ? ”

“ I expected none.”

“ Speak only the truth.”

“ I am speaking the truth.”

“ You are not. You were overconfident this morning, for one who had no hope of relief.”

“ I tried to impress the man who was sent to discuss our surrender.”

“ It would be better for you to answer my questions. There are means to make you. Your uniform saved you when the others were killed, because the troops knew you could give the information I desire. But you will regret that you did not die with them if you defy me.”

A silence followed. So all were dead, and the last hope that some of the others, also, had been carried, stunned, to prison, was gone.

IN PEKIN

“Again I ask you how many troops were detached from the main column to attack this place?”

“I know of none.”

“Is it the intention of the foreign generals to follow the main road through to Peking, or will they advance by this route also?”

“I am a simple enlisted man. I do not know my general’s plans.”

“Your being entrusted with a mission away from the main body shows that you know something. You must tell me.”

“I cannot. I know nothing.”

The Chinaman called a low command. The officer stepped forward and thrust his hand into Don’s pockets. He drew out the three papers given by Hoyle, and passed them to the Chinese dignitary, kneeling as he did so.

The latter looked at the map, and threw it on the floor. Then he glanced at the pass with greater interest. The sealed envelope he evidently considered of greatest importance.

“General Gaselee,” he read. “You have great temerity to deny your mission when you have the proofs of it still on your person.”

With a quick motion he tore the envelope open, and withdrew the folded paper. A faint frown showed on his forehead.

AN ARMY BOY

“What does this mean?” he asked.

“To what do you refer?”

“This paper is blank,” and he held it out to Don’s gaze.

“Sir, I understand as little as you do.”

The Chinaman called to an attendant, who brought a lamp. He held the paper above it, moving it around so that all was heated but none burned. As he did this, he studied it attentively, expecting to see the writing brought out, as is done with some inks used in secret correspondence. But he was disappointed.

“What is the secret of the ink with which this letter was written?”

“I doubt if anything was ever written on it—in fact I am sure that nothing ever was.”

Turning the man nodded to four men standing in the background. They were powerful fellows, and as they advanced their brutal faces showed anticipated pleasure. At a word from the inquisitor Don was forced back against the wall, where a rope hung, the two ends dangling from a pulley secured to a beam above.

One end they lashed about the American’s wrists, the other they laid hold of, and at a nod from the leader, heaved upon it till Don was suspended, his arms above his head.

“Will you tell me what you know?”

IN PEKIN

“I am telling you the truth—I know nothing to tell you.”

There was a command, and the Chinamen seized Don's ankles, fastened them together and suspended a heavy weight to them. The muscles of his arms and legs were stretched taut.

“You were captured with a personal pass signed by your general. You bear a letter to another general of the invading force and a poor sketch of a portion of our country. Your claim of ignorance is not credible. Will you tell?”

“I cannot.”

Another weight was added and sharp pains began to run through Don's limbs, especially in the joints of his shoulders. He hung for a minute in silence, his sufferings increasing till they became more than he could endure.

“Oh!” he cried. “Take them off. Let me down.”

“Where did you expect to meet General Gaselee?”

“I swear to you that I do not know.”

Again a low command, and another weight was added. This drew a shriek from the young man, followed by a shuddering groan.

“Another fifty pounds will tear the cartilage from your shoulder joints and leave you a cripple for life. Shall I add it?”

AN ARMY BOY

But the young American was unable to reply. He opened his mouth, but only meaningless sounds came. At a word from his tormentor, the weights were removed. The strain was lessened, which was a blessed relief, though the pain continued intense.

“I feared you would faint, and my time does not permit me to delay. You have seen something of what I can do. Will you give me the information I desire?”

“Believe me—please believe me, I have none.”

“I know you speak falsely.”

He spoke a few words and one of the torturers slipped away, returning in a few seconds with a short, thick stick, to which were attached a dozen leather ropes, each with a knob at the end. Don remembered the description he had read of the Russian knout, and shuddered.

Again the question was put and answered. Following his answer there was a whistling sound and it seemed as though half a score of red-hot bands had been drawn around his body. His legs jerked up as the muscles contracted, but the Chinaman's words had given him an idea. Instantly he relaxed his body, letting his head fall back and his legs hang limp, and, by a great effort of will, received the second and third blows inertly and without shrinking.

IN PEKIN

There were short exclamations of impatience around him, and he was lowered to the ground. There was no necessity of his simulating a collapse; he was about at the end of his endurance. The respite was grateful, and he lay with his eyes closed to prolong it. The door opened and closed again, then opened the second time. He was racking his brain to think of some story that would satisfy his tormentor—it was evident that he would never accept the truth. Under the circumstances no man would.

Suddenly a bucket of icy water was dashed over him. He caught his breath and with it some pungent vapor which brought him to a sitting posture. A hand supported his back, while another held a cloth saturated with the aromatic liquid to his face.

Wildly he looked around. The Chinaman with the dead face and glittering eye still sat in his chair unmoved. The underlings stood ready and impatient to resume their interrupted work. In passing his eye caught that of the man who was supporting him, and there seemed something friendly in the expression that halted his wandering thoughts. Where had he seen this man before? Then it came back to him. That night in Tientsin, when he had befriended a Chinaman and his family. This was the man

AN ARMY BOY

he had saved and who had kissed his hand in parting.

Then he realized that the Chinaman was speaking rapidly, urging something upon the official. The plea, if it were such, was curtly interrupted, and, at a sharp command, the friendly man stepped back.

As the snaky eyes turned on him again a sense of hopelessness came over the soldier. He saw that death was not to be his, and understood the threat with which the interview had opened. They would not injure him mortally, but would toy with his suffering till all hope of making him betray his friends had gone.

What new torture had they now devised? He was thrown back into a chair, and his hands and feet strapped. Next an iron band was passed around his forehead and secured to the back of the chair, holding him motionless. A lock of hair was cut from the top of his head, and then all but one of the torturers came around to the front where they could watch him. Their expression showed gratification and anticipation of pleasure.

A drop of water fell on his head, then another. The third fell in a slightly different place, the fourth full upon the bare spot. Then the fourth Chinaman appeared. All stood silent.

Don had heard of this torture and knew that if

IN PEKIN

continued long it meant increasing pain, and finally madness. For the present the sensation was not unpleasant.

Then there was a faint feeling of heat, which increased drop by drop. In five minutes it seemed that molten lead was dropping upon him.

“Are you beginning to recover wisdom?”

“I have nothing to tell you; if I had I should not.”

“You think so? Wait. You have been under the test ten minutes. I have known some to hold out an hour, but they were few. Besides I am giving you the test faster and from a greater height than is customary. And I warn you that you will never get out of that chair possessed of reason if you do not yield.”

Don opened his mouth to reply, but confused noises, including the clattering of horses' hoofs in the courtyard, interrupted him. The door swung open, and an officer entering fell upon his knees in front of the seated figure. He spoke rapidly, and a slight cloud appeared on the face of the man addressed. Then both went out, the latter calling a command to the guard as he left.

As the door closed behind them one of the torturers sprang toward Don, but was felled to the floor by a blow from the officer of the guard. The four brutes drew back at this interruption of their

AN ARMY BOY

pleasure, snarling and complaining. The soldiers stepped forward and released the bonds, one of them speaking to him in a guttural but not unkindly tone. The two raised him in their arms and carried him from the room. Before passing through the door, he saw the Chinaman he had befriended in Tientsin pick up from the floor the map and the pass, and put them in his sleeve. The official had carried off the blank sheet from the envelope addressed to the English general.

They carried him through the courtyard, which now presented a scene of great activity. As they passed the anteroom to his cell, one of the soldiers took down a thick robe from the wall. They deposited him on the floor of the cell, and removing his wet clothing, wrapped him in the robe, then left, locking the door behind them. This little show of human kindness, especially the act of the officer in interfering with the torturers, brought a slight feeling of comfort to the lonely boy.

The remainder of the afternoon he lay inert, his eyes staring listlessly at the ceiling. It was only with great suffering that he could move his arms sufficiently to take an occasional swallow from the bowl of water at his side. From time to time the slot in the door would open and a pair of slant eyes look through at him. Each time he would

IN PEKIN

turn heart-sick at the thought that the man with the dead face had returned and was about to renew his inquisition.

The light from the window dimmed and failed. A lantern was brought in and placed on the floor beside him. They brought him a bowl of soup, supporting him while he drank. The heat of it drew the blood from his head and was grateful to his chilled body. He even dozed a little.

Several hours must have passed in this semi-comatose condition, when he was aroused by hearing a scuffling and a muffled groan. He sat up, his heart beating painfully. He looked toward the door to the anteroom, expecting it to open, when a sound from the opposite direction attracted his attention. As he turned, the heavy door on that side opened silently and two Chinamen entered stealthily. Don opened his mouth to call for help, thinking the torturers were stealing upon him, when there was a warning hiss as the leader raised his hat. Don recognized his friendly Chinaman from Tientsin.

The two Chinamen bore an inert figure between them and lay it on the floor. A strong odor of chloroform came with them. Hastily they stripped the man's outer clothing from him, and removing the robe Don had on, placed it on the other. Then they placed the soldier's campaign hat so

AN ARMY BOY

that the face of the unconscious guard could not be seen from the anteroom. Don realized that they had overcome and chloroformed the watcher at the other door to effect his release.

Wrapping the man's long cloak around Don the friendly Chinaman motioned him to follow. They passed through another cell, similar to the one Don had been confined in, then through a long twisting corridor to the outer air. There a covered mule cart was waiting, and into this the two Chinamen helped him. A minute later they were moving at a swift trot through the night.

After ten minutes the cart was halted and he was taken out and led into a house. The front room was a kind of a shop, and the many bottles standing on shelves around the wall confirmed Don's opinion that his rescuer was a physician. Here he was met by the man's wife, who wept tears of sympathy when she saw his wretched plight.

He was taken to another room, where a large urn of hot water was already placed. The doctor helped him to this and bathed him thoroughly, first pouring some antiseptic solution into the water. He then put him on a soft couch and dressed his wounds, cutting the matted hair from the back of his head and applying a soothing ointment. The same ointment was rubbed into

IN PEKIN

the wounds caused by the knout. This completed, he was skilfully bandaged with long, clean strips of linen.

Then the doctor turned him over on his back and began to massage his arms and shoulder joints. At first the sensation was decidedly painful, but it was soon evident that the man was very skilful. Sometimes he would work with both hands, then, continuing with one, he would take the arm in the other and work the joints slowly. The movements became freer, the pain gradually lessened. He talked incessantly in a language that Don could understand no word of, but the tone carried with it affection and sympathy, and a deep peace settled over the harried youngster. In the midst of this the wife toddled in on her cramped feet and made him drink a bowl of rich broth. Then, as the massaging continued, he settled himself back among the soft pillows, closed his eyes, and, in a minute more, was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XX

THE ALLIED ARMIES APPROACH PEKIN

UNCONSCIOUS of the tragedies taking place within so short a distance, the troops of the allied forces continued their march. Even had they known, it is doubtful if any troops would have been deflected to the rescue. Individuals could not be considered when ahead of them their nations' ministers and ambassadors were engaged in a struggle for life. Peking was their first objective, and nothing could be permitted to delay their march.

Daily the Japanese brushed aside the weak resistance offered by the defeated Chinese, and kept in touch with the retreating army. It was not intended that this should be given opportunity to reinforce those attacking the legations. In the rear toiled the long column. None of the excitement was theirs. Their task was to shoulder their burdens each day, and to carry them on to the next camp—if they were able to.

The evening Mathou was reached two of the American officers and some ninety men had suffered sunstroke or heat exhaustion, and that

IN PEKIN

night the camp was noisy with their delirious ravings. Increasing trouble with raids made by small bands of Chinese along the line of communications made it advisable to establish a guard at this point, and those unable to continue the march were selected for the purpose.

In Company "H" the brotherly feeling had departed. The company had split into two distinct factions, the one frankly siding with Hoyle and missing no opportunity to refer slightly to the disappearance of Corporal Page, the other full of sympathy for Kearny, though some of them were doubtful of Page.

Captain O'Hara was distressed; accustomed to a united company, and filled with pride over its excellent record, he sought for some course of action that would bring back the old state of affairs. A rigid disciplinarian, he realized the necessity for making an example after so grave an offense as Harry's, and yet his first sergeant and Sergeant Sypher, in both of whom he had the deepest confidence, had pleaded with him, privately, for clemency in this case.

Harry, in the meantime, continued to march at the rear of the company, a prey to bitter thoughts. To him the hardships of the march no longer meant anything; his mental worry did not permit him to dwell upon his physical discomfort. After

AN ARMY BOY

two days he gave up hope of seeing his chum return and confront his accusers to their confusion, and wondered how he was going to break the news to those at home.

He felt deserted. When the first camp was pitched after his arrest, he expected the usual encouraging talk from Sergeant Sypher, but the latter, while he pleaded with the captain, was too good a soldier to show open sympathy for a non-commissioned officer in arrest.

There was another who felt not the fatigue of the march, and that was Hoyle. He, like Harry, had not been without some expectation of Don's return, but, needless to say, had not dwelt upon the thought with any pleasure. After two days, however, his mind was at rest, and he gave his evil exultation full play. The only drawback to his pleasure was that the captain had not ordered him to prepare the charges for the court-martial of Kearny. He much preferred the trial to take place before the end of the campaign, as he knew the court would be more inclined to be lenient after it was over, especially if their mission were successful.

The day the column approached Tungchow, he began to doubt the advisability of pressing his case against Kearny. The state of the company was plain to him, and though he cared little for this

IN PEKIN

in comparison to his personal affairs, he did mind the effect it was having upon the captain. He could see that Captain O'Hara was loath to prefer the charges against Kearny, and also that he no longer seemed to feel so cordially toward himself. The first sergeant, also, was cold and distant, whereas before their relations, while never cordial, had been quite friendly.

The cunning rascal turned these thoughts over in his mind, and finally decided that the satisfaction of his spite against Kearny must wait some opportunity when it would not react upon himself. The good will, even the admiration, of his captain he must keep if he were to be sure of the recommendation necessary to his advancement. His record already was that of "a reliable and trustworthy non-commissioned officer, of exceptional courage." He must add to it a reputation for generosity and willingness to sink his personal feelings for the good of his organization.

Accordingly when the camp was pitched at Tungchow, he approached Captain O'Hara with a request for permission to speak. It was granted rather ungraciously, as the captain thought he desired to press the case against Kearny, a case about which his own mind was not yet made up.

"It is about Corporal Kearny, sir."

"Well?"

AN ARMY BOY

“I wish to say to the captain that I have given the matter much thought, and believe it is for the best interests of the company to take no further action. It is a matter in which I wish to sink all personal feeling. Until this occurrence, I always rather admired Kearny, though we have never been what you would call friends. But he was very devoted to Page, and you know the condition of mind he was in the morning his friend disappeared. His attacking me in his excitement was not unnatural. I'd be glad to see the captain give him another chance.”

“That is a good spirit, sergeant. This thing has shaken the company up a good deal. But I am not sure that passing it by is the way to remedy the matter, much as I'd like to see it straightened out. I'm not seeing my way clear to overlooking such a breach of discipline.”

“The corporal is young and hot-headed, captain. I punished him enough for his insult to me personally, and for a man of his spirit his arrest has been quite a humiliation.”

“How about your own standing in the company? How will my lack of support affect you with the men?”

“The captain need have no fear of that. I am perfectly capable of maintaining discipline among my subordinates. Besides, if I may be permitted

IN PEKIN

to express an opinion, I'd say that the lively times we are liable to have in the next few days will give the men plenty to think of. His restoration to duty may cause a little flurry, but the affair will soon be forgotten, if the men are not further stirred up by a court martial. I am sure discipline will not suffer, and believe that the action I have ventured to suggest may bring the non-commissioned officers together again."

The captain's face brightened.

"Well, I'll risk it, sergeant, and appreciate the generosity you have shown. I'll see that Kearny knows that you saved his stripes, and will make him apologize."

"Please, sir, I'd rather not. Keep my name out of it, sir, if possible, and do not humiliate the youngster further. He has trouble enough on his mind already."

"It shall be as you say, sergeant, and I'll remember your interest in the company. Send Kearny to me."

Well satisfied with the impression he had made, Hoyle saluted and left. He was tempted to ask the captain then and there for his favorable endorsement for a commission, but was too clever to risk the introduction of an element of personal self-seeking at this time.

Half an hour later Harry was released from

AN ARMY BOY

arrest, and, after a stern reprimand and a warning against further outbreak, was restored to command of his squad. Not the least of his satisfaction in his freedom was the added opportunity to watch Hoyle, and thereafter the latter made no move and spoke no word that was not noted and studied. But Harry was forced to confess that there seemed nothing on which to hang a suspicion.

There was a rumor that night that the allies would not advance the following day, but would remain in Tungchow and perfect their plans for the attack on Peking, now only fourteen miles away. Therefore the men were surprised at an exceptionally early reveille the following morning, and at the word that they and the Japanese were to reconnoiter two separate roads leading to the Chinese capital.

The Fourteenth was thrown out as an advance guard to the American forces, and in this work the regiment had been unusually well trained. Company "H" furnished the "advance party" and Harry's squad formed the "point." It was their duty to develop any ambuscade that might have been prepared, and to notify the troops in the rear so that these might have the opportunity to form for attack or for defense, as the situation might require.

In that country of dense orchards and corn fields

IN PEKIN

it was a nerve-racking task, and Harry found his responsible duties were sufficient to occupy all his thoughts to the exclusion of personal matters. He and his squad did their work thoroughly. The privates were jubilant over his return and were more than usually active in order that no criticism might fall upon their corporal. They kept well ahead of the support, and sent men to the right and left to examine places of possible concealment.

It seemed incredible that the Chinese would permit their enemies to advance so close to the walls of their capital, and to form within assaulting distance without making one last effort to inflict a decisive defeat upon them. And yet hour after hour passed, and mile after mile was covered, without sign or sound of the enemy. And every minute the expectation of an ambush became more wearing on those who were charged with its prevention. By one o'clock they were within five miles of Peking. At three o'clock they were not more than two miles from the outer walls.

Here a halt was ordered and, as the remainder of the regiment came up, a strong outpost line was established. The remainder of the American contingent camped under its protection, and the general endeavored to get in touch with the other leaders, to report his whereabouts and to settle the plans for the assault. The men heard that con-

AN ARMY BOY

tact with the Japanese line had been established, but that the other allies had not been located. Later it was rumored that the Russians had left Tungchow by a third road, that the English were still at that point but were intending to advance that night, and that a battery of French artillery had arrived. The French had remained at Yangtsun to guard the line of communications after the battle at that place.

According to agreement the generals were to assemble for a final conference that evening, but as the day drew to a close and a black night settled down, it became evident that concert of action could not be hoped for. There were anxious hearts at headquarters that night, for, if the Chinese had lured them into a trap, their situation was such that the enemy could attack them in detail.

None of these worries was known along the outpost line, where the soldiers were busy enough. After dark the posts were doubled and patrols passed along the line continually. During daylight no Chinamen had been seen; now, however, there seemed to be scores of them endeavoring to pass. Many were captured and confined under guard on suspicion of being spies. Others broke for cover on being challenged and were fired on by the sentinels. No one thought of sleep.

IN PEKIN

As it drew toward midnight firing was heard in the direction of Peking. The sound would increase until it became a continuous roar of infantry fire punctuated by artillery, then it would die down, to be renewed again in a few minutes.

"It sounds to me," said Sergeant Sypher to Harry, "as though they were making a last effort to massacre those in the legations."

"I fear so. Let us hope they can hold out one night longer."

"Amen. The most discouraging thing is that we have seen nothing to-day of the army we have been chasing for so long. They have probably joined in this attack."

"By Jove, it seems to be getting pretty fierce! There—did you notice that? It seemed much closer than any we have heard before."

"I sure hope so. I'd like to think that they are coming after us. We hold a good line and could keep them busy. I'd rather they'd do that than stay inside the walls."

There was now no doubt that the firing, in part at least, was nearer at hand. The two men, listening intently, had no difficulty in distinguishing the difference. Time passed, however, without any further change, and their attention relaxed.

"Are any of the allies in advance of us?" asked Harry.

AN ARMY BOY

“No—the Japanese are to our right, as you know, and we left the others in Tungechow.”

“This must be an anxious night for our leaders; I found to-day that responsibility is more wearing than physical exertion.”

“I am glad, my boy, that you are in a position to have responsibility again. Your return to command of your squad gave some of us old fellows who were seeming to give you the cold shoulder more pleasure than you suspect. I wish your bunkie were here also.”

“Sergeant, I am glad of the opportunity to ask you what you think of that case?”

“I don’t know what to think. One thing is certain—Page never did anything dishonest.”

“Bless you for that. But what other explanation can there be?”

The sergeant dropped his voice to a whisper.

“Now don’t get excited, for there may be nothing in it. But here is the way I figger it out. Page went voluntarily—the sentinel proved that; also he didn’t sneak out. He walked by the sentinel’s post answering his challenge, like he was on some duty. Now, Kearny, he might have been sent out.”

“By whom?” questioned Harry, eagerly.

“Well, who could give him orders?”

“Why, the commanding officer, the officer of

IN PEKIN

the day and a senior non-commissioned officer of the guard."

"Exactly so. Now if the commanding officer or the officer of the day had sent him, do you not suppose they would have told of it the following morning?"

"Certainly they would."

"But they didn't."

"No—nobody had any explanation."

"Hold on a minute. Nobody made any explanation, but that doesn't prove that no one had any. We know Page went, we know he would not desert a responsible post without orders, we know that neither the old man nor the officer of the day gave him such orders. Now, what's left?"

Harry drew in his breath with a little hiss.

"Hoyle! What a blind idiot I have been!"

"Hush. Now that is only a suspicion. But if we assume Page honest, some one must have tricked him into going, since there were no orders issued from headquarters."

"Then the regimental fund ——?"

"If my suspicions are well founded, it is tucked away inside Hoyle's shirt right now."

"For goodness' sake, let's go to the captain at once!"

"Not on your life. It is only a suspicion caused by my confidence in your friend. If there were

AN ARMY BOY

any other possible explanation the thought would never have occurred to me. Hoyle is one of the best soldiers I have ever seen, and if he is crooked, he's a combination of good and bad such as I have never met in thirty years' service. The captain has absolute confidence in him, and would not act on any suspicion based on such light grounds."

"But I cannot stand by and do nothing."

"I don't want you to, or I shouldn't have spoken. It's for us to watch him like hawks. Imagining himself safe from any suspicion, he'll soon begin to use that money, if he has it. Unless I miss my guess there'll be jewelry and other things to be purchased mighty cheap in Peking, and Hoyle will take advantage of the opportunity. That's where we'll get him. If he gets a hint of our suspicions, he'll hide the money away, so as to prevent its being proven on him. We must be careful."

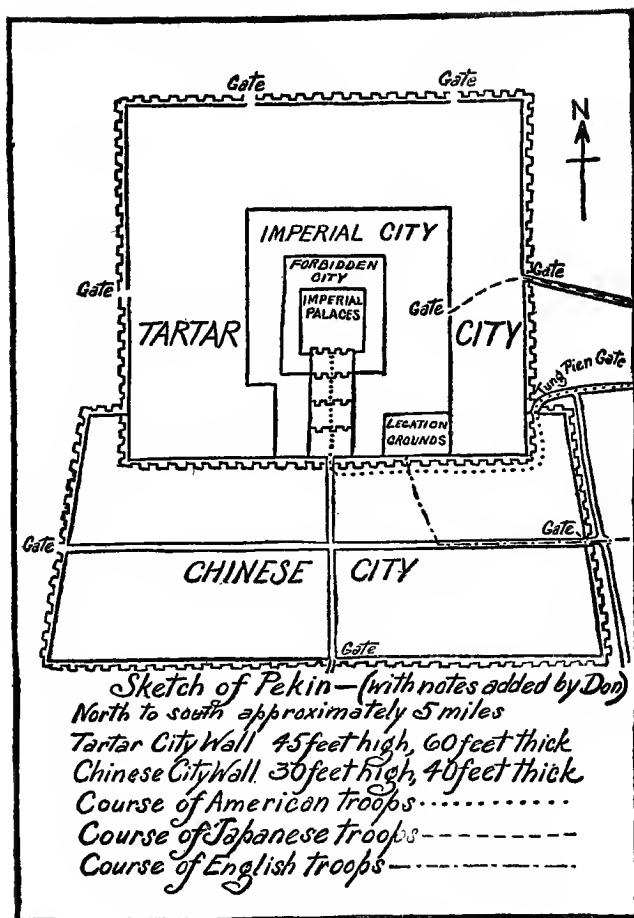
"Bless you again, sergeant. You have certainly taken a load from my mind."

"That's all right. Just do as I say, and we'll save your friend's reputation, and maybe avenge his death."

"You think he is dead then?"

"Afraid there's no hope of anything else. But, my boy, death is not so bad. We both know he met it with his head up. It's fear that a man need be afraid of, not death."

IN PEKIN



SKETCH MAP OF PEKIN

AN ARMY BOY

Back at the general's tent there was deep anxiety and foreboding. At a camp table General Chaffee and his chief of staff sat poring over a detailed map of the city of Peking. They, too, were listening to the heavy firing, and had drawn the conclusion that there were two engagements in progress.

"What do you make of it, colonel?" asked General Chaffee.

"There can be no doubt, sir, that the legations are being heavily assaulted."

"But this closer firing?"

"That I cannot understand, unless part of them have broken through."

"Impossible. See," and he laid his finger on the map. "They would leave the legations here, and would have to fight their way through the streets to the Tung Pien Gate, force that gate and then fight their way to us here. Their course would be the opposite of what I hope ours will be to-morrow, with this difference—we know they are there and have a definite objective, while they have no idea that we are so close. We have sent messengers, but there is no certainty that any have reached them."

"That is true. The firing seems closer. Shall I strengthen our outposts?"

"No, I inspected before dusk, and we can hold back the whole Chinese army."

IN PEKIN

“ Is there anything from the other generals ? ”

“ Not a word, but I shall not wait on them. This night attack is serious, and I shall order the assault at dawn. A heavy cannonading should clear a corner of the wall, and our men must scale it. Here is a place where there is a bridge over the moat. It is terribly exposed, but we must be in the heart of Pekin to-morrow night.”

There was a quick step outside the tent, and a scratch on the canvas.

“ Come in,” said the general.

An officer entered and saluted.

“ Sir,” he reported, “ there’s a man in Chinese costume at the outpost asking permission to see you.”

“ What does he say ? ”

“ Says he has been in Pekin and can report on what is taking place. He has a pass directing the guard to pass him to your headquarters.”

“ By whom signed ? ”

“ By you personally.”

“ It is a hoax. I have given no such pass.”

“ The man seems terribly in earnest, sir.”

“ Is he an American ? ”

“ Claims to be, sir.”

“ Search him for weapons, then bring him along. I hope, Lee,” he added, “ that we may learn something on which to base our plans, instead of having to stab in the dark.”

CHAPTER XXI

PEKIN'S ORGY OF BLOOD

WITH a delicious sense of comfort, security and well-being, Don turned over and drowsily burrowed into the depths of the soft, linen covered pillows. As he dozed off again friendly eyes looked upon him and then glanced at the sinking sun. The Chinese physician smiled as he thought of the eighteen hours of uninterrupted slumber. As he turned to leave the room the sleeper stirred again.

“O-o-o-a-a-a!” a prolonged yawn; then as the arms were stretched above his head, “Ouch! Gee, that hurts!”

The Chinaman approached with smiles, and offered to renew the massage, but Don, sitting up on the couch, waved him back and tentatively tried his shoulders. Then springing to the floor, he proceeded to go through with some calisthenic exercises, slowly at first and with many a wry face, then faster and without marked pain. At the end of ten minutes he found himself in a gentle perspiration, and his limbs nearly as supple as ever.

“I’m fit as a fiddle again, thanks to you, old

IN PEKIN

sport," he said to the interested Chinaman. "And I'd surely like a cold bath, but suppose I'll have to keep these bandages on for a day or so longer."

The Chinaman, nodding and smiling, though understanding nothing, offered him water and towel. When he had washed himself as well as he was able to, a robe was brought out, which he recognized as a Boxer uniform. There were breeches and shoes to match, and, finally, a cap, to the rear of which a long queue was attached.

At first Don hesitated ; there was the thought that, if found in disguise within the enemy's lines, he might be hung as a spy. Then he remembered that the customs of war had no weight in China, and that he hadn't fared so well while in American uniform. He put on the costume. As he finished his strange toilet the Chinaman held out to him the sketch and the pass, which had been left on the floor of the torture room by the dead-faced man. Don searched for a pocket, but was shown by his friend that such articles were carried in the sleeve. He was glad to have again these evidences of Hoyle's treachery.

Naturally his first thought on awakening had been that it was morning ; now, however, he observed that the sun had set, and knew that he had slept three-fourths' round the clock.

With a shock he realized that it was the day

AN ARMY BOY

the allies should have reached Peking. He determined to make an effort to gain the city that night. In all probability it was not more than ten or twelve miles distant.

"Peking," he said, putting his finger on his chest. "Me—Peking."

The Chinaman nodded vigorously and touching his finger, first to his own and then to Don's chest, repeated, "Peking."

He pointed out of the window, opened his eyes wide, and shook an emphatic negative, then closing his eyes, nodded an affirmative. Don gathered that his friend would act as his guide, but would delay until they could not be seen.

They went into another room, where a table was laid for two. Luscious fruits, a plate of what Don first thought was hominy, but found later were lotus seeds, several kinds of meats and breads, eggs, and finally, the most unexpected treat, coffee, made up the meal. The half-famished young soldier ate ravenously. Finally, unable to crowd down another mouthful, he desisted, and leaned back with a satisfied sigh.

Darkness had fallen. The physician left the house, and in the course of a quarter of an hour returned, riding one large mule and leading another. His wife came in and spoke to him earnestly, Don, in the meantime, playing with the

IN PEKIN

doll-like child she carried in her arms. Then the Chinaman produced a paper and brush. He offered them to Don, first dipping the brush in a pot of ink. Don understood and wrote his name, company and regiment on the paper. He then motioned for his friend to do likewise, and the Chinaman complied, putting down a column of three Chinese characters, which he gave to Don, both laughing. Before leaving, to show his gratitude, Don removed a plain gold ring from his finger and placed it in the chubby hand of the infant, which closed on it immediately.

The Chinaman brought out a great two-handed sword attached to a belt, which he strapped around Don's waist. Then taking the brush, he marked over Don's eyebrows, giving them an upward slant. With a grunt of satisfaction, he bade his wife farewell and the two left the house and mounted the mules.

Two hours of swift riding through the cool night air, and ahead of them appeared a great glare on the sky, while from the distance came faintly the rattle of infantry fire and the booming of artillery.

"Pekin," said the guide, pointing ahead.

"Yes, and they are at it now," thought Don.

"I may be in time, after all."

An hour more brought them to scattered build-

AN ARMY BOY

ings, for the most part dark and silent. Passing through these suburbs, they came upon the massive walls that surround China's capital.

Here at a gate, surmounted by a towering pagoda, a guard barred their progress. That the gate should be open at all was a surprise to Don ; that the Chinese should be guarding it while there was fighting within the city was even more of a puzzle. But his one idea was to reach the fighting and join his comrades. He sank his chin into the collar of his coat and glared at the sentries while his friend spoke rapidly. The guards had noted Don's uniform with evident respect, and a moment later the two mules were trotting briskly along a broad street paved with flagstones.

The city was in riot. Swarms of men passed back and forth. Occasionally a shriek arose from the narrow alleys intersecting the main street. Once a panting man, followed by four others, dashed from one of these and crossed the path of Don and the physician. His pursuers overtook him as he was about to dart into another alley, and beat him to death. Farther along a crowd of Chinamen had assembled in front of a large building, evidently the dwelling of a man of wealth, and just as Don passed the door gave in with a crash. The jostling, fighting mass of coolies crowded in ; there was a shot, then a shriek, and,

IN PEKIN

looking back, Don saw a body thrust through a window and fall with a thud to the ground. Dogs fought over the dead bodies that lay scattered around, and no one halted long enough to kick them away. The wild scene was illuminated by blazing houses.

“Pandemonium has broken loose,” thought Don. “The last vestige of law and order is gone.”

Several times wild bands tried to halt them, but the sight of Don’s uniform, and the great sword which he drew threateningly caused them to fall back. Once a Chinaman, dressed as a Boxer, his hands red with blood, danced up to Don, making weird signs and passes. It was a dangerous situation, and called for prompt action. Unable, of course, to make the proper return signs and heartily disgusted at the revolting appearance of the fellow, Don freed one foot from the stirrup and kicked him violently. His bold front had the anticipated effect. The Boxer, who had been knocked flat, regained his feet and slunk away, followed by the jeers and taunts of the mob.

A wild excitement, in keeping with his surroundings, took possession of the young American. All sense of personal danger left him. He did not know whether he could get through, and, somehow, he did not seem to care. A rage against, and contempt for, the wretched, murdering creatures

AN ARMY BOY

that formed the mobs was his strongest feeling, and he longed for a company, or even a platoon, of his own men. How quickly they would clear the streets and bring these fellows, whining, to their knees!

A second large gate loomed ahead, and, as they approached it, the crowds thinned. To either side stretched massive walls, forty feet high.

"The Tartar City," thought Don. "The fighting we hear must be an assault on the legations by the Chinese. There are no foreigners yet inside the city."

Evidently the Chinese physician had come to the same conclusion, for he halted and urgently motioned Don to return. The latter, however, having come so far, was resolved not to turn back without some definite information to give his general should he be able to rejoin the army. Determinedly he crossed the moat leading to the arched gateway, his friend following and protesting.

The gates were open and deserted. The two men after passing through turned to the right. Above them on the wall a cannon boomed at intervals, the projectiles shrieking as they tore through the air toward where Don supposed the legations lay.

Half a mile they traveled in the new direction. Occasionally there was the hiss of a bullet over-

IN PEKIN

head, and Don knew that these came from the besieged. Soon he heard a wild yelling ahead of him, and spurred forward in time to see the last of a large body of Chinamen climb over a barricade, and unite in a desperate charge against a second barricade beyond. From the latter came scores of little spits of flame, then a great ball of waste, soaked in oil and blazing, was thrown from the barricade fifty feet into the street. In the murky glare cast by this, Don saw the front of the charging mass melt before the rapid fire of the besieged. A few reached the second barricade, and were beaten back with clubbed rifles. The others slowed, halted and then fled in panic. A ringing cheer came from the barricade.

“Holding their own here easily enough,” muttered Don. And then came the sounds of firing, followed by a similar cheering from beyond, indicating that an assault on the other side had been repulsed also.

A shell passed overhead, and, striking a chimney in the center of the protected section, exploded. An instant later the chimney fell with a crash to the ground.

“The brave chaps are doing nobly,” thought Don, “but no one can resist attacks like these, combined with bombardment, for very long. I pray that our troops are not far away.”

AN ARMY BOY

Having learned all that was necessary, Don turned his mule and, followed by the Chinaman, rode away. Little attention was paid him by the besiegers, most of whom halted behind their barricade, though a few continued their flight.

Once more they were south of the Tartar City wall and surrounded by the disorders of the Chinese city. Men fought to the death over valuables stolen from houses bordering the street, which, when stripped of all that was worth carrying away, were wantonly set afire. Boxers and men in the uniform of the Imperial Army mingled with the coolies. Knives and guns were freely used. A few stern words from his guide usually secured Don a free passage, though once a number of Imperial troops ceased looting long enough to clear a way for one they evidently considered a high official.

In this way they reached the east wall, where they found the gate strongly guarded and heavily barred. The physician spoke with the officer in charge, who had the gates opened slightly, and rendered Don the military salute as he passed.

The youngster heaved a sigh of relief when he found himself again in the open. Then he caught his breath, as from the left, and much nearer than the legations, he heard the rattling of a machine

IN PEKIN

gun, and, following it, several well delivered volleys.

“European or American troops there,” he said. “The game is on with a vengeance.”

They had passed about a hundred yards beyond the walls when they came to a crossroad. Here the friendly Chinaman halted, and, pointing to where the firing last heard was taking place, offered his hand in farewell.

Don dismounted and wrung the hand offered him. He poured out his gratitude, and though the Chinaman understood nothing of the words, the meaning was plain. He tried to make Don keep the mule, but the latter declined, and finally saw the man, who had so nobly repaid the kindness done him, ride off to the southward, leading the second animal.

At a rapid pace Don passed along the road toward the firing. At the end of a mile the wall came to an end, and he realized that the fighting was taking place around the corner. To his right was a small house, and on the other side he made out the light of a lantern. Don approached it.

As he rounded the corner he found himself in the midst of a group of Russian officers. Quick as a flash one of them had him covered with a revolver.

AN ARMY BOY

Don's hands rose instinctively above his head.

"American," he said.

One of the officers held the lantern to Don's face, and laughed as he saw the inked eyebrows. To make the proof conclusive, Don removed the cap with the dangling queue.

There was a rapid conversation among the officers, then one of them, in fair English, asked Don to explain. This he did briefly, telling them that he had been sent on a special mission, and producing the pass given him by Hoyle.

There was another exchange of words among the officers, then the spokesman returned the pass to its owner.

"We should like to hold you for a while," he said, "but that would be carrying things too far. The truth is that we Russians decided to make a night attack without notifying the others. We hoped to bring to our flag the honor of relieving our ministers unaided. It looks doubtful, however. They are holding us."

"Where are the Americans?" asked Don.

"Follow that road leading to the eastward. You may tell your general that we hope to have one gate open by dawn."

"How far distant?"

"Between three and four kilometers."

"About two miles," said Don as he started.

IN PEKIN

“In an hour or so I should be shaking dear old Harry’s hand, and then,” his teeth came together with a click, “then I settle with Hoyle.”

Half walking, half running, he made his way along the road. First, of course, he must go direct to the general and give him the information he had gathered. Time did not permit of his following the usual course of reporting to the company commander first. Then he would go to his company. He knew that his report would be the signal for an immediate advance, and it must be getting toward dawn. He was in time for the great assault on Peking. It might be that his personal matter would have to wait.

As he was revolving these thoughts and hastening along, suddenly a man’s figure loomed ahead of him and a pistol was pressed against his forehead. Instantly Don ducked and grasped his assailant around the waist. To his surprise the man collapsed under his first effort, and they fell to the ground.

“So near, and to lose out after all,” said a weak voice. “It’s mighty tough on Mary and the kiddies.”

“Cameron!” cried Don. “Cameron, by all that is grand and beautiful!”

CHAPTER XXII

CAPTAIN O'HARA HEARS THE TRUTH

"PAGE, is it really you?"

"No one else. And how come you here, alive and assaulting your friends?"

"Well, I'm not more than half alive, and no white man who has seen as many Chinamen as I have recently would take you for a friend in your present costume. Tell me how you escaped."

"Later, old man—can you walk?"

"Able to totter along, no more. I've had nothing to eat and no sleep since I last saw you, and must have walked forty miles, dodging through the country—I'm down to skin and bone."

"Well, the American camp is near, and we'll fill you up. Here, let me help you."

As they moved along, the Englishman leaning on Don's shoulder, the latter related his experiences. Then Cameron responded.

"When I came to," he said, "I was light-headed and half smothered by a dead Chinaman whose body rested on my head. Probably he fell on me just as some one aimed a blow to settle me, and he

IN PEKIN

got it. At any rate they must have thought me dead, for they left me. Poor old Hartmann and Sampson were finished, but I couldn't find any signs of Mrs. Earle or you."

"Had her body been removed?"

"Her body—was she dead?"

"Yes—killed almost instantly—you sprang over her, and I stopped to carry her back to the house, but she died before I could raise her."

"That's a great relief to me. I was afraid that she had fallen into their hands alive. There must have been some one decent enough to bury her, poor woman. Well, as I was saying, I was pretty sick and weak, but knew that I had to get away. The Chinese had cleaned out everything, taken all the food, the equipments and the guns. I had stuck my Mauser pistol in a crack between two mud bricks at my window when my ammunition was exhausted, and that they overlooked. I brought it along to bluff with. I struck out across country on a guess as to direction and have been wandering ever since—nothing to eat and not much water. I have been near capture a dozen times. When I heard the firing, I made toward it, and was just thinking that I was nearly out of the woods when you showed up. I felt pretty bad when my bluff with the pistol didn't work, and you closed on me."

AN ARMY BOY

"I didn't find you as tough a proposition as in our first scrimmage."

"No—not with my stomach sticking to my backbone. Just wait, my boy, till I get filled up, and I'll give you another try."

"Halt! Who is there?"

The challenge cut the night air like a knife.

"Friends!" answered Don. And then to Cameron, "It's the American line."

"Advance one to be recognized; and come mighty blamed slow and hold your hands up, or I'll fill you plumb full o' holes."

Don chuckled at the earnest addition the sentinel had made to the "Manual of Guard Duty" they had all studied in their garrison training; nevertheless he complied.

A few minutes later he was in the presence of the officer in charge of the outpost, who, though first inclined to doubt Don's story, on account of his costume, was at length convinced and went to report the facts to the general, with whom Don urgently requested permission to speak.

During the absence of the officer, Don got some of the soldiers to conduct Cameron to the ambulance train near by, where he could have his bruises and cuts dressed and washed, and could probably obtain food.

"See you in the morning, old chap," said

IN PEKIN

Cameron as he left. "A little bite and an hour of sleep will fix me up; then I'll be ready to go in with you boys, if your general will let me."

The officer returned and led Don before the general and the chief of staff.

"What is this the lieutenant is telling me about your having been in Pekin?"

"It is the truth, general. I was near the legations at about eleven o'clock to-night."

"And the firing we heard?"

"Was the Chinese assaulting, sir. Our people repulsed two charges while I was there."

"But this firing closer at hand?"

"It is the Russians assaulting the outer walls."

"Impossible!"

"No, sir, it is so,"—and Don related what the Russian had told him.

"Not so unlikely," muttered the general, exchanging a look with his chief of staff.

"No," responded the latter, "their little yellow rivals have been carrying off all the laurels so far."

"Four o'clock," said the general, glancing at his watch. "Please see that orders are given for reveille to be sounded at half-past."

"Now," he added, turning to Don, "let me see that pass you have."

The crumpled paper was produced, and the general examined it.

AN ARMY BOY

"A clumsy forgery. Where did you get this paper?"

Don explained the circumstances of his departure in detail and then touched hastily on his adventures. The chief of staff returned after issuing the order directed by the general, and they both listened with deep interest. When the story had been completed the general spoke.

"Colonel," he asked, "was there not some report of a desertion from the Fourteenth Infantry several days ago?"

"Yes, sir. The regimental fund was stolen, and its guard, a corporal, deserted."

Don gasped and tottered.

"The regimental fund! Why, Sergeant Hoyle told me that Corporal Thornton was to take my place, and that he would keep watch till the corporal came. Oh, the unutterable villain! I see it all now. It was not only my life he wanted. Gentlemen, I beg of you, believe me innocent. The marks of the torture are still on my body. I have returned through great danger to give you the information I have gathered."

"Hush, my man. If you can prove that your return was voluntary it will be ample to convince me that you are worthy of confidence. I have not forgotten the service you did us at Pietsang, and to-night you have done a greater."

IN PEKIN

“Then I beg of you send for the Englishman.”

Cameron was brought in, an enormous sandwich clutched in his hand. When he had confirmed Don's story in every detail, and showed how anxious the corporal was to undertake the trip across country, when he might so safely have taken the road back to Tientsin, the general was convinced.

“There may have to be a trial to remove the charge of desertion, however, unless the sergeant confesses. But greater matters press, and you must rejoin your company and get into uniform. Here, take this to your captain from me.” And the general wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper and handed it to Don.

The latter thanked him and started to go, but his anxiety was too great.

“Will this prevent me from obtaining a commission, sir?”

“Most emphatically, no. Twice you have done exceptional work during this campaign, and you shall have your reward if I can secure it for you. Now, colonel, we must have breakfast.”

Relieved in mind, but still shaken by the revelation of Hoyle's almost successful attempt to rob him of his good name, as well as his life, the young man made his way toward the outpost line. Behind him a bugle sounded the first call, which was taken up in the main camp and along

AN ARMY BOY

the outposts. The awakening soldiers looked curiously after the man in Chinese garb, who asked in such perfect English the whereabouts of Captain O'Hara's bivouac. It was still dark and none recognized him in the faint light of the camp-fires.

He found the captain making a hasty toilet at the well of a little shack, a lantern furnishing the necessary light.

"Sir," said Don, saluting, "Corporal Page reports his return to duty."

"What!" cried the captain. "Corporal Page?"

"Yes, sir."

"H-m-m-m. Well, corporal, there are many things you will have to answer for."

"So I understand, captain, but when you know the whole truth there will be another who will have more."

"Do you know that you have been dropped as a deserter?"

"Yes, sir, and have been told that I have been charged with even worse. But I am here, now, to defend my good name. There are some who have talked behind my back who will not dare face me. I was told to deliver this to you, sir."

Captain O'Hara took the paper and twisted it in his hands. His narrowed eyes searched the young man's features closely. He had been forced against

IN PEKIN

his instinct to believe the corporal guilty, and it was difficult to readjust his mind. And yet, after all, the man's absence had been the strongest evidence against him, and here he was, in face and posture forcing the conviction of innocence. Should this youngster be a true man, then Sergeant Hoyle —

“ Corporal Page, do you know where the regimental fund is? ”

“ No, sir, but I can guess. ”

“ Either you or Sergeant Hoyle must have broken open the field desk and removed the money. ”

“ I appreciate that fact—that is the reason I say that I do not know where the money is, but can guess. Also I can prove that it is not the first theft by the one who has it. ”

“ You make grave charges. ”

“ None that I am not prepared to substantiate to the face of the man I charge. ”

The captain bent to the light and unfolded the paper Don had given him. His eyes brightened with surprise as he saw the signature, then as he took in the contents, he straightened himself and turned to the corporal.

“ Do you know the contents of this paper? ”

“ No, sir, I was not authorized to read it, merely to deliver it to you. ”

AN ARMY BOY

The captain took up the lantern.

“ Read it.”

Don took the paper and held it to the lantern ; this is what he read :

“ The undersigned wishes to express his fullest confidence in the probity and trustworthiness of Corporal Donald Page, 14th Infantry, who has rendered most valuable services to this army and to his country. It is directed that any proceeding that may be contemplated against Corporal Page be postponed until further orders, and that he be restored to full duty with his company.”

The order was signed by the commanding general.

Don choked back a sob, and returned the paper to the captain in silence.

“ That is enough for me, corporal. I'll have to keep this for the present, but later you shall have it. Over there at the kitchen,” O'Hara shouted. “ One of you men go to the line at once and tell Sergeant Hoyle to report to me. Another bring me some coffee, and any other food you may have.

“ Step back in the shadow there, Page. We'll bring this thing to a head here and now, if orders to move don't interrupt.”

Don waited, his heart pounding with excitement ; nor was the captain much calmer.

IN PEKIN

“I’ll hear your story later, corporal. The general has evidently heard it and been satisfied. I hope now that we may be able to surprise the sergeant into a confession. If not, it’s your word against his, and though I believe that you are innocent and he guilty, it will be hard to prove it before a court.”

“But the money, captain.”

“That’s not the biggest question, though we must recover it if possible. It may be that, in his confidence of success, he still has it, or it may be that he has hidden it away. We must watch him, and carefully. But here he comes—our best chance is to break him down.”

There was the sound of a step, a sharp rap on the gate, and, at the captain’s command, Sergeant Hoyle entered. As ever, his presence was soldierly and impressive as he stood erect before his officer, and brought his left hand to his rifle with a snap as he saluted.

“Sergeant Hoyle reports to the company commander as directed, sir.”

“Sergeant,” said the captain, taking a cup of coffee and a hardtack from a soldier who also had entered, “I wish to speak to you about Page. That will do,” to the soldier who had brought the coffee; “you may go.”

Sergeant Hoyle was plainly surprised at the

AN ARMY BOY

reason for his having been called, but he merely answered, "Yes, sir."

"Now Corporal Page," continued the captain, "was a pretty high grade man;" he took a swallow of his coffee. "He was in for a commission, and, sooner or later, I should have had to inquire of you about his home reputation—you register from the same town, I believe. Do you not think there might be some explanation, other than the obvious one, for his disappearance?"

"What does the captain mean?"

"Just that. I suppose you have thought the matter over a great deal, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir, I have. I have reproached myself for not having been more vigilant that night."

"No necessity for that, sergeant. You had your duties and he his. Had you known him long?"

"Yes, sir; I knew him years ago as a boy."

"Did he always have a good reputation?"

"Well, sir, I dislike to speak ill of a man who has probably gone to his final judgment, but the truth is that he did not."

"So? I am surprised. Then you really believe that he deliberately stole the regimental fund and deserted?"

"I am sure of it, sir, since you ask ——"

IN PEKIN

“ You thief and murderer ! ” cried a hoarse voice from the shadow of the building.

Hoyle staggered back, his eyes starting from his head. His rifle fell to the ground, and both hands clutched at his collar as he gasped for breath.

“ Who—who are you ? ”

“ I am the man you tricked into going to what you thought would be his death ! The man you fastened the guilt of your own theft upon ! You cheat and thief ! You sneaking, scheming villain ! I would not promise to keep your boyish thefts from being known and checking your ambition for promotion, so you thought to get rid of me. But I’m here now—your day is done.”

As Don advanced Hoyle gave back step by step, his wild gaze fixed on the threatening figure. For the instant all his daring and resource deserted him, and but for the wall at his back he would have fled. But the man was too naturally a fighter, and his mind was too nimble for him to be long at loss. Weakly, but with some show of bravado, he spoke.

“ So it is you, Page. No wonder I was startled. Couldn’t you make your get-away ? ”

Don sprang forward, but the captain caught his robe and held him.

“ Steady, corporal, steady.”

“ Captain O’Hara,” said Hoyle, “ I demand

AN ARMY BOY

satisfaction for the words of this man. We fought once, sir, and you stopped us. I now ask that we be allowed to settle the matter between us, if Page dares."

"I ask nothing better," said Don, grimly.

"This is more than a personal matter," said the captain. "Sergeant, the corporal has returned and makes a complete denial of all charges against him. In turn, he accuses you of trickery and theft."

"I suppose that he has told some plausible tale, sir."

"I have heard none of the details as yet."

"Very good, sir. I have nothing further to say, except that I stand ready at any time to answer any accusation against me."

"Are you ready to be searched now?" cried Don.

At that instant the assembly was sounded. Hoyle took a long chance.

"Certainly, if the captain wishes," and he stepped forward, unbuttoning his blouse.

"Captain O'Hara—Captain O'Hara!" It was the lieutenant's voice. "There are orders to rush the formation, and to assemble the regiment at once."

"Sergeant, return to your section. Page, go to the wagon and get into uniform. Ask the quar-

IN PEKIN

termaster-sergeant for a rifle and kit and overtake us. This matter will be decided in Peking."

The men saluted and left. The captain buckled on his revolver and followed the sergeant. Twice he noted that Hoyle turned as if to enter the brush that bordered the path, but, finding the captain's eye upon him, continued on his way.

"Wants to slip away," muttered O'Hara. "But you won't, my fine fellow, while I am awake. There's some thousand dollars of public money you'll have to account for before you get a quit-tance, besides a few other things."

Joining the company, he called Harry aside.

"Corporal Kearny," he said, "Corporal Page has returned."

"Glory be — I beg pardon, sir. Is he well?"

"As well as ever, and it looks as if all would be explained."

"I'm sure of it, sir."

"Now I want you to watch Sergeant Hoyle. He may try to escape. No—there's no proof of his guilt, nor have we found the money, but I want no chances taken."

"Never fear, sir; I'll see to him."

"And, corporal, I authorize you to take any means necessary to carry out this order."

"Shall I search him, sir?"

"No—I don't believe he has the money on his

AN ARMY BOY

person, and besides I don't want to get the company in a turmoil now. Watch him, that's all."

While the company was forming, Sergeant Hoyle, seeing the captain's attention elsewhere, stepped quietly backward. At the third step a hand fell lightly on his shoulder.

"The company is forming, sergeant."

He turned. Corporal Kearny's eyes looked into his. There was an expression in their depths that sickened him with a sense of impending retribution.

CHAPTER XXIII

A BATTLE WITHIN A BATTLE

THE regiment was well under way when Don, again dressed in uniform, and equipped with a spare rifle, double timed along the flank and joined his company. His appearance was the cause of much comment and surprise. He saw Harry ahead in the file-closers, instead of his usual place on the left of his squad, and pressed forward to wring his hand. No words were exchanged, only a look and a warm grip, and they were sufficient. As Don dropped back to his squad, Harrison, who had been temporarily in charge, hesitated a minute, then fell back into the rear rank, leaving the corporal's place vacant for the old squad leader. Don stepped into his place, and his friends in the company, accepting this as a sign of his restoration to duty, which meant that the charges against him were withdrawn, burst into a ringing cheer.

“That back o’ yourn looks as sweet to me as my sweetheart’s face, corporal,” said Harrison. “This business o’ fillin’ dead man’s shoes has sure worn corns on me.”

AN ARMY BOY

"Harrison vos only an ecgo," said Schultz. "Der whole squadt iss mit joy oferflowin'. Now I tinks ve haf our chow¹ again regulated, yet."

These and other expressions of pleasure, jokingly put but evidently sincere, were showered on the returned corporal. His eyes were moist as he returned the looks and words of greeting and the hand-clasp of those who were near enough.

"It's good to see you back again, corporal," said Sergeant Sypher. "You haven't missed anything that you need regret. We don't know what you have been up against, but most of us haven't let it shake us. The most of us, while we don't know why you quit us, have stuck to you just the same."

"Thanks, sergeant. It's too long a yarn to tell now; besides, it is not finished yet. But I'm thinking it's drawing to a close, and you'll all be in at the finish."

There was another who felt that it was drawing to a close, and, for the first time in his life, knew the horrors of fear. Sergeant Hoyle, still leading the company as guide, heard the cheering, and did not need the words, "It's Corporal Page," that passed from mouth to mouth, to tell him what had happened. His face had lost its ruddy flush and was a sickly yellow. He swallowed from time to

¹ Chow—slang for food; the expression is used generally throughout the Orient.

IN PEKIN

time, and even his massive jaw could not conceal the droop of the mouth that indicated a breaking spirit. Knowing that his eyes must betray him, he kept them rigidly to the front.

He made fierce efforts of will to command his wily brain to evolve some scheme that would help him out of his present difficulty. Once before in his life he had been in a similar situation, when he, as a boy, stood before his fellows as an exposed thief, but that was long ago, and he had had a home to hide his shame in. Now he was alone, and in a foreign country; if the truth were discovered, where was he to turn?

“There must be some way out—there must be some way out.” Over and over again he muttered the words, but no idea, no scheme sprang to life amidst his chaotic thoughts. To deny? To brazen it out? Yes, of course; but his hand would steal to his shirt bosom to feel the package which had given him so much pleasure till to-day, and which now promised to be his undoing. He must get rid of that money somehow—but how? He felt that keen eyes watched his every movement, and his bold effort to appear willing to be searched would not serve to prevent the captain from ordering it, should there come a lull in their activity. It was plain to him that his carefully cultivated hold on the captain’s confidence had

AN ARMY BOY

been badly shaken. Knowing nothing of the general's order, he could interpret his enemy's restoration to duty in no other way than that the captain had proof of his innocence. And if he believed Page innocent, it was obvious that he must believe his accuser guilty.

"But it can't be proven," he thought, with an attempt to bolster his courage. "No court can find me guilty if I can only get rid of this money and keep my nerve." But the money was there, and, as he pictured the angry contempt of his captain when a search would reveal it, he felt the courage oozing from his toes.

So he writhed in anguish when there came a shout from the companies in advance, and the pace of the column quickened. Raising his lusterless eyes he saw ahead of him the battlemented walls of Peking.

"Give way to the left—give way to the left."

The cry from the rear caused the column to oblique, leaving the right of the road free. At the head of his staff, and followed by a troop of cavalry, rode the general at a brisk trot. His eyes were bright with excitement at seeing before him the goal of all their effort and hopes.

"Where did the cavalry come from?" asked Don.

"Joined the day after you left us," replied Han-

IN PEKIN

lon. "Landed off the transport from the old country, softer'n babies. Hadn't been across a horse fer months." Then a wry smile twisted his lips. "We sort of envied them at first, but not long. The general, who's an old cavalryman himself, took a heap o' joy in 'em. Been keepin' 'em on the trot ever since. Just watch till you see one of 'em try to walk er to set down. I'll bet a month's pay that there ain't a man in the troop that don't sleep on his face—that is, if they gets any chance to sleep."

The general scanned the wall for a minute, then ordered part of the battery escorted by the troop to proceed to the left, and to open fire on a pagoda that marked one of the gates of the city. As they started he ordered the infantry to form connecting links so as to maintain his communication. The mounted men, not knowing of the second order, soon took up a trot, and the following infantrymen were strung out into a long, racing single file, at great intervals.

Hoyle, following the rear guide of Company "G," saw his chance, and, at a bend in the road, slipped into the cover of a corn field. Crouching low, he dashed between the rows for about fifty yards, when he came to a little clearing with a grain shed in its center. His impulse to continue his flight was checked. Should he desert, he would

AN ARMY BOY

surely be captured, unless he left the main road and risked himself among the Chinese, and he shrank from the death to which he had so callously sent his enemy. No, he would hide the money here, brazen the thing out, and later return, when interest, if not suspicion, had worn itself out.

“The company was ordered to keep touch with the artillery, sergeant.”

At the words Hoyle turned with a snarl to meet the steady gaze of Harry's steel-gray eyes. With an oath he yanked his revolver from its holster, but was covered by the other's rifle before he could raise it. He saw that the lock of the rifle was at the “ready,” and that the young corporal's finger was twitching at the trigger.

“Better not, sergeant,” came the calm voice.

Harry realized that his own situation was as dangerous as if he had cornered a wild beast, but his hatred of the scoundrel he held at his rifle's end was such that he welcomed the thought of a finish fight.

By a desperate effort Hoyle drew himself together.

“What is the meaning of this, Corporal Kearny? Drop that rifle at once, sir.”

“Scarcely, sergeant, while you have that revolver so handy.”

“Why, you're crazy, man. Do you think I'd



"BETTER NOT, SERGEANT"

IN PEKIN

use it on you? My pulling it out was instinctive when you surprised me."

"Yes? Well, my keeping you covered is instinctive, also, and will continue so till we are back with the company. As I said before, the company is keeping touch with the artillery."

"I order you to drop that rifle."

"Not on your life."

"You'll be court-martialed for this!"

"I'll chance it. Now march, or my finger will get nervous."

A burst of artillery fire, followed by volleys of infantry, sounded near at hand, but the eyes of the two men never wavered for an instant. For a full minute their wills clashed silently, then the black eyes shrank before the gray, and fell.

Replacing his revolver, Hoyle turned and made his way back to the road. To their left they could see that Company "G" had been halted and was advancing in a long skirmish line directly toward the wall. To their right the last of their own company were disappearing around the bend in the road, retracing their steps.

"Some change of plan, sergeant. Double time." And Hoyle, raging but powerless, complied. They rejoined the company with the last of the men, so their temporary absence passed unnoticed.

Four guns of Rathbone's battery were tearing

AN ARMY BOY

great chunks out of the wall near the Tung Pien Gate. Covered by this and by the fire of the Third Battalion, Company "E" was well on its advance. Colonel Darnall was watching them intently, and as soon as Company "H" was reunited, ordered them forward also. Accompanying them across the moat, he directed the assault of the nearest corner of the wall, then hastened ahead to join Company "E."

In the intervals of their own fire the sounds of combat to the right and left could be heard. It was evident that the whole east wall of the ancient capital was being attacked. Don looked around for a sign of the Russians. Surely it was near this point he had encountered them the night before, yet none of them was to be seen.

Across the open space the company dashed, and reached the wall, towering some thirty feet above them. The Chinese had rallied to the defense, and all exposed places were now torn by bullets. The men hugged the wall, waiting apprehensively for the enemy above to cast down the blocks of stone upon them. Unable to advance, and unwilling to retire, their situation would have been critical but for the deadly marksmanship of their comrades. Those left behind shot down, with unerring aim, every Chinaman who appeared above the wall or at a loophole.

IN PEKIN

Three times Captain O'Hara led his company out in an attempt to join Company "E," but each time was forced to order them back as he saw that the movement could not now be made without disastrous losses. Then a horse dashed by carrying the colonel's orderly. Over the moat and into the sunken road beyond he galloped, to return, a minute later, with the flag waving over him as he passed.

"Company 'E' is on the wall," he shouted.

"If they can do it so can we," cried Captain O'Hara. "Rig some of those long poles," he added, pointing to a pile of what were evidently poles intended for a light telephone line. "They will help you half-way up, then a good climber may make it."

The men sprang to the work with a will. The wall leaned inward and there were many irregularities. By the time the poles were raised, a dozen men had removed the gun slings from their rifles and tied them together. This line the first man up carried with him, and soon a half score of the company was above. The Chinese had been driven from that immediate section by the fire of the Americans across the moat, and those gaining the wall soon drove them beyond range of their rifles.

"The flag is on the wall beyond," was shouted down. "She's the only flag on the wall so far, and I never saw Old Glory look so pretty."

AN ARMY BOY

Just then the adjutant dashed around the corner and halted panting.

“ Captain O’Hara ! ”

“ Here.”

“ Your company is needed at once. The colonel is waiting for you at the gate in the angle of the wall. It seems that the Russians captured it last night, but, when they attempted to advance beyond, were stopped by the Chinese manning the inner defenses.”

“ How about my men on the wall here? Shall we abandon what we have gained? ”

“ Better leave about a dozen here to hold it till we are secure beyond.”

“ How did you get here? ”

“ Straight down the wall. The fire of the enemy is much less severe than it was. Hurry along—Company ‘ E ’ has orders to join you, and I’ll send up the other companies.”

Shouting an explanation to those on the wall, Captain O’Hara formed the rest of the company for the advance and led them forward. While they were forming Don had a chance to speak with Harry.

“ Why are you not with your squad, Harry? ”

“ I’ve another and a pleasanter detail,” replied his chum, with a smile. Then seeing Hoyle lead out he followed closely at a swift run.

IN PEKIN

As the adjutant had said, the firing had slackened materially, but was still hot enough to make it necessary to pass the danger zone in as short a time as possible. Nevertheless the men raised a wild cheer as they dashed by the flag waving on the wall, half-way to their goal, and the men of Company "E" leaned over and returned it exultantly.

They gained the gateway. The heavy doors, six inches thick and bound with iron, lay in pieces, wrecked by artillery fire. The passage, forty feet long, was like a tunnel; into this the men plunged.

Within the air was dank and nauseating, and the men pressed forward to gain the other end. Hoyle, however, halted in the gloom of the center, which was increased by the men blocking the outlet, and slipped his bayonet from his scabbard. It was his intention to rip open his shirt and drop the package of money into the ooze underfoot. It was a risk, but he could afford to miss no opportunity now.

"Better move on, sergeant," came a voice from the obscurity behind him.

Hoyle made a vicious thrust with his bayonet, but the point met the stock of Harry's rifle and glanced off, the twist wrenching it from the sergeant's hand. Hoyle stooped for it, but Harry covered it with his foot.

AN ARMY BOY

"I'll pay you for this," snarled Hoyle under his breath. "Who appointed you my guardian?"

"It's enough for you to know that you'll have to keep your place with the company during this fight. Move on."

A glance showed the sergeant that the men of the company had all crowded to the end of the passage. Turning as if to obey, he tightened his grip on his rifle, intending to crash the butt into the corporal's face and knock him senseless. The sound of the blow would probably pass unnoticed in the confused echoes of the confined space. But at that instant the leading men of Company "E" began to stream into the gateway and he was forced to abandon his desperate venture.

In the meantime Don had reached the inner end of the tunnel, and, in spite of his recent experiences, was sickened by what he saw. The sticky ooze that covered the bottom of the passage was explained. To the right of the exit, piled nearly to the height of the wall, and covering many square yards of the courtyard, were hundreds of corpses, mostly Chinese, though a few Russians were intermingled. It told the story of a fearful struggle on the wall above, in which the Russians had gained the mastery and had hurled their enemies into the courtyard below. The gate had cost both the defenders and assailants dear.

IN PEKIN

From the pile the blood still came in a sluggish stream, which passed under the feet of the crowded soldiers.

Beyond the courtyard ran a narrow street leading to an arched bridge. In the street were the Russian soldiers, crouching behind the low, bordering walls, and crowding the spaces where houses gave them cover from the wall of the Tartar City, which commanded all open ground below. Their dead lay scattered through the courtyard and the street beyond, the greatest number being near the bridge. It was evident that at least one gallant attempt to cross the bridge had been made and had failed.

Colonel Darnall had taken in the situation, and waited with what patience he could command for the arrival of his regiment. He had noted a narrow lane running at right angles to the street, and leading evidently to a second street parallel to the wall of the Tartar City. It would be raked by a great pagoda of several stories which crowned the wall opposite its entrance, but once passed, the bridge could be approached under cover of the houses. There was no firing, and he hoped, by a sudden dash, to gain a position of comparative safety before the Chinese would awaken to what was taking place.

An officer forced his way to the front.

AN ARMY BOY

"The men are fainting for want of air, sir."

"How many are here?"

"Three companies, sir."

"It's too few, but we'll try it. After me, men, at a run."

With an unexpected activity, the old warrior sprang forward, and the men followed. The turn had been gained, and one company had entered the lane, when there came a few scattering shots from the wall, which soon increased to a continuous roar. One of Don's men went down, and he stopped to drag him under cover. This done, he was about to continue, when a thought struck him.

"Here, you!" he cried, intercepting half a dozen men, who, though not of his company, obeyed him. "Let's get up on this slanting roof. We can fire over its top and cover the movement."

The men looked doubtful.

"Give me a leg up," said Don.

As he reached the roof and started up the slope, a Russian officer intervened.

"You'll be killed up there," he shouted in broken English.

Don laughed excitedly.

"We are paid for that," he shouted back.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUCCESS

REACHING the top, Don opened a rapid fire on the Chinese in the windows and loopholes not fifty yards away. Splinters flying from the tiles of the roof showed that he, also, was a target, but, as the others joined him and took up the fight, the effect was soon marked. Rapidly the windows were vacated as the Chinamen ducked under cover.

“Keep it up, corporal,” came a voice from below. Turning Don saw that a gun of the battery had followed the infantrymen and now, unable to turn in the narrow street, was in a dangerous situation.

“Very good, sir; we’ll hold them.” And, assisted by the revolver fire of the artillerymen who could be spared from the piece, they kept the Chinamen from taking advantage of the opportunity to shoot down the horses and block the street. The piece was unlimbered and reversed, the horses unhitched and led around, then re-hitched and the piece withdrawn to a position of safety.

AN ARMY BOY

By this time all the infantrymen had passed through the lane, so Don and his party descended from the roof and rejoined their companies in time to make the rush across the bridge that had been so fatal to the Russians. Beyond they entered a street running parallel to the south wall of the Tartar City.

“Not so bad,” said the colonel. “We have done with three companies what the Russians failed to do with a regiment; still, we must allow for their hard fighting last night.”

“Where are the legations, sir?” asked an officer.

“Something over a mile down this wall, and on the other side. We must fight our way to a point opposite them, then enter, I suppose, by scaling, as there is no gate at that point. But wait a while—give the men a chance to recover their wind and reassemble.”

A few minutes later they began their long fight through the street. The Chinese occupying the houses made practically no resistance, but those on the wall followed the movement closely, firing from loopholes every time the soldiers crossed the open spaces. There were many of these, for, while the side of the street farthest from the wall was a continuous line of houses, the other side had many vacant lots. Their losses, thanks to the inferior

IN PEKIN

marksmanship of the enemy, were inconsiderable in these dashes from cover to cover, still the fire was annoying, and the continued strain was beginning to tell on the men, many of whom had had little breakfast, and few any sleep the night before.

In his joy at being among comrades again, Don felt nothing of this. And the fighting seemed trivial to him after his recent experiences, where the odds had been so great. For Harry, also, the events occurring around him were of minor interest. He clung to Hoyle like a leech, in spite of the latter's efforts to evade him. Since the episode of the tunnel, these had been growing weaker. Despair had gripped the sergeant, and he performed his duties as leader of his section in a manner so mechanical as to excite comment among those wont to observe his daring joy in combat.

Half a mile had been gained, and two more companies had joined them. The men, weary and suffering from the increasing heat of the day, hesitated to cross an exposed interval of about a hundred yards, which must be passed to gain the cover of another row of houses. The old regimental color sergeant, noting that the men held back, unfurled the flag, and waving it above him, stepped into the open.

AN ARMY BOY

“Follow me, boys!” he called.

It was a gallant but useless attempt. Before he had advanced ten paces he went down, and the colors with him. A taunting yell rang from the Tartar City.

At the sight the numb expression left Hoyle's face. Dropping his rifle, he sprang into the open and dexterously raised the wounded man to his shoulder. Then, while the bullets tore up the ground around him, he stooped, and with his free hand picked up the flag. Four steps he made, bearing both wounded man and flag, then collapsed, falling on his face.

A dozen men jumped to the rescue. Two more were hit, but all were drawn back into shelter. The color sergeant was white, and groaned with the agony of a shattered knee. Hoyle was white also. A little hole under his left arm showed where the bullet had entered; there was no blood on his coat, but as he drew his breath in gasps, a reddish foam trickled from his mouth.

“A surgeon! A surgeon!” cried Captain O'Hara.

Hoyle shook his head.

“Done for,” he gasped.

“No—no, sergeant,” said the captain, kneeling beside him. “You must live and be rewarded for your gallant deed.”

IN PEKIN

“No use. Want—speak—Page.

Don approached his dying enemy, all resentment gone in face of this tragic retribution. As he leaned over, compassion in his eyes, Hoyle's face contracted in a malignant frown. With a last effort he slipped his revolver from its holster, raised it and fired. As Don fell limp across his body, there came a rush of blood from Hoyle's mouth; his body relaxed and his eyes glazed.

For an appreciable interval the witnesses to this treacherous act stood motionless, spellbound with surprise and horror. A surgeon came up on a run. Lifting Don, he made a quick examination, then passed him over to a Hospital Corps man.

“Stunned,” he said. “The bullet merely grazed the scalp. Douse him with water and get some stimulant down his throat.”

Then he turned to Hoyle.

“Dead?” asked Captain O'Hara.

“I think so, and a good thing. I saw what happened.”

“Hush,” said the captain. “He was vindictive, but was a brave man, and has probaby gone before a greater judge than you or I.”

“True enough, captain, I beg pardon. I'll do what I can for him.”

He knelt and slipped his hand inside Hoyle's shirt.

AN ARMY BOY

"Yes, there is no heart-beat. The man is dead. There's a package sewn in his shirt. Some one had better take charge of it; it may be valuable."

"Give it to me."

The surgeon slit open the lining and withdrew a slim package, which he passed to the captain.

"Regimental Fund, 14th Infantry," read the latter. "Men, here is proof positive that Hoyle, himself, was guilty of the theft that he tried to fasten upon Page. After this, even the way in which he met his death cannot command sympathy. I agree with the surgeon that it's a good thing he's gone."

Then pulling a paper from his pocket, he turned to where Don leaned weakly against the wall. The young man had recovered consciousness, but was still dazed.

"Here, corporal, is the general's note I promised to return to you when the matter between you and Sergeant Hoyle was finally settled. And here," and into the voice crept the touch of brogue that was half natural, half assumed, but always noticeable in moments of kindly feeling, "here is the regimental fund ye mounted guard over some five days gone. I've never heard ye were properly relieved from that duty, so take charge of it till ye're able to deliver it in person to the adjutant."

IN PEKIN

Don stammered his thanks.

“ Now, men,” shouted the captain, “ these slant-eyed heathen have held us long enough. Company ‘ H,’ forward ! ”

* * * * *

The relief of the legations has been so thoroughly described in many texts as to need no repetition here. The feelings of the fathers and mothers, who had lived through the weeks of terror, when they saw the long columns of their rescuers approaching, and knew that there was no more danger of their dear ones falling into the hands of the yellow fanatics, can be only imagined. And the soldiers forgot all their sufferings and hardships, and even accepted the deaths of their comrades who had fallen en route as right and proper, when they saw the frail women and helpless infants their struggles and sacrifice had saved from awful deaths and nameless graves.

The great triumph of the Fourteenth Infantry, which wiped out all memory of the Americans' inferiority on the march, and made the other troops confess their superiority as fighters, must, however, be told. It was on the day following the capture of the outer and Tartar City walls, when the regiment, thinking they were going into camp, were led to the outer gate of the Imperial City, and told

AN ARMY BOY

it was their task to capture this last stronghold. Five walls, with moats, guarded the central Forbidden City, where Christian foot had never trod. The Japanese, learning of the American attempt, endeavored to forestall them by forcing an entrance from the east. But they failed, assault after assault being repulsed by the defenders of this sacred place. The courage and marksmanship of the Americans, however, directed by their skilled colonel, was too much for the Imperial guards. From wall to wall, they were driven back. Gate after gate was shattered by artillery fire to permit the inrush of the determined soldiers, while the veteran regimental commander, careless of self, watched the progress of the action. Adding a company here, withdrawing a platoon there, sending out flanking forces when the frontal resistance became unduly heavy, he forced the enemy from one apparently impregnable position to another. Finally, as they were about to rush through the last gate, they were halted. The defenders had fled, the place was captured, but international jealousy intervened, and the men were not permitted to enter the sacred courtyard where stood the palaces of China's emperor.

However, the honor of the capture was theirs, and could not be taken from them. And there was a compensation for their disappointment in

IN PEKIN

the evident respect with which an American soldier was viewed thereafter by all foreigners. And when it became known that the efforts of the regiment had won for their colonel the star of a brigadier-general, their satisfaction was complete.

In the difficult work of restoring order to the distracted city, with its millions of people, the Americans took a noble share. They became known for justice and mercy, and in the end the Chinese prime minister, old Li Hung Chang, wrote a personal letter of thanks to the American provost marshal, expressing the gratitude of China's ruler and people.

Gradually the facts about Don's adventure became known throughout the regiment. Many of the details were told by Cameron, who spent much of his time in the American camp, and was welcomed by officers and men alike. He had made a wild twelve mile ride to the end of the field telegraph line, and had sent word of the capture of Peking to his paper some hours before any other correspondent. As a reward, he had been given the place on the permanent staff that he so desired. It would make things mighty comfortable, he often said, "for Mary and the kiddies."

They had been settled in Peking about a month when there came to the camp a distinguished Chinese physician, looking for a soldier whose

AN ARMY BOY

name he had on a slip of paper. Through an interpreter he told the story of the soldier's fight against a company of Boxers, which he had heard from a participant, of the defense of the band of missionaries, the capture and subsequent torture, and of the trip through Peking the night before the big battle. And when the colonel sent for Don, and authorized him to accept the jeweled watch, which the grateful Chinaman wished to give him in remembrance of his friendship, the young man's modest bearing enhanced his reputation still further.

One day in the early autumn he was summoned by Captain O'Hara.

"Corporal," said the captain, "you are still too young to be given a commission in the army, but the general has word that they are forming a body of constabulary in the Philippines, and his recommendation is asked for first class men to be officers. How would you like it?"

"What kind of duty is it to be, captain?"

"Much the same as our own—commanding troops, natives of course, and fighting what is left of the insurgents. You'll find it lively enough if you go."

"Will it hurt my chances for a regular commission next year?"

"Help them, I think."

IN PEKIN

“ Well, I’ll go and be glad of the chance, if you can get the general to recommend me.”

“ ’Twas himself mentioned your name. And he asked me for some other names. Could ye,” with a smile, “ could ye be giving me an idea of any other likely man ? ”

“ Why, sir, I’d say Kearny —— ”

“ History repeating itself. I recall ye brought up Kearny’s name when I spoke of making some lance corporals.”

“ And how about Sypher, sir ? ”

“ No—I’ll let ye have Kearny, but I want Sypher for first sergeant. Besides, the old man would never leave the ranks. He’s one of the few that’s in the place the Lord meant for him, and his country needs him where he is.”

A month later two official letters addressed to “ Lieutenant Donald Page ” and “ Lieutenant Henry Kearny ” were received at the army headquarters. A farewell dinner was given them by the company, and another by the regimental officers. Cameron was present at both, and promised them that, when things became quiet in China, he would follow them to their new field in search of stirring events for his paper’s readers.

The day for parting came. All the men of Company “ H,” and many from the other companies went with them to the Tung Pien Gate, and, from

AN ARMY BOY

the wall where the first foreign flag had flown, gave them three rousing cheers as they rode away toward Tientsin and the coast, there to take ship for the land of their new adventures.

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