

MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 30
SEPT. 18, 1909

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S
MANDARIN

OR TURNING A TRICK
FOR TSAN-TU

BY THE AUTHOR OF MOTOR MATT



Certainly it was not a time to laugh but Motor Matt could hardly help it

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**The Project Gutenberg eBook of Motor Matt's Mandarin; or,
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MOTOR MATT

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THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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MOTOR MATT'S MANDARIN;

OR,

TURNING A TRICK FOR TSAN TI.

By the author of "MOTOR MATT."

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A REAL PIRATE.

SOME QUEER PHILIPPINE CUSTOMS.

HIGH LEAPS BY DEER.

CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt.

Joe McGlory, a young cowboy who proves himself a lad of worth and character, and whose eccentricities are all on the humorous side. A good chum to tie to—a point Motor Matt is quick to perceive.

Tsan Ti, Mandarin of the Red Button, who appeals to Motor Matt for help in a very peculiar undertaking.

Sam Wing, a San Francisco Chinaman, member of a *tong* that is amiably disposed toward Tsan Ti.

Kien Lung, courier of the Chinese Regent, who respectfully delivers the yellow cord to Tsan Ti.

Grattan, a masterful rogue who consummates one of the cleverest robberies in the annals of crime.

Bunce, a sailor who assists Grattan and makes considerable trouble for the motor boys and the mandarin.

Goldstein, a diamond broker with a penchant for dealing in stolen goods.

Pryne, a brother-in-law of Grattan, who plays a short but important part in the events of the story.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE.

"Sufferin' treadmills! Say, pard, here's where I drop down in the shade and catch my breath. How much farther have we got to go?"

"Not more than a mile, Joe."

"We must have gone a couple of hundred miles already."

"We've traveled about six miles, all told."

"Speak to me about that! A mile up and down is a heap longer than a mile on the straightaway. We've been hanging to this sidehill like a couple of flies to a wall. What do you say to a rest?"

"I'm willing, Joe; and here's a good place. Look out for that tree root. It's a bad one, and runs straight across the road."

Motor Matt and his cowboy pard, Joe McGlory, were pop-popping their way up a steep mountainside on a couple of motor cycles. They were bound for the Mountain House, a hotel on the very crest of the uplift.

A day boat had brought them down the Hudson River from Albany, and they had disembarked at Catskill Landing, hired the two machines, and started for the big hotel.

The motor cycles were making hard work of the climb—such hard work, in fact, that the boys, time and time again, had been compelled to get out of their saddles and lead the heavy wheels up a particularly steep place in the trail. This was trying labor, and McGlory's enthusiasm over the adventure had been on the wane for some time.

The big root of a tree, lying across the road like a half-buried railroad tie, was safely dodged, and under the shade of the tree to which the root belonged Matt and McGlory threw themselves down.

The cowboy mopped his dripping face with a handkerchief, pulled off his hat, and began fanning himself with it.

"One of these two-wheeled buzz carts is all right," he remarked, "where the motor does the work for you; but I'll be gad-hooked if there's any fun doin' the work for the motor. And what's it all about? You don't know, and I don't. We made this jump from the middle West to the effete East on the strength of a few lines of 'con' talk. I wish people would leave you alone when they get into trouble. Every stranger knows, though, that all he's got to do is to send you a hurry-up call whenever anything goes crosswise, and that you'll break your neck to boil out on his part of the map and share his hard luck."

McGlory finished with a grunt of disgust.

"I've got a hunch, Joe," answered Matt, "that there's a whole lot to that letter."

"A whole lot of fake and false alarm. Read it again, if you've got breath enough."

"I've read it to you a dozen times already," protested Matt.

"Then make it thirteen times, pard. The more you read it, the more I realize what easy marks we are for paying any attention to it. It's fine discipline, pard, to keep thinking where you've made a fool of yourself."

Matt laughed as he drew an envelope out of his coat pocket. The envelope was addressed, in a queer hand, to "His Excellency, Motor Matt, Engaged in aëroplane performances with Burton's Big Consolidated Shows, Grand Rapids, Michigan." Drawing out the enclosed sheet, Matt unfolded it. There was a humorous gleam in his gray eyes as he read aloud the following:

"HONORABLE AND MOST EXCELLENT SIR: It is necessary that I have of your wonderful aid in matters exceedingly great and important. I, a mandarin of the red button, with some store of English knowledge, and much trouble, appeal to king of motor boys with overwhelming desire that he come to me at Mountain House, near town named Catskill Landing, in State of New York. Noble and affluent sir, will it be insult should I offer one thousand dollars and expenses if I get my wish for your most remarkable help? Not so, for I promise with much goodness of heart. Let it be immediately that you come, and sooner if convenient. May your days be fragrant as the blossoms of paradise, your joys like the countless stars, and your years many and many.

"TSAN TI, OF THE RED BUTTON."

"Sounds like a skin game," grumbled McGlory, as Matt returned the letter to its envelope, and the latter to his pocket.

"It's the first time a stranger in trouble ever sent me a letter like that," remarked Matt.

"Regular josh. Button, button, who's got the button? Not us, pard, and we're *It*. There'll be no mandarin at the end of this blooming trail we're running out. You take it from me. Now——" McGlory broke off suddenly, his eyes fastened on the pitch of the road above. "Great hocus-pocus!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "See what's coming!"

Matt, turning his eyes in the direction of his pard's pointing finger, was likewise brought up standing by the spectacle that met his gaze.

A bicycle was coasting down the steep path, coming with the speed of a limited express train; and some fifty feet behind this bicycle came another, moving at a rate equally swift.

In the saddle of the leading machine was a fat Chinaman—a Chinaman of consequence, to judge by his looks. He wore a black cap, yellow blouse and trousers and embroidered sandals. His thin, baggy garments fluttered and snapped about him as he shot down the road, and his pigtail, fully a yard long, and bound at the end with a ribbon, stood out straight behind him.

The Celestial behind was leaner and dressed in garments more subdued. It was exceedingly plain to the two boys that his heart was in his work, and that the end and aim of his labors was the overhauling of the man ahead.

"Wow!" wheezed the fat fugitive. "Wow! wow! wow!"

For about two seconds this stirring situation was before the eyes of Matt and McGlory. Then the tree root insinuated itself into proceedings.

The fugitive saw the root heaving across his path with a promise of disaster, but going around it was out of the question, and stopping the speeding wheel an impossibility.

The inevitable happened. Matt and McGlory saw the bicycle bound into the air and turn a half somersault. The fat Chinaman landed on his back with the wheel on top of him; then machine and Chinaman rolled over and over until the impetus of the flight was spent.

The two boys ran to the unfortunate bicyclist, gathered him up, and separated him from the broken wheel. The Celestial refused to be lifted to his feet, but contented himself with sitting up.

"My cap, excellent friend," he requested, pointing to where the cap was lying.

"Gee, but that was a jolt!" commiserated McGlory. "How do you feel about now?"

"Kindest regards for your inquiry," said the Chinaman, extracting a small stone from the collar of his blouse, and then emptying a pint of dust from

one of his flowing sleeves. "I am variously shaken, thank you, but the terrible part is yet to come. Kindly recede until it is over, and add further to my obligations."

Matt had picked up the black cap. As he handed it to the Chinaman, he observed that there was a red button in the centre of the flat top.

He was astonished at the Chinaman's manner, no less than at his use of English. His clothes were all awry, and soiled with dust, but he seemed to mind that as little as he did his bruises.

Putting the cap on his head, he took a fan from somewhere about his person, waved the boys aside with it, then opened it with a "snap," and proceeded methodically to fan himself. His eyes were turned up the road.

Matt and McGlory exchanged wondering glances as they stepped apart.

The other Chinaman, having a greater space in which to manoeuvre, had managed to avoid the tree root. By means of the brake he had caused his machine to slow down, and had then leaped off. After carefully leaning the bicycle against a tree, he approached his fat countryman in a most deferential manner. The latter nodded gravely from his seat on the ground.

The pursuer thereupon flung himself to his knees, and beat his forehead three times in the dust.

After that, the fat Chinaman said something. Presumably it was in his native tongue, for it sounded like heathen gibberish, and the boys could make nothing out of it.

But the lean Chinaman seemed to understand. Lifting himself and sitting back on his heels, he pushed a hand into the breast of his coat, and brought out a little black box about the size of a cigarette case. This, with every sign of respect and veneration, he offered to the other Celestial.

The fat man took the box, waved his fan, and eased himself of a few more remarks. The lean fellow once more kotowed, then arose silently, regained his wheel, and vanished from sight down the road. The fat Mongolian was left balancing the black box in his hand and eying it with pensive interest.

"Well, speak to me about this!" breathed McGlory. "What do you make out of it, Matt?"

"Not a thing," whispered Matt. "That fellow has a red button in his cap."

McGlory showed traces of excitement.

"Glory, and all hands round!" he gasped. "Have you any notion that the chink we're looking for has lammed into us in this violent fashion, right here on the mountainside?"

"Give it up. Watch; see what he's up to."

The fat Chinaman, laying aside his fan, took the box in his left palm, and, with the fingers of his right hand, pressed a spring.

The lid flew open. On top of something in the box lay a white card covered with Chinese hieroglyphics. The Chinaman lifted the card and read the written words. His yellow face turned to the color of old cheese, his eyes closed spasmodically, and his breath came quick and raspingly. McGlory grabbed Matt's arm.

"There's something on that card, Matt," said he, "that's got our fat friend on the run."

While the boys continued to look, the Chinaman laid aside the card, and drew from the box a pliable yellow cord, a yard in length.

That was all there was in the box, just the card and the cord.

Feeling that there was a deep mystery here, and a mystery in which he and his chum were concerned, the king of the motor boys stepped forward.

"Tsan Ti?" he queried.

Box and cord fell from the fat Chinaman's hands, and he turned an eagerly inquiring look in Matt's direction.

CHAPTER II.

THE YELLOW CORD.

"Excellent youth," said the Chinaman, "you pronounce my name. How is this?"

"I'm Motor Matt," answered the king of the motor boys, "and this is my chum, Joe McGlory. You asked us to come, and here we are. There's your letter to me."

Matt opened the written sheet and held it in front of Tsan Ti's face. The Celestial's face underwent a change. A flicker of hope ran through the fear and consternation.

"*Omito fuh!*" he muttered, rising slowly to his feet. "The five hundred gods have covered me with much disgrace, this last hour, but now they bring me a gleam of hope from the clouds of despair. By the plumes of the sacred peacock, I bow before you with much gratefulness."

He bowed—or tried to. His ponderous stomach interfered with the manœuvre, and he caught a crick in his back—the direct result, probably, of his recent spill.

"You are here to be of aid to the unfortunate mandarin, are you not, illustrious sirs?" went on Tsan Ti, leaning against a tree, and rubbing his right sandal up and down his left shin. Quite likely the left shin was barked, and the right sandal was affording it consolation.

"First aid to the injured, Tsan," grinned McGlory, getting a good deal of fun out of this novel encounter.

The cowboy had met many Chinamen, but never before one of this sort. The experience was mildly exciting.

"Wit," chanted Tsan Ti, "is the weapon of the wise, the idol of the fool; a runaway knock at laughter's door; arrows from the quiver of genius; intellectual lightning from the thunder clouds of talent; the lever of——"

"Sufferin' cats!" exploded McGlory. "What is he talking about? In that letter, Tsan, you speak about insulting us with a thousand plunks and expenses. Was that a rhinecaboo or the real thing?"

Without changing his countenance by so much as a line, Tsan Ti lifted the bottom of his blouse, and unbuttoned the pocket of a leather belt around his huge girth. From the pocket he took five gold double eagles in good American money.

"Have I the understanding," he asked, "that you will be of help to my distress?"

"Tell us, first," answered Matt, a little bewildered by the mandarin's queer talk and actions, "what it is you want."

"What I want, notable friend, is the Eye of Buddha, the great ruby which was stolen from the forehead of the idol in temple of Hai-chwang-sze, in the city named Canton. I, even I, now the most miserable of creatures, was guardian of the temple when this theft occurred. I fled to find the thief, and Kien Lung, by order of the Son of the Morning, our imperial regent, fled after me with that invitation to death, the yellow cord."

Tsan Ti pointed to the ground where the cord was lying. His flabby cheeks grew hueless, and he caught his breath.

"An invitation to death?" repeated Matt, staring at the yellow cord.

"It is so, gracious youth," explained Tsan Ti. "When our regent wishes one of his officials to efface himself, he sends the yellow cord. It is the death

warrant. The card tells me that I have two weeks before it is necessary that I should strangle myself. This happy dispatch must be performed unless, through you, I can recover the Eye of Buddha. So runs the scroll."

"Speak to me about this!" muttered McGlory. "But look here, old man, you don't have to strangle yourself because some High Mucky Muck, a few thousand miles off, sends you the thing to do it with, do you?"

"Unless it is done," was the calm response, "I shall be disgraced for all time, and my memory reviled."

"Oh, blazes! I'd rather be a live Chinaman in disgrace, than a dead one with a monument a mile high."

"You converse without knowledge," said Tsan Ti.

"That's horse sense, anyhow."

"Let's get at the nub of this thing, Tsan Ti," said Matt, feeling a deep interest in the strange Chinaman in spite of himself. "You were in charge of a Canton temple in which was an image of Buddha. That image had a ruby set in the forehead. The ruby was stolen. You ran away from China to find the thief, and this Kien Lung, as you call him, trailed after you with the yellow cord from the regent. The cord was accompanied by a written order to the effect that, if you did not succeed in recovering the ruby in two weeks, you must strangle yourself. Before the cord was delivered to you, you sent that letter to me."

"What you say is true," answered Tsan Ti. "I have been for a long period endeavoring to keep away from Kien Lung. I knew what he had to give me, and I did not want it. Now that I have the cord, you can understand, out of courtesy I must slay myself—unless, through you, I regain the Eye of Buddha."

"How did you come to pick *me* out for an assistant?" went on Matt. "What you ought to have is a detective. This part of the country is full of detectives."

"I cannot trust the detectives. The ruby is valuable, and I am a discredited mandarin in a far country. The detectives would keep the ruby, and then there would be for me only death by the cord. I read in the public prints generous and never-to-be-forgotten things about Motor Matt, and my heart assures me that you are the one, and the only one, to come to my aid."

"You tune up like a professor," remarked McGlory. "Where'd you corral so much good pidgin, Tsan?"

"I was educated in one of your institutions of learning," was the reply. "But, illustrious sirs, shall we return to the hotel on the mountain top? I have this go-devil machine to pay for. It did not belong to me. A dozen of the machines were near the porch of the hotel, where I was drinking tea. I saw Kien Lung coming toward me along the porch, and I left my tea and sprang to one of the machines. I learned to ride while I was educating myself in this country. Kien Lung was also able to ride, but that I did not know until I saw him later. Shall we go on to the hotel? I am bruised and in much distress."

"We might just as well find out all you can tell us about the Eye of Buddha before we go to the hotel," returned Matt. "We are by ourselves, here, and I'd like to get all the information possible."

Tsan Ti picked up the card and the yellow cord. Thoughtfully he twisted the cord around and around his fat palm and tucked it into the black box. On the cord he placed the card, and over all closed the box lid. With a rumbling sigh, he dropped the black box into the breast of his blouse.

"Foreign devils," said he, once more bracing himself against the tree trunk, "call the temple of Hai-chwang-sze the Honam Joss House. It is by the

beautiful river, in the suburb named Honam. Around the temple there is a wall. The avenue of a thousand delights leads from the great gate to the temple courts, and noble banyan trees shade the avenue. At vespers, some weeks ago, two foreign devils were present. The hour was five in the afternoon. One of the foreign devils was English, and wore a tourist hat with a pugree; the other had but a single eye. Lob Loo, a priest, told me what happened.

"The Englishman threw a shimmering ball upon the temple floor. Odors came from it, quick as an eyeflash. Quick as another eyeflash, the priests reeled where they stood, their senses leaving them. Lob Loo tells me the foreign devils had covered their faces suddenly with white masks. Then, after seeing that much, Lob Loo lost his five senses, and wandered in fields of darkness.

"When Lob Loo opened his eyes, he saw glass fragments on the floor, and a ladder of silk swinging from the neck of the god. The image, renowned sirs, is twenty feet in height, and to reach the ruby eye the foreign devils had to climb. The eye was gone. When Lob Loo told me these things, I was seized of a mighty fear, and fled to Hongkong. There the five hundred gods favored me, and I learned that a man in a tourist hat with a pugree, and another with a single eye, had sailed for San Francisco. Quickly I caught the next steamer, after sending cable messages to the leaders of a San Francisco *tong* who are Cantonese, and friends of mine. When the ship brought the thieves through the Golden Gate, some of the *tong* watched the landing. The thieves were in San Francisco three days, and Sam Wing followed them when they left for Chicago, then for New York, and then for these Catskill Mountains. When I reached San Francisco, the leading men of the *tong* had telegrams from Sam Wing. By use of the telegrams, I followed, and arrived here. Wing had left a writing for me at the hotel, telling me to wait. I waited, but Wing had disappeared. I kept on waiting, and out of my discouragement, remarkable sir, I wrote to you. That is all, until this

morning, when Kien Lung came with the yellow cord. Two weeks are left me. If the Eye of Buddha is not found in that time, then"—and Tsan Ti tapped the breast of his sagging blouse—"all that remains is the quick dispatch."

Both Matt and McGlory had listened with intense interest to this odd yarn. Although a heathen, and lately keeper of a heathen temple, the mandarin was nevertheless a person of culture and of considerable importance. The sending of the yellow cord was a custom of his country, and it was evident that he intended to abide by the custom in case the Eye of Buddha was not recovered within two weeks.

"Shall we turn the trick for him, pard?" asked McGlory. "This palaver of his makes a bit of a hit with me. I'd hate like Sam Hill to have him shut off his breath with that yellow cord. If——"

The hum of an approaching automobile reached the ears of those at the roadside. The machine was coming from above, and Matt pulled the broken bicycle out of the road.

The boys and the mandarin stood in a group while waiting for the car to pass. Tsan Ti, seemingly wrapped up in his own miseries, gave no attention to the car, at first.

There were two passengers in the car—the driver, and another in the tonneau.

The car, on the down grade, was coming at a terrific clip, and the man in the tonneau was hanging on for dear life and yelling at the top of his voice:

"Avast there, mate, or you'll have me overboard! By the seven holy spritsails——"

The voice broke off and gave vent to a frantic yell. Although the driver had shut off the power and applied a brake, the car had leaped into the air when

it struck the root.

The man in the tonneau shot straight up into the air for two or three feet, and Matt and McGlory had a glimpse of a grizzled red face with a patch over one eye, a fringe of "mutton-chop" whiskers, and a blue sailor cap.

"The mariner!" came in a clamoring wheeze, from Tsan Ti.

As the automobile whirled past, the mandarin flung himself crazily at the rear of the tonneau, only to be knocked head over heels for his pains.

As he floundered in the dust, Matt rushed for his motor cycle.

"Is that one of the two men who stole the ruby?" cried Matt.

"What fortune!" puffed Tsan Ti. "Pursue and capture the villain! If he has the Eye of Buddha——"

But the rest of it was lost. Matt, followed by McGlory, was tearing away on the track of the automobile.

CHAPTER III.

THE GLASS BALLS.

Turning the trick for Tsan Ti—as McGlory had termed it—was destined to entangle the motor boys in a whirl of the most astounding events; and these events, as novel as they were mysterious, followed each other like the reports of a Gatling gun.

The journey to Albany, and down the river to Catskill Landing, and thence by motor cycle part way up the mountain, had been monotonous; but from the moment the mandarin and the bicycle went sprawling into the air over the tree root, and the lads had made the Chinaman's acquaintance, Fate began whirling the wheel of amazing events.

Matt and McGlory had had no time to discuss the weird tale recounted for their benefit by the mandarin. There was no opportunity to view the theft of the Eye of Buddha from any angle save that offered by the philosophical Tsan Ti. No sooner had the ostensible facts connected with the stolen ruby been retailed, than one of the thieves flashed down the mountain road, leaving the boys no choice but to fling away after him.

The two motor cycles had absolutely no chance to go wrong on that downhill trail. Had either motor "bucked," the weight of the heavy machine would have hurled its rider onward in a breakneck coast toward the foot of the hill.

"Sufferin' streaks!" cried the cowboy. "If we were to meet anybody coming up, there'd be nothing left but the pieces!"

"I'm keeping a lookout ahead, Joe!" Matt called back, over his shoulder.

He was in the lead, and his rear wheel was firing a stream of dust and sand into McGlory's eyes. But the cowboy was too excited to pay much attention to that.

"We're goin' off half-cocked, seems to me!" he yelled. "We've known that fat chink for about ten minutes, and here we are, lamming into his game like a couple of wolves. What's the use of brains, pard, if you don't use 'em?"

"While we were thinking matters over," Matt answered, ripping around a sharp turn, "the one-eyed man would be getting away."

"What're we going to do when we overhaul him? Make an offhand demand for the Eye of Buddha? It sounds flat enough, and if the webfoot tells us we're crazy, and gives us the laugh, what're we going to do?"

"Brakes! brakes!" cried Matt, and his motor cycle began to stagger and buck-jump as he angled for a halt.

McGlory was startled by the command, but instantly he obeyed it. In order to avoid running his chum down, he not only bore down with the brakes but also swerved toward the roadside. He came to a sudden stop in a thicket of bushes, and extricated himself with some difficulty.

Matt was in the road, his motor cycle leaning against a tree. A yard in front of him lay a flat cap. He pointed to it.

"What's that to do with a breakneck stop like we just made?" snorted the cowboy. "It's not the headgear we want, pard, but the man that owns it."

"Sure," returned Matt. "Look farther down the road, Joe, and then you'll understand."

A straight drop in the road stretched ahead of the boys for a quarter of a mile. Halfway along the stretch was the automobile. The machine was at a

stop, and the driver and the one-eyed man were leaning over the motor. The hood had been opened, and the driver was tinkering.

"Something has gone wrong," said Matt, "and it happened soon after the sailor had lost his cap. Our one-eyed friend, I think, will come back after his property. If he does, we'll talk with him. We can't go too far in this business, you know. I have considerable confidence in Tsan Ti, but still we're not absolutely sure of our ground."

"The poor old duck is bound to snuff himself out with the yellow cord if he don't recover the ruby," returned the cowboy. "That's what hits me close to home. We're going it blind"—and here McGlory dug some of the sand out of his eyes—"and we jumped into this with a touch-and-go that don't seem reasonable; still, I've got a sneaking notion we're on the right track. What's that on the hat ribbon?"

Matt had picked up the hat, and was turning it over in his hand.

"It's the name of a boat, I suppose," answered Matt, taking a look at the gilt letters. "*Hottentot*," he added, reading the name.

"Oh, tell me!" exclaimed McGlory. "*Hottentot!* That's a warm label for a boat. But, say! Suppose One-Eye don't think enough of his cap to come back for it?"

"But he will," answered Matt. "This will bring him, I'll bet something handsome."

As he spoke. Matt pulled a square of folded paper out of the crown of the cap.

"Cowboy trick!" grinned McGlory. "Carryin' letters under the sweatband of a Stetson reminds me of home."

Matt had stepped to the roadside, the folded paper to one hand and the cap in the other.

"Had we better?" he pondered, voicing his thoughts.

"Better what?" queried McGlory.

"Why, keep this paper. It may prove important."

"Sure, keep it! What're you side-stepping for about a little thing like that? We're after the Eye of Buddha, and if that paper has anything to do with it, the thing's ours by rights."

"But suppose Tsan Ti is working some game of his own? That was a fearsome yarn he gave us, Joe."

"Sufferin' tenderfeet! Say, didn't we come all the way from Michigan to help him? Think of that yellow cord, and what it means to—— Oh, Moses!" the cowboy broke off. "Here comes the webfoot, now."

Matt, taking a chance that the sailor was a thief, that he had guilty knowledge of the whereabouts of the Eye of Buddha, and that the paper might furnish valuable information, thrust the note into his pocket, and hastily replaced it with a bit of paper quickly drawn from his coat. Then, tossing the hat into the road, he stepped out and waited.

The sailor was scrambling up the steep ascent with the agility of an A. B. making for the maintop. At sight of Matt, appearing suddenly above him, he hesitated, only to come on again at redoubled speed.

"Ahoy, shipmates!" bellowed the old salt, as soon as he had come close enough for a hail. "Seen anythin' of a bit of headgear hereabouts?"

"There it is," Matt answered, pointing.

"Blow me tight if there it ain't!" He jumped for the hat, and gathered it in with a sweep of one hand. "Obliged to ye," he added, looking into the crown, and then placing the hat on his head with visible satisfaction.

He would have turned and made off down the road, had not Matt stepped toward him and lifted his hand.

"Just a minute, my friend," said Matt.

The sailor flashed a look toward the automobile. The driver had closed the hood, and was waving his arms.

"Nary a minute have I got to spare, shipmate," the sailor answered. "The skipper of that craft has plugged the hole in her bow, and we're ready to trip anchor and bear away."

"Wait!" and a sternness crept into Matt's voice. "We must have a talk with you. Perhaps you'll save yourself trouble if you give us a few minutes of your time."

At the word "trouble," the sailor squared around.

"Now, shiver me," he cried, "I'm just beginning to take the cut of your jib. Trouble, says you. Are ye sailin' in company with that chink we passed a ways back on our course?"

"What do you know about the Eye of Buddha?" demanded Matt.

"Oh, ho," roared the other, "so that's yer lay, my hearty? Well, you take my advice, and keep your finger out o' that pie. I'm not sayin' a word about the Eye o' Buddha. Mayhap I know somethin' consarnin' the same, an' mayhap I don't. But I wouldn't give the fag end o' nothin' mixed in a kittle o' hot water for your chances if you stick an oar in that little matter."

There was that about the sailor which convinced Matt that he knew more concerning the ruby than he cared to tell.

"Stop!" cried the king of the motor boys.

"Not me," was the gruff answer, and both of the sailor's hands dropped into his pockets.

"If he won't stop," cried McGlory, "then here's where we make him!"

He and Matt started on a run toward the sailor. The latter whirled around, his arms drew back, and his hands shot forward. Two round, glimmering objects left his palms and tinkled into fragments at the feet of the two boys. An overpowering odor arose in the still air—wafted upward in a cloud of strangling fumes that caught at the throats of Matt and McGlory, blinded their eyes, and sapped at their strength.

McGlory fell to his knees.

"The—glass—balls——" he gasped, and flattened out helplessly, the last word fading into a gurgle.

"Leave the Eye o' Buddha alone!" were the hoarse words that echoed in Matt's ears.

And they were the last sounds of which he was cognizant for some time. He crumpled down at the side of his chum, made one last desperate struggle to recover his strength, and then the darkness closed him in.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PAPER CLUE.

Now and then there are episodes in life which, when they are past and one comes to look back on them, seem more like dreams than actual occurrences. This matter of the Chinaman, the Eye of Buddha, the sailor, and the glass balls looked particularly unreal to Motor Matt and Joe McGlory.

When Matt opened his eyes, he found himself in a hammock. For a minute or two he lay quiet, trying to figure out how and when he had got into the hammock, and where Joe was, and just how much of a dream he had had.

The hammock was strung between a couple of trees, and from a distance came a subdued chatter of voices, and the low, soft strains of an orchestra.

Matt sat up in the hammock and looked in the direction from which the sounds came. The lofty, porticoed front of a huge hotel was no more than two hundred feet away. Men in flannels and women in lawn dresses were coming and going about the porticoes, and the music was wafted out from inside the building.

The young motorist's bewilderment grew, and he brushed a hand across his eyes. Then he looked in another direction. Two yards from the tree supporting one end of the hammock, the ground broke sharply into a precipitous descent, falling sheer away for a hundred feet or more. He could look off over a rolling country checkered with meadows and grainland and timber patches, with a river cutting through the vista and holding the scene together like a silver ribbon.

He drew a long breath, and swerved his gaze to the right. Here there was another hammock, one end of it secured to the same tree that helped support Matt's airy couch, and the other end to a third tree which formed an acute angle with respect to the other two.

In this second hammock was McGlory. Like Matt, he was sitting up; and, like Matt again, he was staring.

Leaning against one of the three trees, were the two motor cycles.

"Joe!" cried Matt. "Is that you?"

"Hooray!" exclaimed the cowboy, with sudden animation. "I was just waiting for you to speak, in order to make sure I wasn't still asleep. Jumpin' jee-whiskers, what a dream I've had!"

"Where are we?" inquired Matt.

A puzzled look crossed the cowboy's face.

"Don't you *sabe* that?" he returned.

"No."

"Shucks! That's just the question I was going to bat up to you."

"How did we get here?"

"I'm by, again. But, sufferin' brain-twisters, what a dream I've had!" He began laughing softly to himself.

"What sort of a dream was it?" went on Matt.

"Funnier'n a Piute picnic! It was all mixed up with a fat Chinaman, and a yellow cord, and a ruby called the Eye of Buddha, and a one-eyed sailor, and—and a couple of glass balls. Oh, speak to me about that! Say, pard, but it was a corker! The fat chink was doing all sorts of funny stunts, tumbling off a bike, and all over himself."

"There wasn't any dream about it," declared Matt, swinging his feet to the ground with sudden energy.

The laugh died out of McGlory's face, and a blank look took its place.

"Go on!" he scoffed, not a little startled.

"Two fellows couldn't have the same kind of a dream," persisted Matt, "and I went through identically the same things you did. That proves they were *real!* But—but," and Matt's voice wavered, "how did we get here?"

"There are the motor cycles we used when we buzzed out of Catskill Landing," and McGlory brightened as he pointed to the two wheels.

"I see," mused Matt, drumming his forehead with his knuckles. "Nobody seems to be paying much attention to us," he added, his eyes on the groups around the hotel porches.

"Not a terrible sight, and that's a fact," agreed McGlory. "But why should they, pard? They don't know us."

"Somebody must have brought us here and laid us in the hammocks. The last I remember we were down and out. Now, Joe, a move of that kind would naturally stir up a commotion."

"Well, yes," admitted the cowboy, going blank again, "Are you and I locoed, Matt, or what?"

"Come on and let's try and find out."

Matt started for a man who was sitting in a canvas chair smoking a cigar and nursing a golf club on his knees. McGlory trailed after him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Matt, halting beside the chair, "but have you been here long?"

"Two weeks," was the answer with a hard stare. "I come to the Mountain House every summer, and spend my va——"

"I mean," interrupted Matt, "were you sitting here when my friend and I were brought in?"

"Brought in? You weren't brought in. You two rode in on those motor cycles, leaned them against the tree, and preëmpted the hammocks."

"Sufferin' lunatics!" breathed McGlory. "I reckon we'd better call somebody in to look at our plumbing, pard."

"What appears to be the trouble?" went on the stranger, politely curious.

"It just 'appears,' and that's all," rambled the cowboy. "If we could only get a strangle-hold on the trouble, and hog-tie it, maybe we could take it apart, and see what makes it act so."

The stranger sprang up, grabbed his golf stick, and looked alarmed.

"Never mind my friend, sir," said Matt reassuringly; "we're just a little bit bothered, that's all."

"A little bit!" repeated the stranger ironically; "it looks to me like a whole lot."

"This is the Mountain House, is it?" went on Matt. He was severely shocked himself, but tried manfully to hide it while trying to work out the mystery.

"Certainly, sir," growled the man with the golf stick. "Don't you try to make game of me, young man! I'm old enough to be your father, and such——"

"We are not trying to make game of any one," protested Matt.

"But somebody is making game of *us*," put in McGlory, "and playing us up and down and all across the table. Here in these hills is where Rip Van Winkle went to sleep, ain't it? I wonder if he dreamed about fat Chinamen, yellow cords, one-eyed sailors, and——"

"Cut it out, Joe!" whispered Matt sternly, grabbing his chum by the arm and pulling him toward the hotel. "Can't you see he thinks we're crazy?"

"*Thinks* we're crazy?" stuttered the cowboy. "Then I've got a cinch on him, for I *know* we are. Where next?"

"We'll go into the hotel and make some inquiries," replied Matt, noting how the man with the cigar and the golf stick turned in his chair to keep an eye on them. "And for Heaven's sake, Joe," Matt added, "let me do the talking. If you don't, we're liable to be locked up."

"We ought to be locked up," mumbled McGlory. "We're lost, and we ought to be shooed into some safe corral and kept there till we find ourselves. Sufferin' hurricanes! What kind of a brain-storm are we going through, *anyhow?*"

Matt and McGlory passed through the chattering groups on the porch and entered the lobby of the hotel. The music, which now came to them in increased volume, was accompanied by a clatter of dishes from the dining room. Matt laid a direct course for the counter at one side of the lobby.

"Can you tell me," he asked, leaning over the counter and addressing the carefully groomed clerk, "If there is a gentleman named Tsan Ti staying at this hotel?"

"Come again, please," was the answer. "What was that name?"

"Tsan Ti."

"Where's he from?"

"Canton, China."

"Wears a black cap and a yellow kimono," put in Joe. "Button in the cap—red button. He's the high old Whoop-a-gamus that bossed the temple of What-you-call-um and let the Eye of Buddha get away from him. He *must* be here."

"Such jocosity is out of place," said the clerk chillingly.

"Sufferin' zero!" muttered McGlory. "I reckon his home ranch is the North Pole. What's jocosity, Matt?"

"Then Tsan Ti isn't here?" asked Matt.

"Certainly *not*. You might try the Hotel Kaaterskill."

"Kaaterskill!" minced McGlory. "Now, what the blooming——"

"Joe," muttered Matt, grasping his chum's arm, and pulling him away.

"What's come over you, anyhow? You're acting like a Hottentot."

"That's it!" cried Joe.

"What?"

"The name that one-eyed webfoot had on his cap. Hottentot! Hottentot! Hottentot!"

"Joe!" warned Matt, for the cowboy had sung out the word at the top of his voice. "What *ails* you? Great spark plugs!"

McGlory brushed a hand across his face.

"I feel like I'd taken a foolish powder, pard," he answered huskily. "Let's get out of here before I make a holy show of myself."

All at sea, they went back to the hammocks and sat down by the two motor cycles.

"And this," remarked McGlory, breaking a long silence, "is what you call turning the trick for Tsan Ti! I told you that letter we received in Grand Rapids was plain bunk. Read it again, pard."

"I've read it thirteen times, Joe," answered Matt.

"Well, read it fourteen times and break the hoodoo."

Matt took the envelope from his pocket, and drew out the inclosed sheet. Then he stared, then whistled, then leaned back against the tree.

"Now it's you who's doped," grinned McGlory. "Can't you read it?"

"Sure," answered Matt; "listen."

"BUNCE: Be in Purling at ten a. m., Thursday. Show this to Pryne at the general store in the village, and Pryne will show you to me. Important developments. Mum's the word.

GRATTAN."

McGlory threw off his hat, and pawed at his hair.

"Put a chain on us, somebody, *please!*" he gasped. "Where, oh, where, did you get that?"

"Here's a paper clue," said Matt. "I took this out of that cap we found in the road, and, by an oversight, I tucked that letter from Tsan Ti into the cap so the sailor wouldn't notice the original note was missing."

"Then there *was* a cap," muttered McGlory, "and it *did* have 'Hottentot' on the ribbon, and you *sure* took out a note, and it's a cinch there *was* a sailor. Now, if all that's true, then where, in the name of the great hocus-pocus, is the fat Chinaman?"

CHAPTER V.

PUTTING TWO AND TWO TOGETHER.

With a sudden thought, Matt stepped to the motor cycle McGlory had used, and gave the front wheel a critical examination.

"What's that for?" asked the cowboy.

"I'm only putting two and two together, Joe," Matt answered, returning to his place at his chum's side.

"I reckon they make five, this inning," said McGlory.

"I believe I've got the hang of it," went on Matt. "You're just getting back to your natural self, Joe. Ever since we awoke in those hammocks, and up to this minute, you've been a trifle 'flighty.'"

"Well," acknowledged McGlory, "I felt as though I'd been browsing on loco weed."

"How do you account for it?"

"I don't. You're doing this sum in arithmetic. What's the answer?"

"Glass balls," said Matt.

"Speak to me about those glass balls! That webfoot threw two of them, and they smashed right in front of us! And—and—— But, say, pard, it's not in reason to think that two things like those balls could lay us out."

"Remember how the Eye of Buddha was stolen? The one-eyed sailor and the Englishman broke one of the glass balls in the temple, and all the priests were laid out."

"Oh, well, if you're going to take any stock in that fat Chinaman and his yarn, I reckon you——"

"Now, listen," continued Matt earnestly. "Strange as it may seem, Joe, there *are* balls like those Tsan Ti was telling us about. We have had an experience with them, and we *know*. I suppose the glass spheres are filled with some powerful narcotic fumes which are set free the moment the balls are broken."

"It's not in reason," protested Joe.

"It's a hard thing to believe that such objects exist, I'll admit," proceeded Matt, "but we have got to credit the evidence of our senses. While one of the balls was enough to overcome the priests, in the temple, it was necessary for the sailor to use two against us, there in the open. The air, naturally, would soon dissipate the fumes. I shouldn't wonder," Matt added reflectively, "but those balls were invented by the Chinese. They seem to have a knack for that sort of thing."

"Queerest knock-out drops I ever heard of."

"When you and I recovered sufficient strength to get up out of the road," continued Matt, "we hadn't yet recovered full possession of our wits. You remember, Joe, your front tire was punctured. Well, that puncture was neatly mended, and the air pump must have been used to inflate the tire again. You and I must have done that, then rode up here and taken possession of the hammocks."

The cowboy whistled.

"Able to make repairs, and to navigate, but plumb locoed for all that, eh?" he remarked.

"That's my idea, Joe. When we finally recovered our senses, in these hammocks, all that had happened seemed to have been a dream."

"Seems so yet, pard. What's become of Tsan Ti? And the other hatchet boy that brought the yellow cord? They don't know anything about Tsan at the hotel, so he must have been overworking his imagination when he told us he had been having tea there. And that other yarn about seeing the man with the yellow cord and ducking on a borrowed wheel to get away from him! Say, I reckon they'd have known something about a commotion of that sort if it had happened here." McGlory wagged his head incredulously. "The fat chink is up to something, Matt," he finished, "and he's been talking with the double tongue."

"I'll admit," said Matt, "that there are some parts of the problem that look rather dubious, but, on the whole, Tsan Ti's story holds together pretty well. That story of the ruby was corroborated, in a way, by the sailor. From the fellow's actions, he must have known a good deal about the Eye of Buddha. Why did he throw the glass balls at us? Simply to keep us from following him. If the sailor hadn't been guilty of some treacherous work, he wouldn't have done that."

"I'm over my head," muttered McGlory. "But, if the mandarin is so hungry to have us help him, what's the reason he's making himself absent? Why isn't he here?"

"Let's give him time to get here. We weren't on that mountainside for more than two hours. It was nine when we left Catskill Landing, and about half-past ten, I should say, when we met Tsan Ti. It's nearly one, now."

"Well, what's the next move, pard? Are you going to that Purling place and ask for Pryne at the general store?"

"Not right away. We'll give Tsan Ti a chance to present himself, first."

"You don't think"—and here McGlory assumed a tragic look—"that Tsan would go off into the timber and use that yellow cord, do you?"

"He has two weeks before he has to do that."

"*Has* to do it! Why, he don't have to do it at all, except to be polite to that squinch-eyed boss of the Flowery Kingdom. Honest, these chinks are the limit."

Matt got up and pulled his motor cycle away from the tree.

"Let's go into the hotel, and have dinner, Joe," he suggested. "If we don't hear anything from Tsan Ti by four, this afternoon, we'll return to Catskill."

"And not do anything about that paper you got out of the sailor's hat?" asked the cowboy.

"If Tsan Ti doesn't think we're worth bothering with, after we've come all the way from Grand Rapids to lend him a hand, we'll let him do his own hunting for the ruby."

"Keno, correct, and then some," agreed the cowboy heartily. "I've thought, all along, there'd be some sort of bobble about this Eastern trip. But let's eat. I've been hungry enough to sit in at chuck-pile any time the last three hours."

The boys left their wheels in charge of a man who looked after the motor cars belonging to guests, and went into the office for the second time. The clerk surveyed McGlory with pronounced disfavor while Matt was registering. The cowboy met the look with an easy grin, and, after he and Matt had washed their faces, brushed their hair, and knocked the dust out of their clothes, they went into the big dining room and did full justice to an excellent meal.

Neither had much to say about Tsan Ti. Matt was half fearing the mandarin's business was a good deal of a wild-goose chase, and that the ponderous Celestial, for reasons of his own, had absented himself permanently.

Following the meal, the boys went out to sit on the veranda. They had hardly taken their chairs when a big red automobile, with a rumble seat behind in place of a tonneau, sizzled up to the front of the hotel and came to a stop.

There was one man in the car. As soon as the dust had settled a little, a black cap with a red button, a long queue, and a yellow blouse emerged with startling distinctness upon the gaze of the two boys.

McGlory sat in his chair as though paralyzed.

"It's Tsan Ti!" he murmured feebly, switching his eyes to Matt.

"Tsan Ti, and no mistake," answered Matt.

"First he rides a bike," said the cowboy, rapidly recovering, "and now he blows in on us at the steering wheel of a gasoline cart. He's the handiest all-around heathen I ever met up with. And look at him! He acts just as though nothing had happened. Well, let me know about that, will you?"

Tsan Ti turned sidewise in the driver's seat, and swept his gaze over the front of the hotel. He was less than half a minute getting the range of the motor boys. Lifting a hand, he beckoned for them to come.

"He wants us," said Matt grimly. "We'd better go, and hear what he has to say for himself."

"That's the talk!" agreed McGlory.

A bland smile crossed the flabby face of the Chinaman as the boys came close.

"Embark, distinguished friends," said he.

After all the rough and tumble of the morning, Tsan Ti now appeared in perfect condition. He was entirely at his ease, and as well groomed a mandarin as ever left the Chinese Empire.

"Just a minute, Tsan Ti," returned Matt coldly. "There are a few things we would like to have explained before we go any farther in this business of yours."

"All shall be made transparent to you, most excellent youth," was the reply, "only just now embark, so that we may proceed on our way."

"You said you were stopping at the Mountain House," said Matt severely.

"A play upon words, no more. I was staying at the Kaaterskill. What says the great Confucius? 'The cautious seldom err.' I was cautious. Time passes swiftly, and——"

"Get out and explain everything to us, Tsan Ti," broke in Matt firmly. "If you want us to help you, you've got to take time to set us right on a few important matters. We hadn't talked twenty minutes with you before we jumped in to give you a helping hand—and succeeded in getting ourselves into trouble. As you say, 'the cautious seldom err.' That means us, you know, as well as you."

The mandarin heaved a sigh of disappointment, floundered out of the machine, and accompanied the boys in the direction of the three trees and the swinging hammocks.

CHAPTER VI.

A SMASH.

The Hotel Kaaterskill was within a stone's throw of the Mountain House. So far as situation went, there was small choice between them, but Matt resented Tsan Ti's deception in declaring he was staying at one when he was really staying at the other. It seemed so trivial a matter compared with the mandarin's critical situation—as set forth by himself.

"I don't like the way you are acting, Tsan Ti," said Matt, as soon as they had reached the trees. "In your letter to me you asked me to meet you at the Mountain House; and on the mountainside, after you received the yellow cord, you spoke about our going up to the Mountain House; and again, as I remember it, it was on the porch of the Mountain House where you were drinking tea when you saw Kien Lung coming toward you, and bolted away on the bicycle. What excuse was there for such a deception? And how can we help you if you are not open and aboveboard with us?"

"The left hand, honored and exalted sir," returned Tsan Ti, "must not know what the right hand does when one is so unfortunate as I. Sam Wing, in leaving word for me at the house named Kaaterskill, remarked upon the courier Kien Lung being after me upon his unhappy errand, and counseled that I keep myself obscurely. But I should have made communication with you at the Mountain House had you arrived by that place for meeting me. My intentions were high-minded, albeit secretive."

"Then, for now," pursued Matt, "we will let that pass. Why did you vanish from the mountainside after we had been left to chase the one-eyed sailor? He threw two of those glass balls at us, and we were dropped in the road,

unconscious. It was not a long distance from where we had left you, and you could easily have come down to us."

"*Omito fuh!*" muttered Tsan Ti. "My regret is most consuming! The gods crossed my will, notable one; nothing else could have kept me at a distance from you. It was thus. Young men on bicycles, pursuing Kien Lung and me who had made away at high speed on two of their go-devil machines, swarmed suddenly around me like the sacred rocks in the banyans at Honam. In spite of my entreaties, they carried me to the Kaaterskill, and there I made repayment for the broken machine, and for the one which Kien Lung took for himself and did not return. These affairs occupied me profoundly until half an hour since; then I hired yonder devil wagon and started to find you. Behold, you were on the veranda of the hotel as I fared past. Confucius said, in ancient times, 'When I have presented one corner of a subject, and the pupil cannot of himself make out the other three, I do not repeat my lesson.' So the sight of you informed me the sailor of the single eye had escaped, and I concluded best that we hurry after him. Am I not right, honorable friend?"

"He's good with his bazoo," remarked McGlory. "I reckon he makes out a clean case for himself."

Matt was satisfied. Still, he thought that instead of attending to his personal appearance and running around hiring an automobile, Tsan Ti might have taken some quicker method of finding out what had happened down the mountainside. But he was a Chinaman, and his ways and means were not those of a Caucasian.

"Where did you learn to drive an automobile, Tsan Ti?" asked Matt.

"We have the devil wagons in Canton. There are many in the foreign quarter, and I have one of my own." Tsan Ti fanned himself and looked troubled. "There is something," he went on presently, "of which I must

inform you. Perhaps, when you know, you will leave me to find the Eye of Buddha unaided. But it is right that I should tell you."

"What is it?" inquired Matt.

"This, courageous youth: The ten thousand demons of misfortune have been let loose upon those most closely concerned with the loss of the ruby. While the great Buddha sits eyeless in the temple at Honam, his wrath falls upon me in particular; and, now that you are helping me, it will likewise fall upon you. Disasters have crowded upon me, and if you keep on in the search, they will surely overtake you. Already you have had experience of them."

"Sufferin' snakes!" grunted McGlory. "It'll take more'n a heathen idol over in China to get me on the run."

"I guess we'll face the music," laughed Matt. "That ruby eye may be a hoodoo, but we're not superstitious enough to get scared."

"Excellent!" wheezed Tsan Ti. "I have done well to secure your invaluable services. Shall we now proceed down the mountain in pursuit of the sailor?"

"Why, he may be a hundred miles from here by this time."

"Not so!" was the positive answer. "I have my warning that he is near, and that we must hasten."

"Warning?" repeated Matt.

Tsan Ti poked two fingers down the neck of his blouse and fished up a small black V-shaped object attached to a gold chain.

"Observe," he said solemnly, "my jade-stone amulet, covered with choice ideographs from the Book of Auguries. When it burns the skin upon the speaking of a name, then have I a warning. Look!" He held the stone on his fat palm. "With it thus I breathe the words 'one-eyed thief' and"—he winced as though from pain—"the amulet nearly burns."

McGlory dropped his head, and his shoulders shook with suppressed mirth. Never had he met so humorous a person as this mandarin of the red button, with his yellow cord, his jade-stone amulet, and his load of trouble.

Matt was also possessed of a desire to laugh, but managed to keep his features straight. Tsan Ti observed the incredulity of the boys, and dropped the amulet back down his blouse.

"Let us go, doubting ones," he puffed, "and you will see. Come, accompany me, and you will not be long in learning why the amulet burns!"

"Our motor cycles are here, at the garage," demurred Matt, "and——"

"They will be safely kept until you come for them again. Let us, as you say, hustle."

He was up and waddling toward the automobile before Matt or McGlory could answer. The boys followed him, Matt climbing into the front seat at the mandarin's side, and the cowboy getting into the seat behind.

"Hadn't I better drive?" queried Matt.

"It is a pleasure for me to guide and control the pounding demon," the Chinaman answered. "Ha, we start."

But they did not start. Naturally, the long halt had not left enough gas in the cylinders to take the spark, and Tsan Ti had neglected to use the crank.

Matt got down and turned the engine over—and came within one of being run down before he could get out of the way. Regaining the car at a flying leap, he snuggled down in his seat and proceeded to hold his breath. Of all the reckless drivers he had ever seen, Tsan Ti was the limit. He banged over the edge of the level into the long slope, engaging the high speed so quickly that Matt wondered he did not strip the gear. As the car lurched, and swayed, and bounded Tsan Ti's joy shone in his puffy face.

"Glory to glory, and all hands 'round!" yelled the cowboy, from behind. "Change seats with him, Matt! If you don't, he'll string us from the Mountain House clean to Catskill."

Matt leaned over and gave the steering wheel a turn barely in time to keep them from hitting a tree. The wake the machine left behind it looked like a zigzag streak. First they were on one side of the road, and then on the other, juggling back and forth by the narrowest of margins, and keeping right side up in defiance with every law of gravity with which Matt was familiar.

"Cut out the high speed!" shouted Matt. "It's suicide to use that gear on such a slope as this. We could coast down this hill without an ounce of power."

A mud guard was loose, and it rattled horribly. The Chinaman was feeding too much gasoline part of the time, and not enough the rest of the time. Now and again, the cylinders would misfire, pop wildly, then jump into a racing hum. That high-powered roadster made as much noise as a railroad train; and what with Matt yelling directions, and McGlory whooping like a Comanche at every close call they nipped out of, the uproar was tremendous.

Through it all the fat Chinaman glowed and, at intervals, gave vent to ecstatic howls. Whenever they escaped a tree that had threatened them, he exploded jubilantly.

"I can't stand this, pard!" roared McGlory. "I'm goin' to jump out, if you don't stop him!"

To argue with Tsan Ti, in all that turmoil of sound, was out of the question.

Hardly had the cowboy ceased speaking when, through the wild hubbub of noise, Matt thought he heard a sharp detonation. Of this he was not sure, but, almost immediately, a front tire blew up, and the machine swerved wildly.

Bang—*crash!*

The automobile made a wild effort to climb a tree, and the next thing Motor Matt realized was the fact that he was turning handsprings in the road.

Silence, sudden and grim, followed the frantic medley of sound. A bird twittered somewhere off in the woods, and the flutelike notes hit Matt's tortured ear-drums like a volley of musketry.

He got up, dazedly. His hat was gone, and one of his trouser legs was missing. The back of his head, still tender from a blow he had received in Grand Rapids, reminded him by a sharp twinge that it had been badly treated.

Matt limped to the tree that had caused the wreck, and leaned against it. Then, and not till then, was he able to make a comprehensive view of the scene.

The front of the automobile was badly smashed—so badly that it was a wonder Matt had ever escaped with his life. One of the forward wheels had come off.

McGlory, in his shirt sleeves—and with one sleeve missing—was on his hands and knees. He was facing the mandarin—staring at that remarkable person with a well-what-do-you-think-of-that expression.

The mandarin was sitting up in the road. The black cap with the red button was hanging to one side of his head, one of his embroidered sandals was gone, and the yellow silk blouse and trousers were torn. In some manner the steering wheel had become detached from the post, and Tsan Ti was hanging to it like grim death. He seemed still to be driving, for the steering wheel was in the correct position.

Certainly it was not a time to laugh, but Motor Matt could hardly help it.

CHAPTER VII.

NIP AND TUCK.

"That's right," whooped McGlory, twisting his head to get a look at Matt, "laugh—laugh, and enjoy yourself! Sufferin' smash-ups! It's a wonder the hospital corps didn't have to shovel us up in a bushel basket."

"Are you hurt, Joe?" inquired Matt.

"Hurt?" snapped McGlory, his gorge rising. "Oh, no, of course not! We weren't going more than a hundred and twenty miles an hour when we hit that tree, so how could I possibly have suffered any damage? This comes of trotting a heat with a half-baked rat-eater. Here's where I quit. That's right. Go on and hunt your idol's eye, if you want to. Say, if I could get hold of that yellow cord, I'd strangle the mandarin myself."

McGlory climbed to his feet lamely and looked himself over, up and down. His coat was about twenty feet away, in one place, and his hat lay at an equal distance in another. As he moved about collecting his property and muttering to himself, Matt stepped to the side of Tsan Ti.

The mandarin, still dazed and bewildered, continued to cling to the steering wheel. Matt bent down and took the wheel away from him.

"Illustrious friend," said the Chinaman, blinking his eyes, "the suddenness was most remarkable. Once more the thousand demons of misfortune have visited their wrath upon me!"

"Don't talk about misfortune," returned Matt. "We're the luckiest fellows that ever lived to get out of a wreck like that with whole skins. The car's a ruin, Tsan Ti, and you'll have to pay for it."

"Of what use is money, interesting youth, to a mandarin who has received the yellow cord? I have rice fields and tea plantations, and millions of taels to my credit. The bagatelle of a cost does not concern me."

Matt helped him upright and dusted him off. As soon as he had pushed a foot into the missing sandal, he gave vent to a wail, and sat down on the side of the machine.

"Such vastness of misfortune takes my courage," he groaned. "The Eye of Buddha can not be recovered with all the thousand demons fighting against me. The jade-stone amulet burns me fiercely——"

"Wish it had burned a hole clear through you before you'd ever written that letter to Matt," cried McGlory.

"I have involved two honorable assistants in my so-great ill luck," went on the mandarin.

"Never mind that," said Matt. "I thought you knew how to drive a car?"

"He's the craziest thing on wheels when it comes to drivin' a bubble," called out McGlory. "Here's where I quit. Scratch my entry in the race for the Eye of Buddha. I always know when I've got enough. We've had four hours of this, and it's a-plenty."

Motor Matt began looking for his cap. Where it had gone was a mystery. He finally discovered it hanging to a clump of bushes. As he turned around, he was startled to see Tsan Ti with the yellow cord coiled about his throat.

Could it be possible that the mandarin, cast down by his latest accident, was on the point of carrying out the mandate of the regent?

"I say!" shouted Matt, hurrying forward.

But the Chinaman was interrupted in his fell purpose by an explosion in the car directly behind him.

Bang!

He jumped about four feet, straight up in the air. Matt saw a tongue of flame shoot upward from the car.

The gasoline tank had been smashed. The inflammable contents, dripping upon the hot exhaust pipe leading from the muffler, must have caused the blaze.

Sizz-z-, *bang*, boom!

The gasoline was vaporizing. As the startled mandarin watched the blaze, paralyzed and speechless by the unexpected exhibition, the yellow cord swung limply downward from his throat. McGlory rushed up behind him, and jerked the cord away. Tsan Ti did not seem to notice the manœuvre—he was all wrapped up in the blaze and the explosions.

The fire shot skyward, and Matt grabbed the Chinaman and hauled him to a safe distance.

"Bring the wheel, Joe," Matt yelled, "the one that came off!"

McGlory had not the least notion what Matt wanted with the wheel, but he got it, and they were all well down the road when a final terrific boom scattered fragments of the wreck every which way and sent little jets of flame from the diffused gasoline spitting in all directions.

"Good-by, you old benzine buggy!" said McGlory, addressing the flame-wrapped car. "You wasn't worth much, anyways, but I bet the mandarin bleeds for twice your value, just the same. What you looking at that wheel for, Matt?" he finished, turning to his chum.

"It was punctured by a bullet," replied Matt, pointing to a clean-cut rent in the shoe.

"Bullet?" echoed McGlory. "Speak to me about that! I didn't hear any shooting."

"The car made so much noise that's not to be wondered at. I wasn't sure that what I'd heard was a shot, but——"

Matt had lifted his head to speak to McGlory. As he did so, his eyes glimpsed a figure skulking among the bushes at the roadside. The sunshine, and the glare from the fire, caused a ghastly radiance to hover about the bushes.

In the weird shadows of the bushes and trees, a face stood out prominently—a face topped with a sailor hat, fringed with mutton-chop whiskers, and with a patch over one eye.

The king of the motor boys gave a whoop and darted for the bushes. The face vanished as if by magic, but Matt kept furiously on, McGlory chasing after him.

"What's to pay, pard?" the cowboy was demanding.

"The sailor!" flung back Matt. "I saw him in the brush! He must have been the one who put that bullet into our front tire!"

"Whoop-ya!" yelled McGlory, all his hostility springing to the surface and causing him to forget his announced determination to "quit" and let the mandarin shift for himself. "Let's put the kibosh on him! He's the cause of all this. Hang the idol's eye! We've got an account of our own to settle. But look out for the glass balls."

Ahead of him Matt could hear the crash and crackle of undergrowth, and now and then he caught a glimpse of the racing sailor.

The timber grew more dense, and presently, just as Matt thought he had the fellow, he was brought up short with the quarry out of sight and hearing.

"He's dodged away," panted the cowboy. "Maybe he's doubled back."

"I'd have heard him if he'd done that," answered Matt. "He has either stopped, and is lying low, or else he has gone on ahead. I thought I had him,

for a minute. Come on, Joe!"

Matt flung onward, and leaped suddenly from the edge of the timber into a cornfield on a little flat between two shoulders of the mountain. He stopped and listened. The leaves of the corn rustled in the faint breeze, and, in the centre of the field, an ungainly scarecrow half reared itself above the tasseled stalks.

"He's in the corn, that's where he is," puffed the cowboy. "Mind your eye, pard, and look out for the dope balls."

"You go one way across the field," suggested Matt, "and I'll go the other. Sharp's the word now, old chap. We're giving that fellow the run of his life, and he's having it nip and tuck to get away."

The field was not large, and Matt and McGlory crossed it rapidly, the king of the motor boys on one side of the scarecrow, and the cowboy on the other. They met on the opposite side of the field, without having seen the sailor.

"I reckon he's dodged us!" growled McGlory, in savage disappointment. "The ornery old webfoot has——"

He stopped aghast, his eyes on the scarecrow. The tattered figure was moving briskly through the corn, toward the side of the field from which the boys had just come.

"There he goes!" shouted Matt, darting away again. "He got into the scarecrow's clothes, and didn't have the nerve to wait until we had left the field."

"Speak—speak to me about—about this!" returned McGlory breathlessly, plunging after his chum through the rustling rows.

Once more in the woods, the boys found themselves even closer to the fleeting mariner than they had been before. He was in plain sight now, and

shedding his ragged disguise as he raced for liberty.

Up the shoulder of the mountain he went, pawing and scrambling, then down on the other side, Matt and McGlory close after him. He was making strenuously for a cleared space at the foot of the little slope. In the centre of the clearing were the remains of a stone wall, and near the wall stood a little stone house. The house appeared to be deserted, and the half-opened door swung awry on one hinge.

"He's makin' for the 'dobe!" wheezed the cowboy.

The words had hardly left his lips before the sailor vanished within the stone walls. Matt ran recklessly after him.

"Look out for the double-X brand of dope!" warned McGlory. "You know what he did before, Matt."

But Matt was already inside the house. The interior apparently consisted of a hall and two rooms, although the boarded-up windows cast a funereal gloom over the place, and made it difficult to see anything distinctly. Matt sprang through one of the two doors that opened off the hall, and McGlory, still clamoring wildly for his chum to beware of the glass balls, followed.

Slam went the door of the room—probably the only door in the house that was in commission—and rattle-rattle went a key in the lock.

Then came a husky laugh, and the words:

"Belay a bit, you swabs! Leave the Eye o' Buddha alone. An' that's a warnin'."

Feet pattered along the hall and out of it.

"Nip and tuck," sang out McGlory, while Matt wrestled with the door, "and it wasn't the webfoot that got nipped, not so any one could notice. Catch your breath, pard, and calm down. Old One Eye has made his getaway, and we might just as well laugh as be sorry."

CHAPTER VIII.

TSAN TI VANISHES AGAIN.

There was wisdom in the cowboy's words, and Matt gave over his attack on the door and turned to his chum with a disappointed laugh.

"We can get out of here easy enough," said he, "but the sailor gains so much time while we're doing it that he wins out in the race. Great spark plugs, but we're having a time! I'm almost tempted to think that those ten thousand demons, the mandarin talks about, are really pestering us."

"Ten thousand horned toads," scoffed McGlory. "This is what we naturally get for trying to turn an impossible trick for a heathen. What was the good of paying any attention to that letter, in the first place?"

"Well," answered Matt, "we've discussed that point a good many times already, Joe. I wanted to go to New York, anyway, and it was only a little out of our road to come down the river and drop off at Catskill Landing."

"Suppose we get our wheels, go back to Catskill, and then take the next boat down the river? What's the good of all this strain we've taken upon ourselves? If we don't let well enough alone, something is sure going to snap, and like as not it'll be mighty serious. It's a wonder we ever came through that smash-up with our scalps."

There was one window in the room. Matt had passed to it and was making an examination. The glass was broken out of the sash, and the boards nailed to the outside of the casing were loose. He pushed two of the boards off, leaving a gap through which he and his chum could easily crawl.

"If we'd done this in the first place, Joe," said he, "we might have picked up the mariner's trail before he had got too far away."

"Too late now. It was our luck to get into the only room in the 'dobe, I reckon, that had a good door and a usable lock."

"Well," returned Matt, "let's get out and hunt up the mandarin. I hope he won't make 'way with himself while we're moseying around in this part of the woods."

The boys climbed through the window and the gap in the boards, and Matt made a casual survey of the house's vicinity. Of course the sailor was gone, and had left no clue as to the direction of his flight.

Setting their faces in the direction of the road, the boys started off briskly on their return to the wrecked car.

"There's one thing you didn't do, pard," remarked McGlory, while they were on their way through the timber.

"What's that?"

"Why, you didn't lisp a word to the mandarin about that note you took from the Hottentot's cap. Maybe, if the Chinaman knew about that, he'd quit thinking of doing the polite and courteous thing for the regent."

"I had intended telling Tsan Ti about the note," returned Matt, struck by the illuminating suggestion, "but I hadn't time. I'll put it up to Tsan Ti, though, the first thing after we meet him again."

"I've got the yellow string. If he has to make the happy dispatch with that, then I've blocked his game for a while. I don't know much about the etiquette of this yellow-cord *game*. Do you?"

"No."

"Well, leaving that out of the discussion for now, here's another point. Do you reckon old One Eye has found out, yet, how you juggled the notes on him?"

"I can't see as that makes much difference," answered Matt.

"He left us in a hurry, there at that stone house. If he'd known we had the note, why didn't he stop and palaver about it?"

"We were two against him, and he was in too much of a hurry."

"Why didn't he use the glass balls and take the note away from us while we were down and out?"

"Probably his supply of glass balls is running low."

"That note is to be shown to the man in Purling, and the man in Purling is then to show the bearer of the note where this Grattan is. Now——"

"That's a chance for us to find Grattan," cut in Matt.

"You're planning on that, are you? Sufferin' trouble! If it wouldn't be actin' more like a hired man than a pard, I'd go on a strike."

"We're onto this mandarin's business now, Joe," said Matt, "and we ought to see it through to a finish."

"It'll be our finish, I reckon."

At this moment they stepped out onto the road close to the car. The machine was a charred and twisted wreck, and fit only for the junk heap. Matt looked around for Tsan Ti, but he was nowhere in evidence.

"Vanished again!" exclaimed McGlory.

Matt threw back his head and shouted the mandarin's name at the top of his voice. No answer was returned, but the echoes of the call had hardly died away before they were taken up by the humming of another motor, and a little runabout came whirling down the road and brought up at the side of the wrecked car.

Two men were in the runabout, and one of the men was in a tremendously bad humor. The angry individual jumped from the runabout and peered at

the number on the smoking board at the rear of the chassis.

"It was my car, all right!" he cried. "And look at it! Great Scott, just look at it! Total loss, and only a fat chink to look to for damages. Oh, I'm s, t, u, n, g to the queen's taste, all right. Who're you?" he demanded, whirling suddenly on the boys.

Matt told him.

"You're from up the mountain, are you?" inquired Matt.

"Where else?" replied the other crossly. "What's become of the chink that hired this car? Do you know?"

"Probably he's gone back to the hotel."

"Oh, probably," was the sarcastic retort; "yes, probably! I've got money that says he's sloped for good. Look here. They say there were two fellows in the car with the chink when it left the Mountain House. Are you the fellows?"

"Yes."

"Then, by jing, I'll hold *you*. Twenty-five hundred is what I want, and I want it quick."

"Oh, rats!" grunted the man in the runabout. "I'll bet those fellows couldn't rake up twenty-five hundred cents. Quit foolin', Jackson, and let's go back."

Matt and McGlory, after their recent experiences in the collision and while chasing the sailor, were most assuredly not looking their best. But they could have drawn a draft on Chicago for twenty-five hundred dollars and had it honored—had they been so minded.

"Oh, say moo and chase yourself!" cried McGlory. "You rented the car to the Chinaman; you didn't rent it to us."

"I'm going to hold you, anyhow," declared the man called Jackson.

"You'll have a good time trying it," retorted the cowboy truculently.

Jackson stepped toward McGlory.

"Don't you get gay with me," he shouted. "I'm not going to lose a twenty-five hundred dollar car and not make somebody smart for it. I told the chink that was what the car was worth."

"I know something about cars," put in Matt mildly, "and this one is out of date—four years old, if it's a day. If it had been a modern car, with the gasoline tank in the right place, it would never have caught fire, and you could have saved something out of the wreck. The proper feed is by gravity, and the right place for the tank is under the seat——"

"Oh, you!" sneered Jackson, "what do you know about cars?"

"He can forget more in a minute about these chug wagons," bristled McGlory, "than you know in a year. Put that in your brier and whiff it. This fellow's Motor Matt, motor expert, late of Burton's Big Consolidated Shows, where he's been exhibiting the Traquair aëroplane. Now bear down on your soft pedal, will you?"

"Thunder!" breathed the man in the runabout.

"Is—is that a fact?" queried Jackson, visibly impressed.

"It's a fact," said Matt, "but it needn't make any difference in this case. That car of yours, Jackson, would have been dear at a thousand dollars. You'll get every cent the car is worth, too. The Chinaman who hired it is a mandarin. He's in this country on private business. He has tea plantations, rice fields, and money in the bank till you can't rest. Now, stop worrying about the damages and give my chum and me a lift up the hill. We'll find Tsan Ti at the Kaaterskill. That's where he's been staying for a week or two."

Jackson was mollified.

"Of course," said he, "I don't want to be rough with anybody, but you understand how it is. This country is hard on cars, and I have to charge good prices and be sure the cars are hired by men who can put up for them if they go over a cliff or meet with any other kind of a wreck. I'm obliged to you for your information about Tsan Ti. He's been a good deal of a conundrum at the Kaaterskill since he's put up there. A man, riding up from below, passed a couple of Chinamen chin-chinning beside this wreck, and he brought word to me. That's how Jim and I happened to come down."

"You say the man from below passed *two* Chinamen talking near the car?" queried Matt, with a surprised glance at McGlory.

"That's what he said."

"There was only the mandarin in the car when we had the smash," said Matt. "Where could that other one have come from?"

McGlory said nothing, but his face was full of things he might have said—doubts of the mandarin, of course, and vague suspicions of double dealing.

Jim backed the runabout around, and Matt and McGlory crowded into it. There was a hard climb up the hill, overloaded as the runabout was, but finally the Mountain House was passed and the other hotel reached.

The boys, in their tattered garments, aroused considerable curiosity among the hotel guests as they crossed the colonnaded porches and made their way into the office. They inquired for Tsan Ti, and bellboys were sent to the Chinaman's room and around the porches and grounds, calling his name.

But he wasn't to be found.

"Up a stump some more," growled McGlory, "and all because that jade-stone amulet got overheated and caused the mandarin to look for trouble. Oh, blazes! *When* will we ever acquire a proper amount of horse sense for a

couple of our size? You couldn't expect much more of me, Matt, but—well, pard, I'm surprised at *you*."

CHAPTER IX.

TRICKED ONCE MORE.

Matt and McGlory were bruised and sore. They were also pretty tired. From the moment they had met Tsan Ti on the mountainside that morning, they had been knocked about from pillar to post.

"If trouble will please hold off for a couple of hours," said McGlory, "I'll give a good imitation of a fellow snatching his forty winks and getting ready for another round. What do you say, Matt? The mandarin isn't here. He may come, but I wouldn't bet on it, as I'm sort of losing faith in the yellow boy with the red button. He has a disagreeable habit of getting out from under whenever anything goes wrong, and we find ourselves stalled. I reckon, though, you'll want to stay here and give him a chance to blow in?"

"We can hold on here for two or three hours," answered Matt, "take a bath, and a rub down, and a bit of a rest, then fasten our clothes together with a supply of safety pins and motor back to Catskill and get another outfit of clothes from our grips. Then, after a good night's sleep, we'll go to Purling."

"No matter whether the mandarin shows up or not?"

"No matter what the mandarin does, Joe. I've worked up a big interest in that Eye of Buddha, and I'm going to find out whether it's a fair shake or a myth."

"I'll bet all my share of the aëroplane money against two bits that we never see the old hatchet boy again, and also that something hits us before we can get back to Catskill."

"You're guessing, Joe."

"Well, that's my chirp, in anything from doughnuts to double eagles. That Jackson party might as well hang that wrecked bubble in a tree as a memento—the man with the rice fields and the tea plantations, and so on, has started for the high timber just to dodge paying for that pile of scrap down the trail."

"You're wrong," said Matt confidently.

"Wait till the cards are all on the table, pard, and then we'll see."

They had a most refreshing bath and a long rest in a couple of lazy-back chairs on an upper veranda. Orders had been left with the clerk that word should be brought to them at once if Tsan Ti put in an appearance.

McGlory awoke from a drowse to unbosom himself of a subject which had not, as yet, claimed its proper share of attention.

"The fellow who came up the mountain and told Jackson there was a burning car piled by the roadside," said he, "said there were two Chinamen watching the conflagration. Think chink number two was Kien Lung with another yellow cord, Matt?"

"No."

"Then who was he?"

"I've been thinking that it was Sam Wing, the San Francisco Chinaman, who has been keeping track of the two thieves for the mandarin."

"That's you!" exclaimed McGlory. "Why, I never thought of that dark horse. Have you any notion he coaxed the mandarin away on important business?"

"That's likely."

"Anything's likely. For instance, it's quite likely the fat Chinaman is a washee-washee boy from 'Frisco with a fine, large imagination, and that he's stringing us."

"Why should he want to do that?"

"No *sabe*, but there's a lot of things we can't *sabe* concerning this layout."

"Tsan Ti has money——"

"He showed us all of a hundred in double eagles. But did he let us get our hands on the coin? Not any. He allows, in his large and offhand way, that he has millions of taels—but that may be one of his tales," and McGlory grinned.

"Anyhow," said Matt doggedly, "we ride to Purling to-morrow and see the man at the general store."

Matt fell into a drowse again. No one from the office came to announce the arrival of Tsan Ti, and when the hour arrived for the evening meal the boys had their supper sent to their room. They were not arrayed properly for "dining out."

Following the meal they patched up their garments with safety pins, settled their bill, and walked over to the Mountain House garage. Dusk was falling as they trundled their machines into the road and lighted their lamps.

"We'll have an easier time of it going down the mountain," said Matt, "than we had coming up."

"Don't be so sure, pard," answered McGlory. "There are a number of things to trouble us besides the road."

"Don't cross any trouble bridges until you come to them, Joe," advised Matt.

The motor boys were feeling a little stiff and sore, but their engines were humming cheerfully, and there was a joy for them in the downward spin through the woods.

They remembered the tree root, and slowed down for it as it came under their headlights; and they also remembered the location of the wrecked automobile and gave it a wide berth.

At about the place where they had encountered the one-eyed sailor, with everything going smoothly and a fair prospect of reaching Catskill in record time, the crack of a firearm suddenly split the still air to the left of the road. Startled, they clamped on the brakes and came to a halt in time to hear a shrill cry of "Help! help!" ringing out weirdly from the dark woods.

"Sufferin' hold-ups!" murmured McGlory. "And here we are with nothing more than a couple of jack-knives to our names."

"What do you suppose it can be?" asked Matt, dropping the bracket from his rear wheel and letting the motor cycle stand in the road.

He moved off toward the left and listened.

"There's a row on in there," declared McGlory. "I can hear some one pounding around in the timber."

"So can I," said Matt. "We've got to do what we can, Joe. That may mean robbery—or worse. Come on!"

The generous instincts of the motor boys prompted them to go at once to the assistance of a possible victim, and they hurried into the timber. The sounds of scuffling which they had heard died out suddenly, and while they were moving around through the gloom, trying to locate the scene of the trouble, there reached their ears the chug-chugging of motors getting under way.

"Our motor cycles!" exclaimed Matt, darting back toward the road.

"Gad-hook it all!" cried McGlory; "it was a frame-up! A trick to run off our wheels!"

Although they were only a few moments regaining the road, the lamps of the two motor cycles were gleaming more than a hundred feet away.

"Stop!" yelled Matt, racing down the road.

His answer was a raucous laugh—such a laugh as they had heard before. And then came the words, bellowed hoarsely:

"Leave the Eye o' Buddha alone!"

After that silence, during which the gleaming lamps turned an angle in the road and were blotted from sight.

"Seems to me," said McGlory grimly, "I've heard that voice before."

Motor Matt did not reply at once. Perhaps his feelings were too deep for words.

"And I was expecting something, too!" said the cowboy, in a spasm of self-reproach. "Sufferin' easy marks! Matt, some of the stuff from those glass balls must still be playing hob with our brains. Otherwise, how is it these backsets keep happening in one, two, three order? There go a pair of motor bikes that'll stand us in four hundred good big cart wheels. That was right, what you said before we left those wheels and flocked into the timber. That shot and those sounds of a scuffle *did* mean robbery. That's a lesson for us never to help a person in distress. Likewise it's a hint that we'd better pull out and leave the mandarin to manage his own troubles."

"It's a hint that we'd better go to Purling to-morrow and look for Grattan," and there was an unwonted sharpness in Motor Matt's voice that caused McGlory to straighten up and take notice.

"When you tune up that way," said the cowboy, "it means mischief. There was another man with the Hottentot. Do you think the *hombre* was this Grattan sharp?"

"No. Grattan is expecting the sailor at Purling to-morrow. This was some one else."

"The ruby thieves have quite an extensive gang. It's walk for us, from here to Catskill."

"From here to the first farmhouse," corrected Matt. "We'll get some one to take us to Catskill with a horse and buggy."

He bit off his words crisp and sharp, which, to McGlory, proved how deeply he resented the scurvy trick by which they had been lured away from the motor cycles.

"How easy it is to understand things when you look back at' em," philosophized the cowboy, swinging along at Matt's side, down the dark road. "The webfoot and his pal fired that shot and raised a yell for help, then they jumped up and down in the bushes, and the result had all the effect of a knock-down and drag-out. One-Eye must have had us spotted, and he and his pal were lingering in the trailside brush, watching for our headlights. Oh, yes, it was easy. The 'illustrious ones' tumbled over themselves to fall into the trap. If I had that——"

"There's a farmhouse," said Matt, and indicated a point of light close to the foot of the mountain. "Nearly every house in these parts is either a boarding house or a hotel. We can get a rig, all right, I'm pretty sure."

CHAPTER X.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT.

It was midnight before the motor boys were deposited on the walk in front of their hotel in Catskill. A team and two-seated wagon had brought them, and they had not left the vicinity of the road at the foot of the mountain until they had driven around for an hour, made inquiries concerning two men on motor cycles, given a description of the sailor, and passed word that the men were thieves and were to be arrested and held if found.

Matt, according to agreement, paid the driver who had brought them to Catskill five dollars for his services.

Before going to bed Matt gathered a little information concerning the village of Purling. He learned that it was six miles from Cairo, and that Cairo was on the railroad and could be reached by a morning train.

But the train would not serve. By proceeding to the village in that way, the boys would not be able to arrive before noon, and, according to the note in the sailor's cap, they were expected at the general store by ten o'clock.

"We'll hire an automobile," said Matt, "and a driver that knows the mountains. I guess we'd better speak for the machine to-night."

At the same place where they had secured the motor cycles they arranged for a touring car and a driver who knew the country, but the arrangement was not effected until they had deposited three hundred dollars as a guaranty that the motor cycles would be returned, or the owner indemnified for their loss.

"Three hundred plunks gone where the woodbine twineth," mourned McGlory, as they were going to bed, "and all because we're helping to turn

a trick for Tsan Ti. Good business—I don't think."

"This Grattan," said Matt, "is probably lying low somewhere near Purling. If he isn't, he wouldn't be making it so hard for his pal to get at him. The sailor will be there, and he won't get to see Grattan without the letter. We'll catch the fellow, and we may catch Grattan—say nothing of the possibility of recovering the Eye of Buddha."

"We'll draw a blank in the matter of that idol's eye, pard, you take it from me. But there's a chance of our putting a fancy kibosh on Bunce and getting back the go-devil machines. Still, there's also a splendid chance for a fall down. Listen. The *Hottentot* man examines the note in his cap. He sees it's not the few lines he got from Grattan, but a lot of 'con' talk from the mandarin. That leaves One Eye in the air, but gives him a line on *us*. What'll happen? I wish I knew."

"The sailor may not look at the letter in his hat until he gets to Purling, so _____"

"Don't think it, pard. That would be too much luck to come at a time when we're hocused crisscross and both ways."

By seven the boys were up, had overhauled their grips, and got into fresh clothes, and were sitting down to breakfast at the first call. By seven-thirty the touring car was at the door for them, freshly groomed and shining like a new dollar.

It was a sixty horse-power machine, and a family carryall for the personal use of the proprietor of the garage. Not having been used for hackabout purposes, the car was more dependable than one that had been hammered about over the rough roads by anybody who could tell the spark plug from the magneto and had five dollars an hour to pay for a junket.

The proprietor, who was a good fellow at heart and wanted to do everything possible to help the boys recover the stolen motor cycles, made this

concession. So, with Matt in the driver's seat, the native who knew the way beside him, and McGlory with the tonneau all to himself, the touring car flashed out of Catskill Landing and took to the hills.

Of the drive Motor Matt made that morning, the driver on his left entertained the most enthusiastic recollections. Never had he seen a car handled so cleverly; and when the car balked—which the best of cars will do now and then—the way the king of the motor boys located the difficulty and adjusted it was something to think about.

At nine-thirty the touring car landed its passengers in front of the general store. Two men were sunning themselves on the bench in front, and a sleeping dog looked up lazily, snapped at a fly, and then went to sleep again.

"Where's Mr. Pryne?" asked Matt, stepping up to the two men on the bench.

"I'm Pryne," answered one of the two, measuring Matt with an expectant light in his faded blue eyes.

"Look at this," said Matt, and presented the letter from Grattan.

The man, who was roughly dressed and certainly had nothing to do with the store, studied the writing carefully.

"This is all right," he remarked; "*all* right, but"—and his eyes traveled doubtfully over McGlory—"only one was expected."

"Don't worry about that, Mr. Pryne," answered Matt genially; "this chap," and he lowered his voice to a whisper, "is a pal."

"There's another one to go," murmured Pryne.

Matt was startled; then, thinking the other one was the sailor, he braced himself for short, sharp work. "Where is the other one, Pryne?"

"Here," and Pryne indicated the other man who had been sitting with him on the bench.

Matt gave more careful attention to this other individual. He was a Hebrew—one glance was sufficient to decide that. Also, he was ornately clad, wearing many large diamonds and making a fulsome display of heavy gold watch chain. The Jew pushed forward with a wink and an ingratiating smile.

"Goldstein is der name," said he, thrusting out a hand. "I'm der man from New York, yes, der"—and he whispered the rest in Matt's ear—"diamond merchant. You know for vat I come."

A thrill ran through the king of the motor boys. No, he did not know "for vat" the diamond merchant had come, but he guessed that it was to purchase the Eye of Buddha. The mandarin's story was being borne out by every fresh development.

"We're a little ahead of time," observed Pryne, "but I guess it won't make no difference."

"Not the least," replied Matt. "I don't believe it will be necessary for me to take my pal along, so I'll just give him a few instructions about the motor car and we'll be going. This way, Joe," and Matt took McGlory to one side for a brief talk.

"What you going to do when you reach where you're going, with all that gang against you?" whispered the cowboy. "The outfit would be more than a handful for the two of us—and here you're cutting me out of the game right at the start."

"No," whispered Matt, "I'm not cutting you out of the game. You've got the most important part to play. Listen. Find a constable, if you can do it in a hurry, and pick up two or three more men and follow us. Do it carefully, so that Pryne won't suspect. Also tell the driver of the car to look out for the one-eyed sailor. If he comes here at ten o'clock, tell the driver to have him

captured and held—and the other man, too, if they both come. That's your programme, Joe, and everything depends on you."

The cowboy's eyes began to glitter and snap as the gist and vital importance of his pard's instructions drifted through his mind.

"You know you can bank on me, Matt," he answered. "But don't move too fast—make a delay. I've got a lot to do, and you're liable to get so far ahead I'll lose track of you."

"I'll delay matters as much as I can."

Matt returned to Goldstein.

"Where's Pryne?" he queried, observing, with a qualm, that the guide had vanished.

"He is gone for der team," replied Goldstein. "I am sorry," he added, jumping to another subject, "that der price of precious stones is come down. Fancy prices don't rule no more for such luxuries."

"You'll have to pay something for this treasure from the temple of Honam if you get it," answered Matt.

"I will do all that is in reason, yes, but der chances vas great, and I take them."

"Haven't Grattan and I taken chances, Goldstein?" returned Matt sharply.

"You have, yes. Well, we shall see, we shall see."

Goldstein was carrying a small satchel which he kept in hand continually, whether he was sitting down or standing up.

"I come prepared to talk business," he said, with a sly grin, directing his glance at the satchel. "My orders was to wait here until Bunce iss arrived with der letter. I had a letter myself," he laughed.

At this juncture Pryne drove around the corner of the building and drew up at the platform in front of the store.

"Jump in, gents," said he. "It won't be long till I snake you out to my place."

Matt and Goldstein climbed into the back seat. Under the seat was a bag of ground feed. As Pryne was driving out of town, Matt drew his knife from his pocket, opened the blade, and dropped a hand over the back of the seat.

A jab or two with the knife made a hole in the bag. The wagon was an old one, and the boards in the bottom of the box had wide cracks between them. Looking back casually, Matt saw that a fine trail of "middlings" was leaking into the road.

"That will do the trick," he thought exultantly. "My cowboy pard can be depended on to attend to the rest."

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD SUGAR CAMP.

Pryne's team was by no means a swift one. The horses jogged slowly out into the hills, Pryne constantly plying a gad.

"Seems to me like," remarked Pryne, looking around suddenly, "that Grattan allowed Bunce had only one eye."

"That's another pal of his," said Matt coolly. "You've got us mixed, Pryne."

"Waal, mebby. Git ap, there," he added to the horses; "you critters are slower'n merlasses in January."

For a few minutes they rode in silence, the dust eddying around them and only the creak of the wagon, the thump of the horses' hoofs, and the swish of the gad breaking the stillness.

Goldstein, his satchel on his knees, kept flicking a gaudy and heavily perfumed handkerchief in front of his face to clear away the dust. Matt was busy with his thoughts, and was wondering what was to happen at the end of the journey.

Abruptly, Pryne turned again in his seat.

"Seems, too," he ventured, "as how Grattan said this Bunce was a sailor an' wore sailor clothes."

"That's the other fellow again, Pryne," Matt smiled. "You haven't got much of a memory, I guess."

"Waal, it ain't long, but it's mighty keen."

"My cracious," murmured Goldstein, "but der dust is bad. How much farther is it yet?"

"We turn at the next crossroads and pull up a hill," answered Pryne; "then we leave the hill road for a ways, an' we're there. It's my ole sugar camp. Trees is mostly played out, though, an' we don't make sugar there no more. It kinder 'pears to me like," he added, another thought striking him, "Grattan said Bunce had whiskers around his jaws."

"That's the other pal," said Matt.

"Git ap, there, Prince!" called Pryne, slapping the off horse with the gad.

"How long have you known Grattan, Pryne?" inquired Matt.

"Always, since I got married. My wife's his sister. Annabelle—that's the old woman—she's English, she is. Come over visitin' in Cairo, ten year back, an' I up and asked her to marry me. Grattan was to the weddin', an' that was the first an' only time we'd met till a few days ago. Great traveler, Grat is. He's been to Ejup, an' Rooshia, an' Chiny an' all them countries. Great traveler. Takes pictur's for these here movin'-picture machines."

Matt heard this with interest. It reminded him of another time when he had encountered a moving-picture man and had had a particularly thrilling experience. And this experience with Grattan promised to be even more thrilling.

"Is the sugar camp a safe place?" asked Matt.

"Nobody ever goes to the old camp now no more," replied Pryne.

"My cracious, vat a dust!" said Goldstein. "How big is der Eye?" he whispered to Matt.

"Wait till you see it," Matt answered.

"Pigeon's blood, yes?"

Matt supposed he meant to ask if the Eye of Buddha was a pigeon's blood ruby. Taking a chance, Matt nodded.

"She is a true Oriental, eh?" went on Goldstein, a greedy glint coming into his eyes.

"It must be if it comes from China."

"So! If she weigh five carat, she is vorth ten times so much as a diamond. But diamonds ain't vorth so much now."

Matt looked behind him. The sack of middlings was half emptied.

"Are we halfway to the old sugar camp, Pryne?" Matt called.

"Better'n that," was the reply. "Here's where we turn for up the hill."

The hill was long and high, and the road turned into a little-used trail and ascended through timber. The horses pulled and panted and the gad fell mercilessly.

"Somethin' of a climb," said Pryne casually. "One of them tires back there is loose—the one on the right-hand side. Kinder keep an eye on it, will you?"

Matt looked at the tire, which was on his side of the wagon. As yet, it was all right. Matt hoped it would remain so, for if Pryne got out to drive it on he might discover the loss of his middlings—and other things which would have a tendency to excite his suspicions.

"Der dust ain't so much here," observed Goldstein, in a tone of relief.

"Ain't so many wagons to churn it up," said Pryne.

Then fell silence again, Matt busy with his thoughts.

Where was Tsan Ti? While Matt was running down the Eye of Buddha for him, what was the Chinaman, to whom the recovery of the ruby meant so much, doing?

These speculations were bootless, and Matt fell to thinking of the glass balls. If Grattan had a supply of them, all the men McGlory could bring would not be able to prevent him from getting away.

Success in the king of the motor boys' venture hung by an exceedingly slender thread.

"It will be hard business to cut it up," came the voice of Goldstein, breaking roughly into Matt's somber reflections.

"Hard to cut what up?" Matt asked.

"Der Eye. When it ain't best to sell precious stones in one piece, then we cut them up."

Matt understood what the Jew was driving at. Large diamonds are hard to market, especially if the diamonds have been stolen. In order to dispose of them they are often cut up into smaller stones.

"You see," proceeded Goldstein, "dis ruby is valuable because of its size, yes. Der size makes all der difference. If it is cut under fife carat, dere vasn't much sale. Anyhow, diamonds is sheaper as they was. I lose a lot of money by der fall in der price of diamonds."

"Here's where we turn from the hill road an' strike out for the sugar camp," remarked Pryne.

He swerved from the steep road as he spoke and drove into a bumpy swath cut through the timber. For half a mile or more they jolted and banged along, then Pryne pulled to a halt.

"I'll hitch here," said he, getting out, "an' I'll leave the rig. The rest of the way we'll go on foot. It ain't fur," he added hastily, noticing the solicitous glance which Goldstein threw at his patent-leather shoes.

"First time I efer come to a place like this to buy precious stones," remarked the Jew, clambering slowly down.

Matt had a bad two minutes waiting for Pryne to hitch the horses and fearing he would come to the rear of the wagon and discover the slashed bag of feed. But Pryne was apparently unsuspecting.

Turning away from the tree to which he had hitched the horses, he called to Matt and Goldstein to follow him.

Their path took them through the old sugar "bush," among maples that were dead and dying and whose trunks were deeply scarred by the sap hunters. Presently an old log building came into view.

"There's the place," said Pryne.

Part of the building was nothing more than a tumble-down shed. One end of the structure, however, was walled in, and seemed to have been made habitable by the use of rough boards.

A length of stovepipe stuck up through the roof—about the only visible sign that the place was used as a dwelling.

With Pryne in the lead, the odd little group moved around the side of the log wall to a door.

To say that Matt's heart did not beat more quickly, or that visions of violence did not float before his mental gaze, would be to say that he was not human.

He had a keen realization of the dangers into which he was about to throw himself. The moment he passed the door deception would be a thing of the past. Grattan would recognize him as a stranger—a prying stranger who had come to the sugar camp with the intention of securing the Eye of Buddha.

Matt's problem was to engage Grattan's attention, and keep him from going to extremes, until McGlory should arrive with reinforcements.

Just how Matt was to do this he did not know. He was trusting to luck—and luck had not been favoring him to any great extent lately.

The door of the log hut was closed. Pryne rapped on it.

"Who's there?" demanded a voice from within.

"It's Pryne, Grat," was the answer.

"Goldstein and Bunce with you?"

"Sure. I've fetched 'em."

"Then bring them in. I'm ready and waiting."

Pryne bore down on the wooden latch and threw open the door.

"Go right in, gents," said he, stepping back.

Goldstein, with a laugh, passed through the door first. Matt followed. Pryne brought up the rear and closed the door.

What light there was in the one room in which Matt found himself came through the broken roof. There were no windows in the log walls.

"He was there, all right, Grat," cried Pryne, with a loud guffaw, "an' he didn't make no bones about comin' with me. He was mighty anxious to come, seemed like, but I don't calculate he guessed he'd find so many folks here."

Matt's eyes, by that time, had become accustomed to the gloom, and he was able to look around and distinguish various objects.

First, he saw a heavy-set man on a bench. This man had a dark face and a sinister eye, and was leaning back against the wall. Both his hands clung to a buckthorn cane with a large wooden handle. The cane was crossed against one of his knees and held it slightly elevated.

"Throw yer binnacle lights this way, my hearty, as soon's ye're done sizin' up my shipmate," came a voice from the opposite side of the room.

Matt whirled, a startled exclamation escaping his lips.

It was the one-eyed sailor who had spoken. The fellow was sitting on another bench, a wide grin on his weather-beaten face.

The trap had been sprung—and it was the most complete trap Matt had ever been in.

"I told ye more'n once to leave the Eye o' Buddha alone," chuckled Bunce, "but ye wouldn't take a warnin'. *Now*, see where ye are!"

CHAPTER XII.

A TIGHT CORNER.

It was a characteristic of Motor Matt that he never became "rattled." A clear head and steady nerves were absolutely essential in his chosen career. To these he added a quick and sure judgment.

"Surprised, are you?" asked Grattan, with a choppy laugh.

"Well, yes, in a way," replied Matt coolly.

"I wonder if you know what you're up against?"

"You have a stolen ruby, called the Eye of Buddha, and Goldstein is here to buy it."

"My cracious!" gasped the Jew, throwing up his hands.

There was no doubting his surprise, so Matt knew that he, at least, was not in the plot.

"Close your face, Goldstein," scowled Grattan. "This business isn't going to bother you. Take a seat, Motor Matt," he added. "We'll have a little chin-chin before we get busy."

There was an empty bench along the end wall. Matt walked over to it and seated himself, glad that there was to be a "chin-chin." This meant delay, and would give time for McGlory to arrive with reënforcements.

"I don't understand what's der matter," gulped Goldstein, pressing back against the wall and hugging his satchel in his arms. "I don't like der looks of things, no."

"You can't help the looks of things," snapped Grattan, "and you'll understand the situation a lot better before you get away from this sugar camp. Sit down."

There was a three-legged stool close to the Jew, and he dropped down on it in a state of semi-collapse. His eyes passed to Pryne, who had drawn a revolver and was standing in front of the door. Undoubtedly Goldstein had a lot of money in his satchel with which to pay for the ruby, so it is small wonder he was worried upon finding himself a participator in such a scene.

"I thought der young feller was Bunce!" he exclaimed, moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

"Put a stopper on your jaw-tackle!" yelled the sailor. "That's the line we've run out to you for now, and you'll lay to it."

The Jew swallowed hard on a lump in his throat and fell limply against the wall behind him.

Goldstein had even more to lose as the outcome of that desperate situation than had Matt, but the king of the motor boys saw at a glance that he was absolutely useless so far as resistance was concerned.

Grattan dropped his suspended foot on the floor and turned to Pryne.

"Did any one come with Motor Matt, Pryne?" he inquired.

"Two fellers come with him," was the response. "They got to Purling in a automobile."

"Who were those fellows, Motor Matt?" demanded Grattan, shooting a sharp glance at the young motorist.

"The driver of the car, from Catskill Landing," said Matt, "and my chum, Joe McGlory."

"Why did you leave them in Purling?"

"The driver had to stay to look after the car, and I didn't think it was necessary to bring McGlory along for a bodyguard."

Grattan threw back his head and peered at Matt through half-closed eyes.

"You're a cool one," he remarked. "Why were you coming here to see me?"

"I wanted to get the ruby."

Bunce roared. Grattan commanded silence sharply, and the sailor's merriment ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

"Did you think," went on Grattan, "that you could, single-handed, take the ruby from me by force?"

Matt was silent.

"Or did you think you could talk me out of it?"

"I hadn't much of an idea what I could do," said Matt. "It was just barely possible you'd be generous enough, when you learned the circumstances, to give or sell the Eye of Buddha to Tsan Ti."

Grattan curbed the old sailor's fresh inclination to laugh with a quick look.

"What are the circumstances?" he queried.

"Tsan Ti has received the yellow cord. If he does not recover the idol's eye in two weeks, he must destroy himself."

"Young man," said Grattan, "I have been two years planning to get my clutches on the Eye of Buddha. I have haunted Canton, feasted my eyes upon that priceless splash of red in the forehead of the idol in the Honam Joss House until the itch to possess it fairly drove me mad. But the temple was too well guarded, the priests too many, and the walls too high. It was only when I learned of the balls of Ptah and their powers that the feat looked at all feasible. In order to see these balls of Ptah for myself, I made the long journey from Hongkong to the ruins of Karnak on the Nile."

Taking the buckthorn cane under his arm, Grattan stepped across the room to a table near the bench where Bunce was sitting. On the table rested a small box with a strap handle. Grattan opened the lid of the box, and from a nest of cotton picked one of the shimmering glass balls. He handled the ball gently, and a glow came into his eyes as he held it up.

"A quantity of these balls," he proceeded, "were unearthed a year ago from among the ruins of Karnak. They are of Egyptian glass, thousands of years old, and each of the big beads has blown into its surface the *praenomen* of Hatasu, a queen who is conjectured to have lived more than fourteen hundred years before our era. A party of workmen discovered the balls, and chanced to break one of them." Grattan paused, turning the shimmering sphere around and around in his hand. "All the workmen," he went on, "were thrown into an unconscious condition, and it was in this manner that the peculiar properties of the balls were discovered. Why they are called the balls of Ptah I don't know, and what they contain that has such a peculiar effect on living beings, no one has ever been able to discover. But I heard of them, stole a dozen, and tried one on the museum guards in making my escape. It answered the purpose," he went on dryly. "If it had not, I would have been caught."

Almost reverently he replaced the ball in the cotton-lined case and closed the lid. Returning to his bench, he resumed his original position, sweeping an amused glance around him at the awed faces of Goldstein, Pryne, and Matt.

"Armed with one of the balls of Ptah," he proceeded, "I picked up the ancient mariner"—he nodded toward Bunce—"and we manufactured a silk ladder twenty feet long, and weighted it at one end. Then, one day, we repaired to the Honam Joss House at five in the afternoon. That ball of Egyptian glass, crushed to fragments on the floor, overcame the priests. Bunce and I protected our own faces with masks, equipped with oxygen

tubes reaching into small tanks of compressed air in our pockets. To throw the weighted end of the ladder over the head of Ptah took us possibly a minute; for me to climb the ladder and dig the ruby from the idol's forehead consumed possibly five minutes; and for Bunce and me to get out of the temple took five minutes more. We were safely out of Canton when the storm broke."

Matt had listened to all this in supreme wonder. The audacity of the undertaking caused his pulses to stir, but he wondered why Grattan should recount such an exploit to him, and in the hearing of Pryne and Goldstein.

"You know now," continued Grattan, "what the Eye of Buddha has cost me, and you say it is just barely possible I would be generous enough to yield the gem to Tsan Ti in order to save his life!"

"Or you might sell it to him," suggested Matt.

"I might, if he could pay what it is worth."

"Grattan," spoke up Goldstein with sudden fervor, "you have promised me der first shance!"

"Keep still!" growled Grattan. "You'll get all the chance you want before you leave here."

"The mandarin is a rich man," said Matt, who, of course, was parleying merely to gain time.

"He has a little money with him, but that is all. Every plantation he owns in China, every string of cash in his strong boxes is guarded by the regent. If he does not recover the Eye of Buddha, the property will be confiscated. And he can't touch a cent of his fortune until he returns the ruby to its place in the idol's head. So, you see, your friend, the mandarin of the red button, is in a bally hard fix. He can't buy the ruby, and certainly I won't give it to him."

This was intensely interesting to Matt. He was listening, now, in a casual way, for the approach of McGlory and his party, and he was planning what he could do with the balls of Ptah in order to keep Grattan from using them.

"You're a clever lad, Motor Matt," went on Grattan, "and I admire clever people. You performed a neat trick when you removed that folded note from Bunce's cap. It was a foolish place to keep such a thing, but Bunce is a good deal of a fool. For instance, I reached the Catskill Mountains with six of the balls of Ptah—the only ones of the kind to be had—and the crack-brained sailor man stole two of them and threw them away on you and your chum, gaining little and losing something which might prove of priceless value to us."

"Now, shipmate," began Bunce, in a wheedling voice, "you don't get the right splice on that piece of rope; you——"

"That'll do," said Grattan, waving his hand.

Bunce subsided. The power of Grattan over the sailor was absolute. It was easy to see whose had been the plotting mind and the guiding hand in the exploits of the two.

"You are sharp enough to wonder, I suppose," said Grattan, again addressing Matt, "why I am going into these private details for your benefit. The answer is simple. Our plans are laid to leave here to-day. You can't stop us, no one can stop us. The balls of Ptah will disarm all opposition, and the four of them will see us out of the country with Goldstein's money."

"But if Goldstein has the Eye of Buddha," said Matt, "I will know it and can prove it. He can't hold stolen property."

"Certainly he can't. Goldstein gets the ruby and we get Goldstein's money. You have Goldstein arrested and prove in a court of law that he bought the idol's eye from the original thieves. Then——"

A howl came from Goldstein.

"I von't buy, I von't buy! That is a skin game. I von't buy der stone."

"Oh, yes, you will," and, for the first time, a laugh came from Grattan's lips.

"You've brought the money and you'll buy before you leave."

Then, for the first time, Goldstein understood the true meaning of the situation. He flashed a wild look at Pryne and the revolver, and sank back against the wall and groaned.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MASTER ROGUE.

"As I said before," resumed Grattan, "I admire clever people. Goldstein is not clever. I send a letter to him at New York and tell him to come to Purling, ask for Pryne at the general store, and bring money enough to buy the Eye of Buddha. His covetous soul prompts him to defy the law, buy the ruby for half its value, and cheat Bunce and me. He rushes into the trap. I tell you he is as big a fool as Bunce—almost."

"Mercy!" begged Goldstein. "Oh, Mister Grattan, don't rob me! Der price of diamonds has gone off, and I lose much money——"

"Silence!" thundered Grattan.

Goldstein fell whimpering back against the wall.

"It was only by a chance, Motor Matt," went on Grattan, "that I discovered your trick in exchanging a letter of your own for one of mine in the ancient mariner's cap. Bunce did not know I was harbored in this old sugar camp. Pryne knew it, and also my sister, who happens to be Pryne's wife. No one else knew it. Bunce and I had discovered that we were being trailed by a San Francisco Chinaman, and that he was firing telegrams back to the slope for Tsan Ti. From Catskill I came here to wait until the ruby could be exchanged for Goldstein's money. Bunce went around the vicinity of Catskill keeping watch for the spying Chinaman, and for Tsan Ti. He didn't find the 'Frisco hatchet boy, but he did discover, this forenoon, that the mandarin was staying at the hotel on the mountain. Bunce was traveling around in an automobile, and he had my letter asking him to come to Purling, which I had mailed to him at the Catskill post office. When he

found Tsan Ti was staying in the hotel, Bunce thought he would hurry to Purling and take his chance of finding me. On the way down the mountain, as ill luck would have it, he passed you and the mandarin. Then came that exchange of notes. When Bunce discovered that, his panic was still further increased. The road he took to Purling passed along the foot of this hill.

"I was out taking my constitutional, at the time, and fate threw Bunce and me together, for I hailed him as he was passing. The driver of the automobile was a man we both knew we could trust. Bunce and I had a talk, and I read the letter you had put in his hat in the place of the one I had sent. The circumstances attending the exchange of that note convinced me that in you I had an uncommonly clever person to deal with. I guessed that you would use the note and try to find out where I was. I didn't want you to do that, but I arranged with Pryne, if you did, to bring you out here. I also sent Bunce on the rightabout back to the mountainside, and told him to make away with your motor cycles. That, I hoped, would keep you from Purling by giving you something else to hunt for instead of the Eye of Buddha. But I didn't know you—I failed to do your cleverness full justice.

"Bunce went into hiding at the roadside from the mountain top, knowing you would have to come that way. When you sped down the road in an automobile, with your chum and Tsan Ti, Bunce was rattled. He had been expecting you on motor cycles, and had framed up a little plan which he worked so successfully later. However, he put a bullet into one of the automobile tires and caused a smash. The fool! He came near getting us into the toils of the law so deep we could never have escaped. His folly continued, however, when he skulked close to the burning machine to note the extent of the ruin he had caused. He had a close call when you took after him. More by luck than by any good judgment, he got away from you, and was close enough to see and hear what went on when the owner of the wrecked automobile met and talked with you in the road.

"Bunce hunted up the driver of the car, who had been waiting for him in a convenient place not far from the road. The two went into hiding in the brush, spotted your motor-cycle lamps, captured your machines, and the wheels are now handily by to help us in our getaway."

Matt had listened to this talk abstractedly. He was waiting and listening for McGlory and the reënforcements. Why didn't they come? They had had ample time, and Matt was positive they would pick up the trail he had left and follow without difficulty. McGlory was a good trailer, and he would be quick to understand the sifted line of middlings when he saw it.

"Shipmate," said Bunce, "you haven't given me my proper rating. It wasn't all luck an' touch an' go with me. I done noble, I did."

"You mean well, Bunce, but you're not clever," said Grattan.

"My eye! Wasn't it clever the way I put on them scarecrow fixin's in the cornfield?"

"And then lost your nerve and ducked while Motor Matt and his chum were looking at you? Oh, yes, that *was* clever."

There was scorn in Grattan's voice.

Matt had heard enough to realize that Grattan was a master rogue. He was playing a bold game, and with consummate skill. He was willing to talk, to lay bare the innermost details of his work, for he had planned escape and felt sure he would get away. Matt wondered if he would not succeed in spite of McGlory and the men he was to bring with him.

Those balls, those balls of Ptah! They appeared to be the key that was to help Grattan through the coil of the law.

"I am rewarding you, Motor Matt, for your cleverness," pursued Grattan, "and for the narrow escape Bunce gave you in that automobile. The reward is the Eye of Buddha. I sell it to Goldstein for the money he has in that

satchel; then, while Bunce and I are safely out of the hut, I break one of the balls of Ptah by hurling it through the open door; you and Goldstein become unconscious; you recover and make a prisoner of Goldstein; and, finally, by due process of law, you recover the ruby for Tsan Ti. Very simple. So far as I can see, Goldstein is the only one to suffer."

Matt was still listening, listening. Where in the world was McGlory?

Grattan turned toward the shivering Jew.

"Goldstein," said he sternly, "how much money have you in that satchel?"

"Mercy, Mr. Grattan!" implored the diamond merchant. "I have lost much money by der decline in——"

"How much have you in the satchel?" repeated Grattan.

"Only a little, Mr. Grattan. I dit not bring much."

"Didn't you bring enough to pay a good price for the ruby?"

"How was I to know vat der ruby was worth? Fife thousand dollars is what I brought——"

"Five thousand! Five thousand to pay me for two years of planning, and the risk! You have brought more than that."

"Where is der ruby, Mr. Grattan?"

"Where you'll not find it until I see how much money you have in the satchel. Give it to Bunce. Bunce, you open the grip and count the money."

"Don't do that, please, Mr. Grattan! I have lost much money by der drop in ——"

"Take it over and give it to Bunce."

Tremblingly, Goldstein got up with his precious satchel. His face was pallid, and he seemed scarcely able to move. He started toward the sailor;

then, suddenly, when he was close to Pryne, he whirled and grabbed at the exposed revolver.

The satchel dropped, and Goldstein, with the fury of desperation, fought like a madman. It was his money he was fighting for—money that was, perhaps, dearer to him than life itself. Nothing else could have goaded him into such a mad attempt to escape from the hut.

Bunce sprang toward the struggling pair at the door, and Grattan also arose and stepped toward them.

This offered Matt a chance for a daring *coup*. Unseen in the excitement, and unheard because of the noise of the scuffle, he glided to the table and opened the box. Deftly he extracted one of the balls and allowed the box-cover to fall into place. The ball passed into his pocket.

While he stood by the table, Grattan suddenly caught sight of him.

"Go back to your bench, Motor Matt!" he ordered. "You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by sitting tight and obeying orders. Get back, I tell you."

Matt backed to the bench and sat down. Bunce and Pryne flung Goldstein to the floor, and while Pryne kicked him toward his seat Bunce regained his own place with the satchel.

"I did not think Goldstein had it in him," laughed Grattan. "When you take his money, you touch him in a vital place. Be sensible, Goldstein," he added. "We've got too strong a grip on you."

The Jew lifted himself to the stool, bruised and battered. His head was bowed and he presented a pitiable sight.

"Now, then, Bunce," said Grattan, "look into the satchel. Let's see how much Goldstein brought with him for purposes of barter. I didn't expect to get anywhere near what the Eye of Buddha was worth, but——"

There came a pounding on the door. Instantly all were on their feet, consternation written large in every face but Grattan's and Matt's. Grattan believed that, even with intruders at hand, he was master of the situation. Matt, armed with one of the balls of Ptah, was inclined to dispute the question with him.

"Open up!" cried a voice.

There was a bar across the door and Pryne stood with one hand on the fastening to make sure it held against the attack. Grattan fluttered a hand for silence.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"Porter, the constable, from Purling, and five other men."

Grattan leaped to the table and caught up the box. Holding it in front of him, the buckthorn cane under his arm, he whispered to his confederates:

"Bunce, you and Pryne stand ready to leave the room. When I give the word, go—and go quick."

Then, lifting his voice, Grattan added:

"Open the door, Pryne, and admit the constable from Purling and five men."

Pryne bent to the bar.

"Stop!" cried Matt.

Pryne raised himself quickly. He and Bunce, Grattan and even Goldstein stared at the king of the motor boys.

Matt was standing on the bench, his right hand lifted, and one of the shimmering spheres in his hand.

"Don't come in here yet, McGlory!" shouted Matt. "I'll give the word when I want you to come. You see, Grattan," he added, "I'd a little rather have my

friends stay on the outside until they can come in here *after* I break the glass ball."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GLASS SPHERES.

Tremors shook the one-eyed sailor. The satchel quivered in his hands. Pryne was filled with consternation, and showed it as plainly as did Bunce. The full meaning of the situation had not dawned on Goldstein as yet, but the light was slowly breaking. Grattan alone, of all those confronting Matt, seemed in full possession of his wits.

"Don't throw that, don't throw that!" stuttered Bunce. "Avast, I say!"

"Where'd he get the thing?" demanded Pryne.

"Clever lad!" murmured Grattan. "You must have taken that out of the box during the disturbance caused by Goldstein. I saw you by the table, but I didn't think that was your game. Well, what are you intending to do? You have one of the balls and I have three. I don't know that I grasp your intentions."

"If these glass balls are broken," answered Matt steadily, "it means that all of us, every person in this room, will be stretched out on the floor, unconscious and helpless. Those outside will escape the effects of the narcotic, or whatever it is contained in the spheres. Those who are at the door happen to be my friends. They will wait a space; then, after the fumes have cleared out of the room, they will come in, make prisoners of you, Bunce and Pryne, save Goldstein's money for him, and recover the Eye of Buddha."

"Let me understand this fully," continued Grattan. "How do you know those outside are your friends?"

"Listen," said Matt. "McGlory!" he called.

"On deck, pard!" came the answer of the cowboy. "You're in a nice row of stumps, I must say. Who's in there with you?"

"Grattan, Bunce, Goldstein, and Pryne."

"What's the layout?"

"I'm on a bench at one side of the room with one of the glass balls. Grattan stands opposite me with three more. If I throw the ball I'm holding, then I want you fellows to wait until it's safe to come in."

"Speak to me about that!"

Grattan was thoughtful.

"How did those fellows manage to find their way here?" he asked.

"Pryne had a sack of ground feed in the back of the wagon. I slashed it with my knife and we left a plain trail."

"Jumpin' Mariar!" breathed Pryne.

"You've hit it off nicely, Pryne!" scowled Grattan. "Annabelle ought to be proud of you for that. Bunce isn't the only fool I've been tied up with, this time." He turned again to the king of the motor boys. "You're deeper than I imagined, but you're a point shy in your reasoning, son. You'll not get the Eye of Buddha by proceeding in that fashion. I was dealing generously with you when I offered to trade the ruby for Goldstein's money."

"You have no right to rob Goldstein," said Matt. "I couldn't help you without being equally guilty."

"Goot boy!" applauded Goldstein. "That's der truth."

"This diamond merchant," argued Grattan, "is only a 'fence' for stolen property. He came out here to cheat me, cheat Tsan Ti, cheat the law. We're simply beating him at his own game."

"Two wrongs never made a right," answered Matt.

"You talk foolishly. But, even though you carry out your plan, I say again *you will not get the Eye of Buddha*. That is safely hidden where it will never be found. Besides—look at Bunce."

Matt had been giving his full attention to Grattan. He now swerved his eyes toward the sailor and found a revolver leveled in his direction.

"Here's Scoldin' Sairy starin' ye in the face," said Bunce. "Don't tease us no more or she'll speak."

"The moment that ball leaves your hand, Motor Matt," declared Grattan, "Bunce will fire. The rest of us will be left merely unconscious on the floor, but you—well, you're clever enough to imagine what will happen to *you*. Are you willing to talk sense? I promise to leave the Eye of Buddha with Goldstein in exchange for his satchel of money, but we must be allowed to escape with the satchel."

"I'll not help you rob Goldstein," answered Matt.

"Ye'd rather be sent to Davy Jones' locker, I suppose?" put in Bunce. "That's where ye'll go, as quick an' sure as though ye was wrapped in canvas and thrown over the side with a hundred-pound shot at yer pins."

Goldstein, palpitating between hope and despair, watched and listened to this crossfire of threat and defiance wherein the fate of his money was at stake. A half-crazy light arose in his eyes and he seemed meditating some desperate move.

Grattan lifted his voice.

"Hello, out there! We've got Motor Matt under the point of a revolver, and if you don't retreat from the vicinity of this hut, there'll be shooting."

"Is that so, pard!" came wildly from McGlory.

"Stay where you are," cried Matt. "They won't shoot—they don't dare."

"Bunce," began Grattan, "you'd better——"

Grattan had no time to finish. With a wild yell of fury Goldstein flung himself at Grattan and seized the buckthorn cane, jerking it away and whirling it about his head.

"The buckthorn!" shouted Bunce, in more of a panic than the Jew's manœuvre seemed to call for; "he's got the buckthorn cane!"

Grattan let go of his temper for the first time, and whirled and leaped at Goldstein. The Jew struck at him viciously, the blow falling short and knocking the box of glass balls out of his hand and upon the floor.

"Mask! mask!" bellowed Grattan.

The box flew open as it fell and Matt caught a glimpse of broken glass fragments flying out of it, and of something white lifted to the faces of Grattan and Bunce. All was turmoil in the room. Grattan rushed at Goldstein and tried to recover the cane. Matt flung at him the ball—the last conscious act the king of the motor boys could remember.

The pungent odor arose to his nostrils, choking him, blinding his eyes and robbing him of his strength. He crashed down from the bench, and then a mighty hand seemed to sweep over him and drop a black pall of silence.

Motor Matt opened his eyes. He was lying out in the sun, the bare boughs of the maples over him, and McGlory kneeling at his side.

"You had a rough time of it, old pard," said McGlory, "but you didn't stop a bullet—and that's some satisfaction."

Matt groped around in his mind to pick up the trend of events. Suddenly all the details flashed through his brain.

"What became of Grattan and Bunce?" he asked, sitting up.

"They smashed through a boarded-up window, pard," replied McGlory.

"And got away?"

"Like a couple of streaks. They used our motor cycles."

"Why don't you follow them?"

"Follow them? What's the good? That happened an hour ago. The Purling constable rushed back to the village to do some telephoning, and it's barely possible the two tin horns will be corralled. I wouldn't bank on it, though. Luck hasn't been coming that way for us since we struck the Catskills."

"An hour ago!" muttered Matt, rubbing his forehead. "It seems as though all this excitement had only just happened."

"That's the way those dope balls act. I was afraid of 'em. And it wasn't so blooming pleasant for us fellows to stand out here while all that ruction was going on in the house. When One Eye and his pal crashed through the window—or maybe it wasn't a window but a hole in the wall that was just patched up with boards—we all took after 'em. Out close to the road they jumped on a couple of motor cycles—ours, by the looks of them—and were off a-smoking. When they came out of the cabin they had white things over their faces——"

"Masks," said Matt. "They had them handy. But for that you'd have found them in the cabin along with Goldstein and me. By the way, where is Goldstein?"

"We left him in the house. We weren't in so much of a hurry to bring him to his senses as we were you."

"And Pryne—what's become of him?"

"Stretched out beside the diamond buyer."

"Did you find the Eye of Buddha?"

"That's a dream, Matt. No, we didn't find it. All we found was a satchel of money—the satchel Goldstein had with him at the store in Purling."

"There were six of you—five with the constable. Where are the other four?"

"The constable miscalled the number," laughed McGlory, "so his talk would have a bigger effect. There were only four of us all told. You see, we left the driver of the car in Purling to look after Bunce when he showed up there. And he was here, all the time! Sufferin' surprises! Say, I was sure stumped when I heard the Hottentot was in that cabin."

"There were three besides you," went on Matt, persisting in his attempt to get the matter of numbers straight in his mind, "and the constable has gone to Purling. Where are the other two?"

"Here they come," and McGlory pointed to a couple of Chinamen, who at that moment emerged from the hut.

Matt stared and rubbed his eyes.

"Am I still under the influence of those glass balls?" he muttered, "or is that really Tsan Ti coming this way?"

"It's the mandarin, fast enough," chuckled McGlory, "and the chink that's with him is Sam Wing."

Observing that Matt had recovered his senses, Tsan Ti hastened forward.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EYE OF BUDDHA.

Tsan Ti was not particularly happy. He seemed pleased to meet Matt once more, but underlying this pleasure was a deep and settled melancholy.

"Greetings, astonishing friend," said the mandarin. "You have performed actions never to be forgotten; imperishable deeds which——"

"Cut out the frills, Tsan Ti," interrupted Matt, "and tell me where you went after Joe and I left you at the wrecked car."

"Sam Wing approached me while I was seeking exhaustively for the yellow cord, which I had lost and which I had the overwhelming desire to use. Sam Wing was ascending the mountain, traveling on foot, to gain the top and find me. He had a report to convey. He conveyed it. He had seen the aged mariner in Purling, and he had come at once for me. I stopped for nothing—not even to explain my absence to you who had left me in such hurry. I went with Sam Wing forthwith, and we found some one to transport us to Purling. There we watched out the night in vain, and toward morning repaired to the house of a poor person, who afforded us food and a couch on which to rest. I was resting when Sam Wing came to my side and declared there was a youth in the place who was hunting for the peace officer. I went out, hoping to meet the peace officer myself and ask for news of the sailor. Imagine my marvelous astonishment upon discovering your distinguished friend. He wanted men and he could find few, so Sam Wing and myself accompanied him. Accept my congratulations, eminent friend, upon your escape. It is with sorrow, however, that I view the flight of the sailor and that other, whom I saw, on a former momentous occasion, wearing a sun hat

with a pugree. These, I imagine, assisted their escape out of the sense-destroying fumes."

From his blouse, Tsan Ti developed two squares of white cloth with holes clipped in each to fit a pair of eyes. A strong odor of drugs accompanied the display of the masks.

"It was objects similar to these," went on the mandarin in pensive retrospection, "with which the thieves covered their faces in the temple at Honam. Pah!" and he flung the bits of cloth from him in repulsion.

"You were a long time getting here, Joe," said Matt, turning to his chum.

"I was a long time getting the constable," answered Joe, "and there wasn't another *hombre* in the town who cared to take the risk of going with me. Finally I found the constable, and then Tsan Ti and Sam Wing came our way. We started, in a rig the constable borrowed from in front of the general store."

"You picked up the trail?"

"Tell me about that!" laughed McGlory. "Sure we picked it up, pard. How could we have missed it?"

"It is unfortunate," spoke up Tsan Ti gloomily, "that the yellow cord was lost at the time the devil car took fire. It was of great importance to me as the means of carrying out the invitation given by our gracious regent. The sailor and his confederate have fled, and the Eye of Buddha has gone with them. The ten thousand demons of misfortune continue to make me feel their displeasure. There is nothing left but the happy dispatch."

"Aw, cheer up," growled McGlory. "Buy a string of laundries, somewhere, and tell your gracious regent to go hang."

"I am bound by ancient ceremony to accept and use the cord," insisted Tsan Ti, mildly but firmly.

"Well, you've got a few days yet. Don't use the cord until you have to."

"I cannot use it until I find it, solicitous friend."

"Suppose you never find it?"

"Then Kien Lung will hunt for me and give me a second."

"Sufferin' heathens!" murmured McGlory, in disgust.

Matt got to his feet.

"Let's go and see how Goldstein is getting along," he suggested. "What became of that satchel, Joe?"

"We left it in the house—thought that was the safest place for it."

"We'll have to take care of that. It contains the money Goldstein brought to use in buying the Eye of Buddha."

Together Matt, McGlory, Tsan Ti and Sam Wing made their way back to the hut. Just as they reached the door Goldstein sprang to his feet, the buckthorn cane in his hand.

"Look at him!" exclaimed McGlory. "He's still locoed, Matt, and in about the same state of mind you and I were when we repaired that bursted tire, rode to the Mountain House, and went to sleep in the hammocks."

The diamond merchant's face was full of anger and apprehension. His clouded faculties were still possessed of the notion, it seemed, that his satchel of money continued to be the object of Grattan's designs.

Jumping at the log wall, Goldstein struck a terrific blow with the head of the cane.

"I hope he keeps hammering the wall," breathed the cowboy. "If he ever came at one of us like that we'd have to take him down and lash his hands and feet. Gee, but he's vicious."

Again and again Goldstein struck the logs with the cane. At last the head of the cane snapped and flew into fragments, and a glittering object flashed toward the door, struck Sam Wing and dropped downward. A gleam of sun caught the object, and it glowed like a huge drop of blood.

A chattering screech went up from Tsan Ti, and forthwith he slumped to his knees and picked the object up in his trembling hands.

Startled Chinese words came from Sam Wing; the mandarin answered, and there followed a frantic give and take of native gibberish, mostly whoops, grunts and falling inflections.

"Sufferin' gold mines!" cried McGlory. "Say, pard, is that red thing the Eye of Buddha?"

"It must be," answered Matt excitedly, hurrying into the room and picking up the cane and some of the fragments of the head. "Great spark plugs!" he exclaimed, examining the pieces.

"What do you make out, pard?" demanded McGlory.

"Why," went on Matt, "the head of the cane was hollow, *and the ruby was concealed in it!*"

"No!"

"Fact! Here, look for yourself. I wondered why Grattan was so careful of that cane. The last thing I remember was seeing him rush at Goldstein and try to get the cane away from him. Goldstein had grabbed the stick and had knocked the box of glass balls out of Grattan's hand with it. Of course, at the time Grattan tried to get the stick back, the balls were spilling their knock-out fumes all over the room, and he couldn't waste much time getting into his mask and lighting out. He had to leave the cane behind—it was either that or be laid out by the glass balls and captured. Perhaps he thought

we'd never find out the ruby was in the cane and that he could come back later and recover it."

"Goldstein has smashed the mystery!" jubilated McGlory, "and when he comes to he won't know a thing about it."

Matt was dazed, and the two excited Chinamen were still gabbling like a couple of frantic ducks; McGlory was walking around, rubbing his eyes, and Goldstein was sitting on the stool undergoing the last stage of his awakening.

"What's der matter?" inquired the diamond broker. "Where is—what is—— Ach, der satchel, der satchel!"

His eyes had alighted on the grip, and he shot off the stool and gathered up the precious object. His first move was to open it and make sure of the contents.

"Where is Grattan?" he asked, with a sudden tremor. "Where is der feller that wanted to steal my money?"

"You don't have to fret about him any more," said McGlory. "He's lit out—in something of a hurry. I don't reckon he'll be back."

"What a lucky escape, what a lucky escape!" chanted Goldstein; "mein gracious, what a lucky escape!"

Matt, observing that Tsan Ti and Sam Wing were not yet done with their wild felicitations, strolled around the room. He saw the place where Bunce and Grattan had crashed through the wall. Fire, at some time or other when the sugar makers were boiling their sap, had eaten into the logs, leaving a large hole which had been covered with boards. Grattan and Bunce, knowing about the weak spot in the wall, had chose to get out of the cabin in that way rather than by attempting to pass through the door.

While Matt was looking at the breach in the timbers, he heard a series of shouts from the Chinamen. A glance in their direction gave him a fleeting glimpse of Pryne, forcing his way through the door and over the heads of Tsan Ti and Sam Wing.

"That tinhorn's getting away!" shouted McGlory.

He would have chased after Pryne had Matt not gripped him by the shoulder and held him back.

"Let the fellow go," said Matt. "He was roped into the game by Grattan, and was only a tool, at the most. We've recovered the Eye of Buddha, and have saved Goldstein's money for him, so I guess we're doing well enough."

The rough way the Chinamen had been treated by Pryne appeared to have made them remember that there were others in the cabin besides themselves.

Tsan Ti got up, balanced the ruby on the palm of his hand, and stepped toward Matt, as happy a mandarin as could be found, in China or out of it.

"See, estimable and glorious friend," he cried. "This is the Eye of Buddha, which caused me so much misfortune and came near to causing my death. It has been found, and but for you it would have been lost to me forever. My life is yours, illustrious one, my fortune, my lands—everything I own!"

Matt paid little heed to the mandarin's rapturous talk. His eyes were on the ruby, which was as large as a small hen's egg and of the true pigeon's blood color. Its flashing beauty was marvelous to behold.

"Out of my goodness of heart," went on the mandarin, "and from no desire to insult, believe me, I shall present my eminent friend with a thousand dollars and his expenses. Is it well, excellent one?"

"Quite well, thank you," laughed McGlory, answering for his chum. "Here, Tsan, take this and send it back to your gracious regent. Tell him to use it on

himself, and oblige."

With that, the cowboy laid the ominous yellow cord across the mandarin's shoulders.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BROKEN HOODOO.

The constable, in leaving the sugar camp for Purling to do his telephoning, had taken his own rig. Having finished his work in Purling, he made his return journey to the sugar camp in the automobile which Matt and McGlory had hired. A few words were enough to convince the driver of the car that it was useless for him to wait at the general store for the one-eyed sailor.

The automobile could not ascend the rough hill road, but waited at the foot of the slope while the constable climbed to the sugar camp and informed those there that a conveyance was ready to take them wherever they wanted to go.

Pryne having suddenly recovered and bolted, only Matt, McGlory, Goldstein, and the two Chinamen were in the hut. Without loss of time they accompanied the constable down the long wooded slope.

"What are the prospects for capturing Bunce and Grattan, officer?" inquired Matt, while they were slipping toward the foot of the hill.

"Mighty poor," answered the constable, "if you want me to give it to you straight. But I've done everythin' I could. There ain't any telegraft line to Purling, so I had to telephone my message to Cairo. They're pretty much all over the hills by now."

"Then what makes you think Bunce and Grattan will get away?"

"Why, they'll be goin' so tarnation fast on them pesky machines there won't be any constable in the hills with an eye quick enough to recognize 'em from the description. Anyhow, what do you care? The fat Chinaman's

happy, an' the Jew's so glad he walks lop-sided. What is it to you whether them hoodlums git away or not?"

"Oh, hear him!" muttered McGlory. "It means three hundred cold, hard plunks to us, constable. The two pesky machines that took those tin horns away have to be paid for by Motor Matt and Pard McGlory."

"Do tell!"

"If you hated to hear it as bad as I hate to tell it you wouldn't ask me to repeat."

"Noble sir," spoke up Tsan Ti, "you and your worshipful friend shall not be out a single tael. I, whom you have benefited, will pay for the go-devil machines. That, if you will allow me, comes in as part of your expenses."

"Now, by heck," said the constable, "that's what I call doin' the han'some thing. I've put in a leetle time myself, to-day," he added, "an' I cal-late I'm out nigh onto ten dollars. But I helped do some good, an' that's enough fer me."

"Here, exalted sir," observed the mandarin, and dropped a twenty-dollar gold piece into the constable's palm.

"I don't believe I got any change," said the officer.

"No change would be acceptable to me," answered Tsan Ti, with dignity.

"Waal, now, ain't I tickled? There's a dress in that fer S'manthy an' the kids. 'Bliged to ye."

"The old boy's beginning to get generous, Matt," whispered McGlory. "Maybe, after all, he really intends to fork over that thousand and expenses."

"Of course he does," said Matt.

When they reached the automobile, all six of them crowded into the car. Seven passengers—counting the driver—made tight squeezing in accommodations built for five, but Goldstein and the constable were dropped at Purling, and comfort followed those who remained, thereon.

Goldstein, following his burst of ecstasy over the recovery of the satchel, had relapsed into a subdued condition. Very likely he realized that he was under something of a cloud, inasmuch as he had come to Purling to treat with a thief for the loot of a magnificent haul. Goldstein remembered that Grattan had not been at all backward in giving Motor Matt the details of everything connected with the Eye of Buddha, and the reflections of the diamond broker could not have been at all comfortable or reassuring.

Matt allowed the Jew to go his way without a rebuke. He felt that the man had been punished enough; and, besides, he was the cause of their discovering the place where the ruby had been concealed. But for Goldstein, the Eye of Buddha might never have been located.

On the way to Catskill from Purling, Matt gave an account of what had taken place in the old sugar camp. Grattan had been at considerable pains to explain many things that had been dark to Matt and his friends, and the king of the motor boys passed along the explanation.

The history of the Egyptian balls was particularly interesting to Tsan Ti, no less than other details connected with the robbery; and the way Bunce had played tag up and down the mountainside with Matt and McGlory held a deep fascination for the cowboy.

"Taking this little fracas by and large," observed McGlory, when Matt had finished, "I think it's about the most novel piece of business I ever had anything to do with. It began with a lot of 'con' paper talk shoved at Pard Matt by Tsan Ti, and from the moment we met up with the mandarin there's been nothing to it but excitement, and a little uncertainty as to just where the lightning was going to strike next."

"You two illustrious young men," said Tsan Ti gravely, "have laid me under staggering obligations. Money may pay you for your loss of time, but nothing except my gratitude can requite you for the excellence of your service. You will hear from me through Sam Wing to-morrow."

The boys got out of the automobile at the hotel, and Matt had the car take Tsan Ti and Sam Wing up the mountain to the Kaaterskill.

"They're a pair of pretty good chinks, after all," said McGlory, "and I'm glad to think I had a little something to do with keeping the yellow cord from getting in its work on Tsan Ti."

On the following day, Tsan Ti sent Sam Wing to Catskill with a heavy canvas bag.

"Me blingee flom Tsan Ti," explained Sam Wing. "Him takee choo-choo tlain fol San Flisco, bymby ketchee boat fol China. Heap happy."

"He has a right to be happy," said McGlory.

"How much did he have to put up for that wrecked motor car, Sam?" asked Matt.

"Twenty-fi' hunnerd dol'."

"He went and stung him!" whooped McGlory. "The old robber."

"No makee hurt. Twenty-fi' hunnerd dol' all same Tsan Ti likee twenty-fi' cent to me. Him plenty lichee man."

When Sam Wing went away, Matt and McGlory dumped the contents of the canvas sack out on the table. The money was all in gold, and totaled two thousand dollars, even.

"He figured out expenses at a thousand dollars," remarked the cowboy. "They're 'way inside that figure."

"He's the sort of fellow, Joe," said Matt, "who'd rather pay a man ten dollars when he only owed him five, than five when he owed ten."

"Sure! He's the clear quill, but he sure had me guessing, the way he jumped around. I'll bet he connected with more good, hard jolts on this trip to America than he ever encountered in his life before."

"We came pretty near it, ourselves," laughed Matt. "I can't remember that I ever had a more violent time."

"It was some strenuous, and that's a fact. If you live a hundred years, pard, and drive automobiles all the while, you'll never scrape closer to kingdom come, and miss it, than you did when we came down the mountainside with the mandarin at the steering wheel."

"I wouldn't go through that experience again for ten times the amount of money there was in that bag."

"I wouldn't, either—not for the Eye of Buddha. There's no easy money in turning a trick for Tsan Ti. I reckon we earned all we got."

THE END.

THE NEXT NUMBER (31) WILL CONTAIN

Motor Matt's Mariner;

OR,

FILLING THE BILL FOR BUNCE.

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A REAL PIRATE.

"At the time I commenced following the sea," said old Captain Gifford, in relating a thrilling experience of his early life, "there were pirates all about the West Indies, and the dread of them was always uppermost in a sailor's thoughts. We didn't mind the yellow fever. When a man died with that, he died—it was a visitation of Providence, and his fate was to be thought upon calmly and sorrowfully; there was no horror in the reflection. But to be murdered—murdered upon the high seas—that was a thing which it made one sick to think of.

"Resistance on the part of a ship's crew, if unsuccessful, was certain death—and often, too, in the most cruel form; for the revengeful, drunken pirates, with their worst passions aroused by the conflict, would in such a case take delight in torturing their victims. And even where no opposition had been attempted, the plea that 'dead men tell no tales' was generally sufficient to insure the massacre of all on board.

"So you see it was about as long as it was broad. There was very little encouragement to surrender. It was simply a question as to whether one would die fighting like a lion or be butchered on the deck like a sheep.

"Of course there were exceptions; but these were not frequent enough to inspire much hope in the event of capture. Slaughter was the rule, and if not committed in every instance, the fortunate ones might thank their stars.

"In those days we used to hear dreadful stories of such tragedies. Sometimes these would come to light through the confessions of condemned pirates; while in other cases a single survivor of some hapless crew of a merchantman would relate the tale of the capture and death of his

shipmates—he himself having been spared through some freak of the miscreants, perhaps to serve on board their vessel.

"I commenced following the sea at the age of fifteen, making my first voyage in the brig *Agenora*, Captain Christopher Allen, bound to Trinidad de Cuba. In all there were nine persons belonging to her, being the captain, the two mates, and the cook, with five hands before the mast, counting a son of Captain Allen and myself. But, of course, I did not amount to much at that time.

"Young Argo Allen was seventeen, so that he had the advantage of me by two years, besides having made one voyage to the West Indies. He was one of the best fellows that ever lived; and having learned on his first voyage to 'hand, reef, and steer' after a fashion, he was always ready to assist me to the extent of his knowledge. Indeed, I think one young sailor generally feels a sort of pride in helping another who knows less than himself.

"We had a long passage out, with calms and head winds, and Argo and I talked much of pirates. He told me how scared he had been upon his former voyage, when the vessel was overtaken by a low, black schooner, which, upon coming up with her, sailed past within a cable's length, with a crew of fifty or sixty horrible-looking wretches staring at the brig in perfect silence.

"'After getting a little ahead,' said Argo, 'she tacked and came back. My hair rose right up then—it fairly lifted my hat! But she simply repassed us on the other side, and went off about her business.'

"'How do you account for it all?' I asked.

"'Oh, that's easy enough,' he replied. 'We were outward bound, with a cargo of New England produce, and the pirates knew that we were not likely to have money on board. This was all that saved us; but I wouldn't be so scared again for the price of the brig!'

"So Argo Allen had seen a real pirate, and it actually made me look up to him with a kind of admiring awe, not that I had any desire to meet with a like experience; but then it must, I thought, have been so thrilling—such a thing to think of and to tell of!

"On arriving at Trinidad, we disposed of our cargo at a very high price; while, on the other hand, our return invoice of molasses was purchased at an unusually low figure; so that, after loading for home, Captain Allen found that he had, above all expenses, a good three thousand dollars in doubloons.

"Meanwhile Argo and I were greatly pleased at meeting with two of our townspeople, a Mr. and Mrs. Howard; and it delighted us still more to learn that they were to take passage with us for the North. They had been sojourning in Cuba for a number of months, but were now anxious to go home, as the yellow fever season had arrived and there were already many cases of it in the city.

"Although Captain Allen was in high spirits at having made such a profitable voyage, he felt some uneasiness at the idea of sailing with so much money on board. The pirates, he said, had their spies in all the Cuban ports, and these secret agents, by watching the run of trade, could easily determine what vessels were likely to offer the most tempting booty.

"At length, all being ready, and Mr. and Mrs. Howard coming off to us, we hove up our anchor and made sail. The greatest danger, Captain Allen believed, would be close off the port, and so he had given out that we should probably remain three or four days longer. It may have been this which saved us from being molested at the start, and I think it was.

"But now an unexpected misfortune came upon us. We sailed with the land breeze very early in the morning, and while we were getting under way one of our crew was taken down with the yellow fever. We were only a few miles clear of the land when another was attacked in the same manner, and

before night the cook and second mate also took to their berths. We kept on, however, and indeed the course of the wind would have prevented us from returning had we thought of doing so.

"There remained, capable of doing duty, only the captain and chief mate, one old seaman, Argo, and myself; but Captain Allen said that should no more of us be disabled, the vessel could still be managed. As a last resort, he added, he might put into Havana or Key West.

"On the second day we passed that famous resort of the West Indian pirates, the Isle of Pines. The *Agenora* gave it a wide berth, I assure you; but our hearts were in our throats for the whole fifty miles of its coast line. It seemed as if the breeze were all the time threatening to die out and leave us becalmed there. However, we ran the gantlet in safety, and continued our course toward Cape St. Antonio, the most western point of Cuba.

"During the following night, the chief mate and the remaining seaman were both stricken with the fever, leaving only the captain and us two boys, together with our passenger, Mr. Howard, to handle the brig, with six dreadfully sick people on board.

"This was a sad state of things; but the breeze was bright and fair, and we hoped to double Cape St. Antonio the next day, thus getting to the northward of Cuba, after which it would be easy to reach Havana.

"On that day, however, it fell entirely calm, with a dense fog covering the sea, so that the vessel lay idle, heading by turns all around the compass.

"We had by this time nearly come up with the cape, and it was a bad place to meet with a calm, for this headland was a notorious piratical rendezvous, almost as much so as the Isle of Pines. However, if we must lie helpless, the fog would be in our favor, the captain said.

"In the meantime Mrs. Howard showed herself an extraordinary woman. She was only twenty-four years old—a mere girl, as it were, and a very

beautiful one—but she seemed as if she knew just what to do and how to do it. She cooked for us who were well, and, in spite of her husband's remonstrances, braved all the danger of attending upon the sick, like a veritable Florence Nightingale.

"After lasting for about twenty-four hours the fog disappeared and a light breeze sprang up. A current had taken us along for some miles, and we were directly off Cape St. Antonio.

"At first no water craft of any description was to be seen, but presently we were startled at perceiving a small sloop-rigged vessel putting out from the land and making directly toward us. That she must be a pirate was beyond all question, as no other vessel would have been hiding in such a place.

"Looking through his glass, the captain saw that, in addition to her sails, she had out a number of long sweeps, or oars, and this at once told us that there was no possibility of escaping from her with the faint breeze which we had.

"The *Agenora* carried two six-pounders and a good supply of small arms, yet, with only four of us to handle them, they offered but a forlorn hope against thirty or forty men, with probably a heavy pivot gun and other cannon. Nevertheless, there was but one thing to do, and that was to fight to the death if necessary.

"'My poor wife!' we heard Mr. Howard say to the captain; 'she shall never fall into the hands of those wretches while I have a single breath remaining.'

"Captain Allen was pale, but very cool. He and Mr. Howard loaded the six-pounders, while we boys attended the muskets, putting heavy charges into all of them.

"In a short time we were able to count the sweeps which the sloop had out. They were fourteen in number—seven on a side, with two men at each. This made twenty-eight men, besides the fellow at the tiller and six or seven

others; so that there were at least thirty-five of them. The only cannon that we could see was one mounted amidships, and no doubt on a pivot.

"As they got nearer we brought the *Agenora* around so that both the six-pounders would bear upon them, and then Captain Allen sighted one of the guns, while Mr. Howard stood by with a glowing portfire, ready to clap it upon the priming at the word.

"'Now,' said the captain presently, 'let it go!'

"Instantly there was a deafening bang! and the recoil of the gun fairly shook the brig. How we watched for the result! Skip, skip, skip, went the shot from wave to wave, close to the sloop, yet without touching her.

"Almost before we could speak or think, a sheet of smoke burst from the pirate vessel, and 'pat, pat, pat,' right on board of us, came a charge of grape shot, and a twelve-pound ball—as we found afterward it must have been, from the hole it made in our bulwarks.

"There was no time to lose, and our second cannon was fired as quickly as possible; but its contents missed the pirate, though they struck near enough to throw a shower of spray upon her deck.

"Again the miscreants fired in return, and redoubled their labor at the sweeps. The breeze was at last wholly gone, so that they had to depend entirely upon their strength of muscle, but of this they had enough and to spare.

"Argo and myself now opened fire with the muskets—'bang, bang, bang!' but I don't think we hit a single one of the villains. We saw them loading their big gun for a third shot, and it seemed as if, at such short range, they must tear us all to pieces. But Captain Allen and Mr. Howard were also loading—cramming one of the six-pounders to the muzzle with grape and cannon balls.

"The pirates were just ready to fire as the captain ranged along his gun.

"Quick, Mr. Howard!" he cried. "Touch her off!"

"The report rang through our ears, and we could have shouted as we saw the effect. The sloop's long gun was tumbled over, and the men who managed it strewn mangled upon the deck. A number of the heavy sweeps dropped from the hands that held them, or were sent whirling into the air. I think this one discharge must have killed more than a dozen men.

"For a few moments the victory appeared to be won; but just then the *Agenora* swung around in such a manner that neither of the cannons could be made to bear upon the enemy. The pirates saw our dilemma, and a few powerful strokes of their sweeps brought them right under our bow.

"We ran forward to prevent them from boarding, but they swarmed over the bowsprit and head rail, cutlass in hand, till it was plain that two men and two boys were to be no match for such a number of desperate villains. In spite of all we could do, they were in a fair way to make short work with us, when on a sudden the scene was changed.

"Mrs. Howard had anticipated such an emergency from the very first, and now, with a ladle in one hand and a kettle of boiling hot tar in the other, she ran to our relief.

"The tar in such a state could be dipped up as easily as water, and in a quarter of a minute all the headmost pirates had got it full in their faces. Filling their eyes and mouths, or running down their half-naked breasts, it must have put them in great agony. They went tumbling back upon those behind them, and as we quickly followed up our advantage, the deck was almost instantly cleared.

"In a few minutes the sloop was making all possible speed away from us, but she had out only six sweeps instead of the fourteen with which she had commenced the chase.

"All of us except Mrs. Howard had been more or less wounded, so that we did not attempt to molest the pirates as they retreated; while on their part, as the cannon we had knocked over for them was their only one, they could not fire upon us. I think they must have had nearly twenty men killed or disabled, to say nothing of those who were scalded by the hot tar.

"I shall never forget how carefully Mrs. Howard bound up the ugly cuts in our arms. She seemed to know everything, just like one's own mother—and yet she was such a young woman!

"We got a breeze soon after the fight was over, and were thankful for it, too, as we did not know how many more pirates there might be in the neighborhood. It took us around Cape St. Antonio, and two days later we arrived at Key West, where we were put into quarantine.

"Of our yellow-fever patients, two died just as we dropped anchor, but the remaining four soon after began to improve and finally recovered. We lay in quarantine for a number of weeks, and then, with the vessel thoroughly fumigated, were permitted to sail for home.

"Upon our arrival there, the good old *Agenora* became an object of much curiosity, while as to Mrs. Howard, she was visited by a host of friends, anxious to hear the story of our peril from her own lips.

"I am sometimes asked if in all my seafaring life it was ever my fortune to meet with a real pirate—one whom I knew to be such. To that question I think myself justified in saying 'yes'—and further, that it was an experience which I never desired to repeat."

SOME QUEER PHILIPPINE CUSTOMS.

The occurrence of a death in a Filipino family in Bulacan is the signal for an immediate celebration. "Our brother has gone to a happy land, and we must rejoice," they say. Relatives and friends are invited to come, and an orchestra is summoned. Then the dancing and feasting begin, and continue until the time of the funeral, which in this climate takes place within twenty-four hours.

Those who have the means buy a black cloth-covered casket ornamented with spangles and bows of bright blue ribbon. The poor rent the "town coffin," a plain tin box, evidently designed for those of medium stature, for a year or two ago, in a funeral procession, the feet of the deceased, incased in bright blue plush chinelas, were seen sticking out at one end.

The orchestra heads the procession through the streets, usually playing some lively air learned from the American soldiers. The popular funeral music is "A Hot Time," and it keeps the procession moving at a brisk pace.

Thursday is the favorite day for weddings in Bulacan, as it is "bargain day" in the matrimonial market. On Thursdays the priest marries many couples at a time, and consequently at less expense to each couple. Four o'clock in the morning is the favorite hour. Following the ceremony the newly married pair return to the bride's home, where dancing and feasting ensue till sundown.

A bride to whose wedding feast some Americans were invited had a romantic prelude to her nuptials. The parents of the bride were strenuously opposed to the match, owing to a strong disinclination on the part of the groom to do any sort of labor. So Anastasia was sent up into the mountains to visit among relatives, and traces of her whereabouts were carefully concealed from Felicidad, the groom elect.

But Felicidad, although too indolent to support his prospective bride, did not purpose that another should win her, so he summoned several faithful friends to his aid and began an active search. His devotion was rewarded with success, and three weeks later Felicidad returned in triumph, with radiant Anastasia borne aloft on the shoulders of two of his trusty friends.

The following Thursday, in company with fifteen other happy couples, they were married.

HIGH LEAPS BY DEER.

Mr. Gordon Boles, a sportsman who has hunted all over the world, has recorded some remarkable leaps taken by deer when pursued. His observations have been chiefly in his native district, Exmoor, the land of "Lorna Doone," in India, and in Northwestern Canada. Uncontrollable fear and partial blindness caused by long pursuit, he gives as reasons for deer taking leaps which usually end in death. Once, while hunting with the Devon and Somerset stag hounds, he saw a hind leap 300 feet from a cliff to the seashore. She was dashed to pieces. In the excitement of the chase one of the hounds followed her.

On another occasion a stag made a bold burst for the open, going straight for the sea. He came to the edge of a cliff, some hundreds of feet above the beach, and then dashed restlessly backward and forward, as if seeking a path to descend.

He either missed his footing or jumped, and when the hunters came up he was seen below, a shattered mass, with the horns broken into small pieces. Mr. Boles is inclined to think that the stag committed suicide deliberately.

Another deer, which made the leap at about the same place, landed safely and swam out to sea. Men pursued him in a boat and killed him.

In India Mr. Boles wounded a sambur, which resembles somewhat the common deer. The sambur showed fight on a narrow path overhanging a precipice. Mr. Boles fired again, but in his excitement aimed too low, the ball passing beneath the deer and striking the ground just back of his hind legs. The deer turned and deliberately leaped over the height.

A fine buck he wounded in Northwestern Canada, when pursued by the dog, jumped from a height of 100 feet into a shallow stream and broke his neck.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

Images may be clicked to view larger versions.

Page 6, changed "consarnin 'the" to "consarnin' the".

Page 9, removed unnecessary quote before "Tsan Ti turned sidewise."

Page 18, corrected "boy's" to "boys'" in "king of the motor boys'."

Page 24, removed unnecessary quote after "revolver leveled in his direction."

Page 29, corrected double to single quote before "dead men tell no tales."

Page 30, corrected typo Angenora in "The *Agenora* carried two six-pounders".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S
MANDARIN; OR, TURNING A TRICK FOR TSAN TI ***

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