

## THE POT OF FRIGHTFUL DOOM.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE CAT AND THE CHERUB," "THE GENTLEMAN IN THE BARREL," ETC.



HE blithesome air of «Tsim-tsam-chong» was issuing forth from the little chamber in Beverly Place when a sudden tempestuous rattling came at the door, and Dr. Wing Shee stilled his mandolin.

«They are going to finish my brother Chow!» wept the youth Sum Ah. «The head of the Sing Song Tong just gave me a scroll,—and a kick-push too,—and it says they have put Chow in chains in a dungeon, with nothing but foreign devils' bread! And the man who tries to rescue him they swear to roll in the cask-with-red-hot-spikes; and oh, most wonderful, ancient, wise physician, won't you try?»

Among the screens and china at Sum Chow's curio shop the doctor found none but the helper Yang. Chow was gone. Sum Fay, the diminutive wife of Sum Chow, heard, and put down her tiny girl Sum Oo, and came out with a sinking heart beneath her silken tunic. The doctor told her that Chow was his friend, and spoke of the duty Confucius demanded of friendship, and said that Sum Chow was surely beloved of the gods and so could not die young. Then he left her mute and blank. But he knew how fiercely the Sing Song Tong had scowled at Chow for years, because of Chow's buoyant career and because he would not join them. They were a treacherous secret society, driving women slaves, and seeking the despotism of Chinatown. A day ago their hatchet-men had eased a grudge against a poor old maker of pipe-bowl holes, and had clapped a plaster over his mouth, and beaten his back with his own bamboo, till his face was the color of clay, before Sum Chow had broken one of their heads and driven them away from their aged victim. Chow's present plight was the Sing Song Tong's reply; and now the doctor read the omen of three spots which he had shown Sum Chow the night before—spots which had been nine days on the doctor's thumb-nail. As the little old wise man pushed along the crowded streets, he strove to connect with all this the recent strange recurrence of the uninterpretable number one and a half, which had lately appeared in all his occult findings.

Sum Fay had gone with a shudder to the

dusty shrine, and had lighted redolent joss-sticks, and burned soul-money for Chow's spiritual costs, in case they had killed him. She had been a mission Christian girl, and had learned but little of the Taoist faith; for all of Chow's religion was integrity and the love of family. But now, in her first disaster, her native promptings conquered; and she prayed to her tinsel gods with her baby in her arms. The tiny Sum Oo cooed and smilingly clutched at her mother's chin. But a salt tear suddenly dropped from Sum Fay's cheek into the baby girl's bright eye, and gave her a fright, and made her weep bitterly with her mother.

The doctor believed that if Sum Chow survived, he was stalled in the Ok Hut private hospital, which stood on a narrow street with evil history, called Hatchet Run. The rascal Ok Hut was one of the Sing Song Tong, and he had in his building a secret cell which was entered through a trap in the garret above the sick wards, and aired through a single opening made by omitting a brick from the very deep wall. To try an approach to this cell by way of Ok Hut's garret would be futile, but Dr. Wing Shee knew how to use the hole in the wall. When, at evening, the learned doctor arrived at Hatchet Run, his sleeves concealed many appropriate articles appertaining to his plan. The doctor mounted to the room of his great fat friend Pow Len, who dealt in tooth-picks made from the whiskers of sea-lions, and whose heart the doctor trusted more than his tongue.

«Ah!» said Pow Len. «It is he whose skill once saved me from death of a twisted gullet. Can I serve him?»

«It was not a twisted gullet,» corrected the doctor, assuming a heavy professional air. «Your complaint was really contempt-of-the-spleen. My noble toothpick friend, I wish to borrow your excellent coffin, not for a funeral ceremony, but to sit in it here and meditate. For my brain is heavy with invention.»

«Nothing new, I hope?» said the orthodox Pow Len, surveying the handsome casket which admiring compatriots had given him. It stood as high as an old-time eight-day clock.

«Consider a friend with confidence,» quoted the doctor. «My invention is classic, now remaining but of fragmentary record, but first conceived ten centuries and three little years ago by the superhuman Tut Tut, to whom the thought shot down in a two-colored lightning stroke. It is the sky-flying machine.»

«Ah!» exclaimed the vast Pow Len. «With that I could sail like a swallow to the Golden Gate, and beard the drowsy seals by night. Enormous profits—the life of a bird—dear me!»

«Precisely,» said the doctor—«the life of the airy dodo. Now, in my experience, sir, nothing has proved so stimulating to precision of thought as sedentary solitude spent continuously in commodious coffins. Therefore I request your honorable death-chest.»

Thus, after Pow Len, who listened with hanging lip, had reverently poured tea for the wonderful wise man, and, dreaming of innumerable toothpicks for the plucking, had agreed, under promise of secrecy, to exchange quarters with him until either the flying-machine was produced or suitable coffin rent forthcoming, Pow Len withdrew.

The doctor quickly locked the door, and then, with his wonted deftness, fitted the coffin-lid with hinges and a hook. In a little while he had screwed the box upright against the wall, and had blown out the light and fastened himself in what had been built for a silent man. The coffin was facing in the direction of the hospital. He emptied his sleeves, and hung a tiny peanut-oil lamp above his head, and by its glimmer began to drive an auger through the back of the coffin and through the unfinished sheathing of the house to the open air.

«Sum Chow would be such a loss,» thought the doctor, as he worked in bare yellow arms, with his cue coiled around his neck, «that I cannot think the omens meant it. What pleasant hours we have passed learning the 'Melican tongue! Chow should have been a scholar; for the grace with which he handles, even in 'Melican script, such words as (cat) and (dok) and (pik) and (cow,) and a hundred others I forget, is marvelous. I do not think I could ever remember the complicated marks for (man) and (woo-man,) or (poy) and (kull) long enough to come from Sum Chow's and write them correctly in my room in Beverly Place, unless I sacrificed my dignity and ran. All this 'Melican writing looks alike.»

An electric light high above a neighboring street shone on the hospital. Through the

two auger-holes he could see the cell port left by the missing brick in the wall across the street. Now in one of the holes he fitted a bamboo tube, through which he intended to blow a message by way of the port to whomsoever should languish in the cell; and he hoped to reach Sum Chow. There were hours to pass before the street would be vacant, and Wing Shee had allotted the time to the composition of a message in verse, which to all but Chow would be gibberish. The doctor's only essay with a pen had left him content to express the English sounds as best he could with brush and Chinese characters. That was difficult when he met distinctions foreign to the older tongue; yet Chow could almost always decipher the doctor's scrolls. As when, in the beginning, Dr. Wing had written the Chinese signs for the sounds: «Wun pik kee foo lee too mut chee tau kee in hee sat: say iss no pik kee Chaw shee!» and Chow had readily translated these into «business» English as: «One piggee foolee too muchee talkee in his hat: say is no piggee jossee!» and recognized in this a phrase which had escaped from the mission night-school copy-book, and which, by disaster to the word «heart,» had been changed from «The fool hath said in his heart» to «A big fool talked too much in his hat.»

So the doctor made himself warm with the ardor of rhyming. Thus, while not many blocks away the little wife Sum Fay lay awake with the tiny Sum Oo asleep on her breast, and while the mother's melting eyes kept forming images of her husband in the dark, and she sighed and sobbed between hope and wretched fear, the doctor had even forgotten that he was sitting in a coffin, with the hour well past midnight, and the evidence of fiddle and pipe and maudlin festivity lessening in that neighborhood, and perhaps Sum Chow in extreme torture either in the hospital or in some place unknown. And when, at length, Sum Fay had fallen asleep with exhaustion, and the tiny Sum.Oo heaved on the mother's breast like a voyager on a miniature sea, three long hours had passed, and the learned Dr. Wing Shee had finished the following English poem:

How mun nee mah kee wah sun mai tum?  
How mun nee tay 'ko ah lee mah kee cum?  
You mak hop pee tem; yaw fah mee lee  
Ah too mut chee wai tai; no kun shee!  
You no me?

«And to think,» sighed the doctor, «that, instead of staying by literature, I stamped off to the wars! Instead of a leg-mender I

might have been a laureate. (Ah too mut chee wai tai; no kun shee!) Ah, Lao-Tse, but there 's inspiration in this box!)

He softly unlocked the lid, and came out to scan the street through Pow's dilapidated blinds. For the moment there was no one in sight. Quickly he shut himself in again. A match was ready with its end embedded in putty so that the phosphorus was barely exposed. The putty fitted the bamboo tube, and when he sent this missile flying across the narrow street, propelled from the tube by an explosion of his breath, it disappeared within the hospital, through the port, without a sound. The flying-machine was completed.

SUM CHOW was in the hospital. He had been lured there by one to whom once he had given alms. The wretch had watched in the crowded thoroughfare for a man of distinguished dignity, wearing a rich blue tunic with bright gilt button-balls, and light blue silken trousers wrapped at the ankles. Sum Chow liked snowy linen stockings and shoes embroidered in silver; his long cue shone with careful braiding, and his head and face were always shaved close in Chinese elegance. He hardly betrayed the power of attack which had made his envied success. That day he had gone to Hatchet Run to pay for a golden love-bangle for littlest Oo. The appointed traitor had begged a hearing in the hospital entry, and there six brutal Sing Song hatchet-men had soon prevailed over Chow's single strength. He had battered two of them, but the others had thrust him into a big jute bag, and when they carried him wriggling through the wards and up the garret ladder, the patients thought it merely a crazy opium-fiend. The hatchet-men had emptied the bag through the trap to the brick floor, and Chow had been stunned, and had wakened to find himself cold and stiff in semi-darkness, at first he knew not where. He had put his mouth to the hole in the wall and called for help in all the languages he knew, but no one had heard him. He had lain aching for hours afterward, during which Ok Hut's menial had lowered a bowl of water and some American bread. These he had avoided with fear; and so hunger sharpened, and he sternly set his face to the fate which he felt was preparing. He wondered if his shade could protect his little wife and his littlest Oo, or if death was even harsh in that. Midnight found him cramped and bowed. The strange thing which suddenly struck the inner wall, and fell a-flame at his side, was startling even to Chow.

It smoldered and died. In a moment another missile, with more wood exposed to the flame, struck and ignited. He seized it, and it burned brightly long enough for him to notice that immediately following it a waxen taper, tipped with its balancing putty ball, had shot through the air port, long, white, and unmistakable. He lighted it, and the cell port appeared from without to be faintly illumined. When his eyes had changed to meet the light, the wondering Chow picked up a scroll, and instantly recognized the brush-work of the doctor. He read:

How many markee was on my thumb?  
How many days 'go allee markee come?  
You make happy time; your family  
Are too muchee wet-eyed; no can see!  
You know me?

He bounded into life, and waved the taper past the port three times for the spots the doctor had shown him the night before, and then, after a pause, nine times for the days they had stayed on the thumb nail. So that Chow, drawing on a thread that flew in attached to a pebble, was not surprised to find one end of a Chinese telephone, and then to hear the voice of his friend:

«Worship the gods for this preservation, hearty brother,» it whispered. «Your little Fay and little Oo and the stripling all fare well, though wet-eyed that you stay away; and be felicitated on their mighty love. Now first I will shoot you a dinner of dried ducks' hearts in tiny gelatin capsules—those capsules which the 'Melicans use to hide the taste of their grimacing drug *kwain-nai-in*, but which were long conceived before the year of their principal joss by one Muk Ah Muk, who confined in them the bubblesome spirits he extracted from his ten meek wives.»

So that as he fell asleep, bodily contented and hopeful for the morrow, Sum Chow murmured for the tenth time:

«With the gods I never associated; but of mortals surely the greatest is Dr. Wing Shee!»

THE letter which reached the saddened curio shop told in the doctor's Chinese-written English that the big yellow tea-pot was not smashed, but endured in eternal tenderness for its little cup and its littlest saucer and the young spoon. Sum Ah (the young spoon) translated this for joyous Sum Fay (the little cup), and she danced Sum Oo (the littlest saucer) on her knee, who laughed and gurgled and behaved not like a demure Cantonese, but like any sprite amused by its own

half helplessness. The light seemed now to warm the strange and beautiful wares to brighter tones, and Sum Fay set gaily to dust them before a customer from the foreign devils' world should send her scuttling in her slippers back to the penetralia; and when the helper Yang took up his books in an easier mood, and rattled the buttons on the abacus, Sum Ah sang a mission hymn of hallelujah. The better feeling lasted well into the day; but though in the afternoon Sum Fay walked abroad behind Sum Ah, and bravely smiled and chatted with him that none might suspect her woe, twilight fell with deeper melancholy. Dr. Wing had given no hope for the future. If the beloved had been free, he would have run to find his wife and his funny baby.

IN the small hours of another weary night Sum Chow sat on the damp cell floor despairing again. In the morning Ok Hut had come to the trap and beamed down, wearing the rings the hatchet-men had wrested from Chow. Ok Hut had observed with an affectation of scientific glee the signs of the first day's suffering, and then had departed. The hours had dragged without incident, and darkness had come, and then midnight, with ominous sounds from the pauper ward, and two o'clock, with its anxious expectancy; and then the appointed time had passed with no token from Dr. Wing. The picture kept growing in Chow's mind of the doctor, dead and cold in Pow Len's coffin at the hands of the Sing Song Tong, and then of a cortège, with little Fay mourning the friend of her widowhood. By now he had hoped to be free. The plan had been to cut a hole in the trap, which would serve when he jumped and reached through to slide the bolt. But the sawing of wood in the stillness of night must be slow and exceedingly careful; and now it was late for beginning, and he had yet no tools.

Across the way the learned doctor, with the peanut-oil lamp like an aureole above his head, was standing motionless in the dim mahogany casket, frowning at sounds from the hospital. The doctor's trusted omens, whether he consulted the spots on his neighbor's cloth, or the bundle of crooked sticks in the pewter mug, or which way a bug ran under the burning-glass, had haunted him still with the uncanny number one and a half. He waited, alert for good or evil containing that element. The moans in the pauper ward were holding him back. They rose from a wretch in the sinking stage of the opium-habit, one of those whom the sick-pay tongs

sent thither to save the drain on their treasuries. Ok Hut was accustomed to give these victims a draught which promised relief to their agonies, and then, in the most exquisite dream of their lives, they floated out of the world with never a murmur at fate, and the societies gained, and Ok Hut prospered, and the coroner was amused. Sometimes were heard for a moment those screams that went with the final plight of the smoke fiends, when, as frequently happened, they suddenly lost their minds and ran amuck; but then Ok Hut, if they refused the fatal dose, would shut them in the secret cell, stuffing the air port with rags. The doctor feared that such might happen to-night in the midst of Chow's endeavor.

But the groans subsided, and the lights from the hospital windows lessened, and Hatchet Run was left in silence. Sum Chow heaved a mighty sigh as the telephone pebble flew in; and now he pulled on the endless rope-yarn rigged across the street by the doctor, and brought in the tools through the air-port. Also the doctor sent a small round object in many thicknesses of wadding.

«Handle it like a new-born babe,» he had whispered; «for in it are crowded winds of whirling waterspouts, and thunder of falling mountains, and flashes of furious flame. 'Tis a pot of frightful doom, tuned to the omens with one and a half frog's thumbs.»

Then Sum Chow poised on the empty water-bowl, and started the auger into the trap. But suddenly he paused.

There had come a wild shriek from the pauper ward, with commotion and the smashing of a chair and the calls of the terrified sick. Ok Hut had been deceived. The opium fiend had not been done for; he had risen up and fallen on Ok Hut in his sleep, throttling him, and screaming that the room was hot with fiery demons.

«Ah!» muttered the doctor, in alarm. «The noise will scurry them all from their beds. Ah!»

Sum Chow withdrew the auger, and listened. They were dragging the madman up the ladder; they were going to throw him also into the cell. The ladder broke, and three men fell to the floor with a crash. That meant a delay, thought Chow. He sunk the auger into a beam close by the trap, and worked until it was twisted firmly several inches into the wood. Now it was stout enough to hold him when he hung to it by one arm—near enough to the trap to clutch the ankle of whomsoever should come to open it.

Ok Hut's menial, a man from the northern province of Chang Tung, great in stature,

but no match in quickness for a well-built Cantonese, was treading along the garret. Sum Chow sprang up and clung to the auger, and the door was raised in the dark.

«You are free,» came the menial's voice, speaking falsely, as Chow well knew. «I will tie this cord, and you can climb up on it.»

This was a ruse. Ok Hut feared that the squad might have heard the cries, and might be closing in from the outside, suspicious of something irregular. They had done this once before, and then they had found simply a wretch beating out his brains against the hospital floor. But to-night they might have been warned and might be looking for Chow, though an appeal to the police on behalf of any Chinaman is improbable; and they might, when all expectation should subside, swoop suddenly down as they had before. It was better to get Chow out and lock him in a chest in the garret, though at the risk of stifling him. Then the madman could be thrown into the cell, where if the squad came before his strength had been writhed away they would find at the worst but a poor victim whose condition, brought on by himself, would not excite the anger of the law. The menial's invitation to Chow was a ruse which meant that when Chow's head was within reach a noose would be slipped over it, choking him, so that he would mutely follow the menial, for whatever temporary disposition might be made of him during the time.

The menial waited for an answer, but the place was black and silent. He spoke again, but his voice was returned by the walls of the cell. Then he went on his knees and struck a match, and thrust it down to be away from its sulphurous fumes. The match sputtered its first blue flame, and at the same moment the menial's wrist was caught by two hands, and the full weight of Sum Chow came on the menial's arm with such sudden force that he fell forward, hitting his head on the trap-way, and then tumbled through to the floor of the cell, where he lay stunned.

In the house on the other side of the street the doctor was breathlessly on tiptoe, with the telephone at his ear. The telephone line hung lax, and the hospital was grimly still.

«Go into the street, O bravest friend!» at length came a trembling voice in the doctor's ear. «Haul and hold fast on the cord. It hangs out from the hole in the wall. That one of us who lives shall avenge my little Fay, O friend! my littlest Oo! Haul and hold fast!»

«I hear,» came the quiet answer. «Friends to live with—enemies to die with. Haul and hold fast!»

The doctor let himself noiselessly out of the coffin. It was dangerous to descend by the stairs. In a moment he dropped from the window, three times his length, to the pavement. At first he lay as if disabled, but he soon staggered up, and found the cord that issued from the cell port. The other end Sum Chow had tied around the menial's head and through his mouth to keep him silent, and Chow had made the man rise and had forced him against the cell port, where the doctor, now hauling and holding fast on the cord from the street below, held him powerless to move or speak. A long time seemed to pass while the doctor leaned back with the cord wrapped around his wrist. To him the hospital appeared to have regained its slumbers, and he pictured Sum Chow creeping stealthily along the garret toward the ladder-way. On the Run the swaying shop-signs squeaked in the gusty wind that was bringing the dawn. The doctor heard the steps of one of the squad on the intersecting street, and described the arc of a circle that brought him around the corner, still taut on the cord, but safe from observation. The policeman went by, and one approached from another way, and the doctor swung back into Hatchet Run.

Sum Chow had climbed out of the cell. At a distance he saw the faint light from the ladder-way, but heard nothing. In a few moments he walked toward it, knowing that the tread would be taken for that of the menial. At the ladder he peered cautiously over. The room was one apart from the sick wards, and no one was in it. The maniac seemed to have been quieted, and doubtless lay in his bunk. The prisoner hung by one hand, and dropped to the floor of the hospital; at the same instant Ok Hut appeared at the door from the pauper ward, and stopped, transfixed with astonishment. For a moment the two men stood staring into each other's eyes.

«This is life or death to you,» said Chow, in a low tone. «Throw up your hands and turn your face to the wall.»

But Ok Hut did not obey. He kept his eyes on Chow, debating. Ok had no weapon, but there was one in the drawer of the table where the feeble lamp stood burning. Sum Chow also seemed unarmed, except for a small object which he grasped. Ok Hut waited, planning how to shorten the space between himself and the table, so as to make a dash and get it sooner than Chow could reach him. There was silence but for the snoring of those who slept in the pauper ward. Ok Hut seemed motionless; but he was changing

his weight from one foot to another, so that each time he was approaching a fraction of an inch nearer the weapon that lay in the drawer.

Over in the other building some one was looking in perplexity from the window at the spectacle of the learned Dr. Wing Shee holding tight on a cord from the cell port. It might be friend or foe. The doctor jammed his slouch hat over his eyes, and felt for the revolver that was strapped to his forearm under his large sleeve. Soon the enemy would be down and out and at him, and there would be pistol shots and the hurry of the squad in the night.

In the hospital the two men were gazing intensely into each other's eyes. Ok Hut was beginning to move by greater units, and his confidence began to return.

«Stop!» said Chow, putting out his hand. «If you pass that crack in the board—»

But Ok Hut made a leap for the table. In a twinkling Chow, with all his might, hurled the pot of doom.

A terrific explosion in Chinatown startled the hills of San Francisco, followed by cries, the jingle of window-glass, and the chattering of scared Chinese, and soon by comparative stillness. Sum Chow, with a flesh-wound in his cheek, came bounding down from the hospital into the arms of the doctor. Mingled cries were rising from the sick wards. The Run was filling with a crowd of all races that seemingly had sprung from nowhere.

Already smoke was pouring from the hospital windows.

«Conceal your cut,» commanded the doctor. «Stand as though you were one of the crowd. In a moment the squad will be here, and then the ruthless water-snake men, with their chu-chu monster.»

When the police thrust them aside, the two crossed to the door of a friendly merchant, and soon were hidden in the collecting throng. They stayed to see Ok Hut brought out insensible and bleeding from many wounds, and all the other inmates brought out safely. When Chow and the doctor knew that the building was doomed, they issued unmolested from the back of the store to another street, and made their way in the early light toward where little Fay lay awake, with her heart beating fast at the shouts and the clang of the fire-engines, with littlest slumbering Oo clasped tight to her bosom.

THAT evening they sat about the dinner-table, with Sum Ah and the helper Yang, who listened in admiration, while happy little Fay sat behind her spouse, and littlest Oo enchanted herself with the tip of the doctor's cue.

«You—you risked your life for me!» said Chow, with something glistening in his eye.

«And what is amusing,» said the learned Dr. Wing Shee, who would have risked it again, «is that they have amputated one of Ok Hut's legs at the knee. So that the omen (one and a half) meant simply that he was doomed to issue from this with only one and a half of his two original legs! I have to thank you for these very interesting and exciting days.»

*Chester Bailey Fernald.*

## ON READING WILLIAM WATSON'S SONNETS ENTITLED «THE PURPLE EAST.»

RESTLESS the Northern Bear amid his snows  
Crouched by the Neva; menacing is France,  
That sees the shadow of the Uhlán's lance  
On her clipt borders; struggling in the throes  
Of wanton war lies Spain, and deathward goes.  
And thou, O England, how the time's mischance  
Hath fettered thee, that with averted glance  
Thou standest, marble to Armenia's woes!  
If 't was thy haughty Daughter of the West  
That stayed thy hand, a word had driven away  
Her sudden ire, and brought her to thy breast!  
Thy blood makes quick her pulses, and some day,  
Not now, yet some day, at thy soft behest  
She at thy side shall hold the world at bay.

*Thomas Bailey Aldrich.*