

# The Special Correspondent

## CHAPTER XVIII.

The country is fertile and well cultivated, growing wheat, maize, rice, barley and flax, in its eastern districts. Everywhere are great masses of trees, willows, mulberries, poplars. As far as the eye can reach are fields under cultivation, irrigated by numerous canals, also green fields, in which are flocks of sheep, a country half Normandy, half Provence, were it not for the mountains of Pamir on the horizon. But this portion of Kachgar was terribly ravaged by war when its people were struggling for independence. The land flowed with blood, and along by the railroad the ground is dotted with tumuli beneath which are buried the victims of that patriotism. But I did not come to Central Asia to travel as if I were in France. Novelty! Novelty! The unforeseen! The appalling!

It was without the shadow of an accident, and after a particularly fine run, that we entered Yarkand Station at four o'clock in the afternoon. A few Chinese passengers alighted at Yarkand, and gave place to others exactly like them—among others a score of coolies—and we started again at 8 o'clock in the evening. During the night we ran the three hundred and fifty kilometers which separate Yarkand from Kothan.

A visit I paid to the front van showed me that the box was still in the same place. A certain snoring proved that Kinko was inside as usual, and sleeping peacefully. I did not care to wake him, and I left him to dream of his adorable Romanian.

In the morning Popof told me that the train, which was now traveling about as fast as an omnibus, had passed Khar-galk, the junction for the Killan and Tong branches. The night had been cold, for we are still at an altitude of 12,000 meters. Leaving Guma Station, the line runs due east and west, following the thirty-seventh parallel, the same which traverses it in Europe, Seville, Syracuse and Athens.

We sighted only one stream of importance, the Karakash, on which appeared a few drifting rafts, and flocks of horses and asses at the fords between the pebbly banks. The railroad crosses it about a hundred kilometers from Khotan, where we arrived at 8 o'clock in the morning. Two hours to stop, and as the town may give me a forecast of the cities of China, I resolve to take a run through it.

As we were about to board the car again, I saw Popof running toward me, shouting: "Monsieur Bombarnac!" "What is the matter, Popof?" "A telegraph messenger asked me if there was any one belonging to the Twentieth Century on the train."

"A telegraph messenger?" "Yes, and on my replying in the affirmative, he gave me this telegram for you."

"Give it me! Give it me!" I seize the telegram, which has been waiting for me some days. Is it a reply to my wire sent from Merr, relative to the mandarin Yen Lou?

I open it. I read it, and it falls from my hand. This is what it said: "Claudius Bombarnac, Correspondent Twentieth Century, Khotan, Chinese Turkestan:

"It is not the corpse of a mandarin that the train is taking to Pekin, but the imperial treasure, value fifteen millions, sent from Persia to China, as announced in the Paris newspapers eight days ago; endeavor to be better informed for the future."

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Millions—there are millions in that pretended mercury vase!" In spite of myself, this imprudent phrase had escaped me in such a way that the secret of the imperial treasure was instantly known to all, to the railway men as well as to the passengers. And so, for the greater security, the Persian government, in agreement with the Chinese government, has allowed it to be believed that we were carrying the corpse of a mandarin, when we were really taking to Pekin a treasure worth fifteen millions of francs.

Now the secret is divulged, and we know that this treasure, composed of gold and precious stones, formerly deposited in the hands of the Shah of Persia, is being sent to its legitimate owner, the Son of Heaven.

That is why my lord Faruskar, who was aware of it in consequence of his position as general manager of the company, had joined the train at Douchak so as to accompany the treasure to its destination. That is why he and Ghangir—and the three other Mongols—had so carefully watched this precious van, and why they had shown themselves so anxious when it had been left behind by the breakage of the coupling, and why they were so eager for its recovery.

That is also why a detachment of Chinese soldiers has taken over the van at Kachgar, in relief of the Persians. That is why Pan Chao never heard of Yen Lou, nor of any exalted personage of that name existing in the Celestial Empire!

We started to time, and, as may be supposed, our traveling companions could talk of nothing else but the millions which were enough to enrich every one in the train.

"This pretended mortuary van has always been suspicious to me," said Major Nolita. "And that was why I questioned Pan Chao regarding the dead mandarin."

"I remember," I said; "and I could not quite understand the motive of your question. It is certain now that we have got a treasure in tow."

"And I add," said the major, "that the Chinese government has done wisely in sending an escort of twenty well armed men. From Kothan to Lan Tcheou the trains will have two thousand kilometers to traverse through the desert, and the safety of the line is not as great as it might be across the Gobi."

"All the more so, major, as the respectable Ki-Taang has been reported in the northern provinces."

"Quite so, and a haul of fifteen millions is worth having by a bandit chief."

"But how could the chief be informed of the treasure being sent?"

"That sort of people always know

what it is their interest to know."

"Yes," thought I, "although they do not read the Twentieth Century."

Meanwhile, different opinions were being exchanged on the gangways. Some would rather travel with the millions than carry a corpse along with them, even though it was that of a first-class mandarin. Others considered the carrying of the treasure a danger to the passengers. And that was the opinion of Baron Weisschnitserdorfer, in a furious attack on Popof.

"You ought to have told us about it, sir—you ought to have told us about it! Those millions are known to be in the train, and they will tempt people to attack us. And an attack, even if repulsed, will mean delay, and delay I will not submit to. No, sir, I will not!"

"No one will attack us," replied Popof. "No one will dream of doing it."

"And how do you know that—how do you know that?"

"Be calm, pray."

"I will not be calm; and if there is a delay I will hold the company responsible."

That is understood; a hundred thousand Barons damages to Monsieur le Baron Tour de Monde.

Let us pass to the other passengers. Ephrinell looked at the matter, of course, from a very practical point of view.

"There can be no doubt that our risks have been greatly increased by this treasure, and in case of accident on account of it the Life Travelers' Society, in which I am insured, will, I expect, refuse to pay, so that the Grand Transasiatic Company will have all the responsibility."

"Of course," said Miss Bluet; "and if they had not found the missing van, the company would have been in a serious difficulty with China. Would it not, Fuik?"

"Exactly, Horatia."

Horatia and Fuik—nothing less! The Anglo-American couple were right, the enormous loss would have had to be borne by the Grand Transasiatic, for the company must have known they were carrying a treasure and not a corpse, and thereby they were responsible.

As to the Caterans, the millions rolling behind did not seem to trouble them. The only reflection they inspired was, "Ah! Caroline, what a splendid theater we might build with all that money!"

But the best thing was said by the Rev. Nathaniel Morse, who had joined the train at Kachgar.

"It is never comfortable to be dragging a powder magazine after one."

Nothing could be truer, and this van, with its imperial treasure, was a powder magazine that might blow up our train.

## CHAPTER XX.

The first railway was opened in China about 1877, and ran from Shanghai to Fou-Tcheou. The Grand Transasiatic followed very closely the Russian road proposed in 1874 by Tashkend, Kouljia, Kami, Lan Tcheou, Singan, and Shanghai. This railway did not run through the populous central provinces, which can be compared to vast and humming hives of bees, and extraordinarily prolific bees. As nearly as possible it forms a straight line to Sou-Tcheou before curving off to Lan Tcheou; it reaches cities by the branches it gives out to the south and southeast.

Since we left Kothan, we have covered a hundred and fifty kilometers in four hours. It is not a high rate of speed, but we cannot expect on this part of the Transasiatic the same rate of traveling we experienced on the Transcaspian. Either the Chinese engineers are not so fast, or, thanks to their natural indolence, the engine drivers imagine that from thirty to forty miles an hour is the maximum that can be obtained on the railways of the Celestial Empire.

At 8 o'clock in the afternoon we were at another station, Nia, where General Pevtsoff established a meteorological observatory. Here we stopped only twenty minutes. I had time to lay in a few provisions at the bar. For whom they were intended you can imagine.

The passengers we picked up were only Chinese, men and women. There were only a few for the first class and these only went short journeys.

We had not started a quarter of an hour, when Ephrinell, with the serious manner of a merchant intent on some business, came up to me on the gangway.

"Monsieur Bombarnac," he said, "I have to ask a favor of you."

"Only too happy, I can assure you," said I. "What is it about?"

"I want you to be a witness. I am going to marry Miss Bluet."

"Marry her?"

"Yes. A treasure of a woman, well acquainted with business matters, holding a splendid commission—"

"My compliments, Mr. Ephrinell! You can count on me."

"And, probably, on Monsieur Cateran?"

"He would like nothing better, and if there is a wedding breakfast he will sing at your dessert—"

"As much as he pleases," replied the American.

"That it is to be—"

"Here."

"In the train?"

"In the train."

"But to be married you require—"

"An American minister, and we have the Rev. Nathaniel Morse."

"Bravo, Mr. Ephrinell! A wedding in a train will be delightful."

It needs not be said that the commercial were of full age, and free to dispose of themselves to enter into marriage before a clergyman and without any of the fastidious preliminaries required in France and other formalistic countries. Is this an advantage or otherwise? The American thinks it is for the best, and, as Cooper says, the best at home is the best everywhere.

It is too late for the ceremony to take place to-day. Ephrinell understood that certain conventionalities must be complied with. The celebration could take place in the morning. The passengers could all be invited, and Faruskar might be prevailed on to honor the affair with his presence.

During dinner we talked of nothing

else. After congratulating the happy couple, who replied with true Anglo-Saxon grace, we all promised to sign the marriage contract.

"And we will do honor to your signatures," said Ephrinell, in the tone of a tradesman accepting a bill.

The night came, and we retired, to dream of the marriage festivities of the morning. I took my usual stroll into the car occupied by the Son of Heaven, found the treasure of the Son of Heaven faithfully guarded. Half the detachment were awake and half were asleep.

About 1 o'clock in the morning I visited Kinko, and handed him over my purchase at Nia. He anticipated no further obstacles; he would reach port safely, after all.

"I am getting quite fat in this box," he told me.

I told him about the Ephrinell-Bluet marriage, and how the union was to be celebrated next morning with great pomp.

"Ah!" said he, with a sigh. "They are not obliged to wait until they reach Pekin."

"Quite so, Kinko; but it seems to me that a marriage under such conditions is not likely to be lasting. But, after all, that is the couple's lookout."

At 3 o'clock in the morning we stopped forty minutes at Tchertchen, almost at the foot of the ramifications of the Kuen Lun. None of us had seen this miserable, desolate country, treeless and verdureless, which the railway was now crossing on its road to the northeast.

Day came; our train ran the four hundred kilometers between Tchertchen and Tcharkalyk while the sun caressed with its rays the immense plain glittering in its saline efflorescence.

(To be continued.)

**RUG MADE OF HUMAN SCALPS.**

Seventy-seven Lives the Cost of One Possessed by Iowa Indian.

A rug which took seventy-seven lives in the making is owned by an Iowa Indian living in Stroud, O. T., says the Dallas News. It is 150 years old and consists of seventy-seven scalps torn from the heads of as many human beings. The rug, which is barely five feet square, is of many hues, for the scalps are red, gray, black, white, brown and auburn.

They belonged to peaceful people, too, and are said to have been taken by special command of the Great Spirit from the finest specimens of men, women and children belonging to the white, red and negro races.

As soon as the scalps were secured they were sewn together and the rug was from that time regarded as the remedy for all trouble. When an Indian was taken sick he was laid on this rug and if he did not recover his spirit was assured of a pleasant journey to the happy hunting ground.

This remarkable creation can be seen only once a year.

At the annual wild-onion feast, which comes on April 1, the Iowa Indians make the rug play an important part. The onion is freely used, the Indians saturating themselves from head to foot with the juice. This was their successful way of driving away the evil spirits.

A prayer rug belonging to the shah of Persia is another valuable mat. Though barely two feet square, its design is most elaborate. It is worked throughout in precious stones and the effect is dazzling. The ground is formed of rose diamonds and in the center is a large bird, whose neck is made of amethysts and its body of rubies. The vines, which form a network, through which the bird may be seen as through a cage, are made of emeralds, while the bands which connect the stones are of seed pearl.

The floral emblem of Persia is worked out in blue, yellow and pink stones, this design being known as the Mina Khan design.

It is difficult to determine even the approximate value of this small rug, but it has been estimated that if it were sold the proceeds placed at 5 per cent interest would bring in an income of at least \$250,000 per annum.

**A STORY OF TWO PAINTERS.**

Did Van Dyck and Hals Really Paint Each Other's Portraits?

There is a story related by Houbraken, which may or may not be true, that Van Dyck, passing through Haarlem, where Hals lived, sent a messenger to seek him out and tell him that a stranger wished to see him, and on Hals putting in an appearance asked him to paint his portrait, adding, however, that he had only two hours to spare for the sitting. Hals finished the portrait in that time, whereupon his sitter, observing that it seemed an easy matter to paint a portrait, requested that he be allowed to try to paint the artist. Hals soon recognized that his visitor was well skilled in the materials he was using. Great, however, was his surprise when he beheld the performance. He immediately embraced the stranger, at the same time crying: "You are Van Dyck! No one but he could do what you have just now done!"

Assuming the story to be true, how interesting it would be if the two portraits existed, that one might see what Frans Hals, accustomed to the heavier type of the Dutch burghers, made of the delicately defined features of Van Dyck, and how the latter, who always gave an air of aristocratic elegance to his portraits, acquitted himself with the bluff, jovial Hals, who was as much at home in a tavern as in a studio. For no two men could be more different, both in their points of view and in their methods, though they were alike in this one particular—that each was a most facile and skillful painter.—St. Nicholas.

**About the Size of It.**

"Say, paw," queried little Johnny Bumpernickle, "what does a paper mean when it says that further comment is unnecessary?"

"It usually means," my son, that the writer doesn't know what else to say," answered the old gentleman.

## CASABIANCA'S CELEBRATION.

The boy stood on the burning perch  
Whence all had made a scout;  
A Roman candle in his hand  
Was just about to shoot.

A frizzled pinwheel at his side  
Was all that staid to tell  
How far he, match and lit his side,  
Had fled with grievous yell.

A busted bomb upon the floor,  
Some remnants of hat,  
Suspender buttons—three or four—  
That was where grandpa sat.

An Isle of safety on the lawn,  
Where still the grass was green,  
Marked where his sister dear had gone  
To rub on vaseline.

Amou the smoke rose from the yard,  
And then, through one small rift,  
We saw where mother, scorched and  
scared,  
A smelling bottle sniffed.

And at the gate stood Uncle Bill  
In fragments of his pants,  
Demanding in his accents shrill:  
"Send us an ambulance!"

The boy, as we remarked at first,  
A Roman candle held,  
He struck a match and lit the fuse;  
"This is the last!" he yelled.

The Roman candle flared and flared  
The balls flew far and wide,  
His relatives, all badly scared,  
Once more essayed to hide.

Alas! Ere shelter they could find,  
The dreadful deed was done;  
He whirled the candle all about  
And poked them every one.

In pain they limped up to the porch—  
They crept from bush and shrub,  
And each implored in husky tones:  
"Let me get at that cub!"

There came a burst of thunder sound.  
The boy—O, where was he?  
By turns he was sent on a round  
That led from knee to knee.

Chicago Record-Herald.

## JACK GRIDLEY'S CELEBRATION.

JACK GRIDLEY crawled through a hole in the fence back of his home and cautiously tiptoed toward the house. The sun was higher than Jack had intended it should be when he returned; when he had slipped out of the back door, just before midnight, with two big cannon crackers and his pockets full of smaller ones, and had joined Bill Ainsley, to set the church bell wildly ringing, on the stroke of 12, in joyous time-honored salutation to the glorious Fourth, he had planned to be back in his room and in bed before the sun rose. But the noisy hours had fled and now it was broad day.

A rooster crowed on a neighboring farm, and from the henhouse back of him the old Buff Cochon answered long and clear. Buff was Miss Ann's alarm clock, and beads of anxiety stood out on Jack's face as he cautiously but hurriedly lifted the latch of the back door. Why didn't it open? He had left it unlocked when he stole out in the night and now—he gave a reckless, desperate tug, but the door yielded not one whit. Could he have carelessly left the hook so that it fell back in place with the jar of closing? He must have. Jack glanced uneasily towards Miss Ann's bedroom, then slipped off his shoes, climbed to the low shed at the back, ran swiftly and noiselessly across the roof, and reaching up to the window sill of his room pulled himself up, and with a sigh of relief dropped inside. Thank heaven, he had left that window wide open.

He was none too soon, for even as he slipped his jacket off preparatory to jumping into bed, Miss Ann's thin, cracked voice rang up the narrow stairway: "Jack, you can get up now!"

"Yes'm," was the meek reply. Waiting such length of time as would naturally elapse during the process of dressing, Jack filled his pockets with the remainder of his crackers and presented himself in the kitchen. Jack Gridley was motherless, and his father, a commercial traveler, had found a home for the boy with Miss Ann Hobart.

"Good morning," said Miss Ann, as Jack entered the kitchen. "Good morning," he replied as he hurried toward the woodshed for an armful of wood. Breakfast was ready when he returned, and there had been no opportunity to fire a cracker.

"John," said Miss Ann, helping him to a second dish of oatmeal, "if I were you I would save those two largest crackers for this evening, to close the day with."

"Now, suppose," continued Miss Ann, "that you give them to me for safe keeping; I am afraid the temptation to fire them will be too great otherwise." Jack grew red in the face, and hastily gulped down a glass of milk. "Can't, they're busted," he said.

"You mean they are broken. But you haven't told me how you broke them," continued Miss Ann sweetly. "I—I fired 'em!" Jack blurted out truthfully.

"John Gridley! what do you mean?" All the sweetness was gone from Miss Ann now. "You haven't fired a cracker since you rose this morning. Now, when did you fire those big ones? Tell me the truth instantly!"

"Last night," said Jack, feebly. "At what time last night?" "I don't know," "John Gridley, you look me in the face and tell me what time you left this house." The jig was up and Jack knew it. "Well, if you must know, it was a few minutes of 12," he said.

"Hand me those crackers, every one you've got. Now, John Gridley, don't you stir foot outside of the yard this day. Now go out to the woodpile and saw until I tell you to stop."

"Poor Jack! He wouldn't give Miss Ann the satisfaction of knowing how he had felt, but when his stint of wood was finished, he fled to the barn and up in a dark corner of the hawmow he had his cry out with only the sympathetic whinny of old Nell in the stall below, for comfort. All the morning he had heard the pop, pop, pop of crackers, and later the circus band, as the procession paraded the streets; he had even caught just a glimpse of the parade as it entered the tent, for the circus had pitched not far from Miss Ann's house. This was the first circus in Easthampton for years, and Jack had set his heart on going. Miss Ann strongly disapproved of circuses, but Jack had written to his father and obtained consent, providing he was a good boy, and now—Jack wept afresh. Most of all he wanted to see the elephant (it was a small circus and had but one of the huge pachyderms).

About 3 o'clock Miss Ann related to

## PLAN OF '76 REAPPEARS ON INDEPENDENCE DAY



"Great Washington!" He said: "If we had these toys in our time how we could have affrighted and beaten the British!"

the extent of allowing him to have his crackers, and in the noise of these he tried to drown out the noise of the circus band that floated out from the big dingy canvas so near and yet so far. Suddenly it flashed into his head that he might send up crackers on his kite. Why not? He had read of a camera being sent up to take photographs, and if a camera could go, crackers could. Jack set to work at once to put his idea into execution. A long fuse was made and attached to the crackers. Near the crackers a string was tied to the fuse, and this in turn was tied to a bit of wire on the kite string near the kite, which had been pulled in. The free end of the fuse was lit, the kite set free, and Jack watched the tiny sputtering sparks sail up into the air. When the fire reached the string it burned it off, setting free the crackers which exploded a second later in midair.

Finally Jack took the biggest cracker that he had, one he had been saving for a grand climax, made an extra long fuse, attached it in the usual way and then gave the kite all the string he had. Up, up, up, he sailed until she floated fairly over the circus tents. Then Jack saw the tiny speck of a cracker drop, and, watching it speed downward without exploding, he muttered to himself in disappointment, "Why didn't I keep it and fire it on the ground where I could make it go anyhow?" But Jack had simply miscalculated and had allowed too much fuse between the cracker and string for an explosion high in air. Just after the tiny speck vanished behind one of the smaller tents, Jack heard it explode, followed instantly by a scream that made Jack's hair rise. Out from behind the tent shot a huge black beast, tearing across the fields with awkward, lumbering strides, but wonderfully fast. It was the elephant! With trunk thrown up and back of its head, and trumpeting shrilly, it made straight toward Jack, smashing down the rail fences in its path as if they were straws, his keeper in full pursuit, hopelessly distanced. From the big tent began to pour out a strange motley crowd of townspeople, painted clowns and scantily dressed bareback riders to see what had happened. For a moment Jack, too frightened to move, watched the huge beast bearing down upon him, then he fled for the hayloft in the barn, and through a crack watched the mad race. Straight on came the elephant, now did he stop for an instant at Miss Ann's nice picket fence; it crashed down as had the rails before it. Then the runaway caught sight of the big, wide-open barn doors (Miss Ann had told Jack to close them that afternoon) and probably seeing safety in the dark recesses of the barn, rushed in, where he stood trumpeting and trembling with fright. A few minutes later Jack heard the keeper close the doors and say to the crowd coming up, that he would shut the elephant in for awhile until he had calmed down. Then the keeper told how someone, he didn't know who, had thrown a cracker in front of the big beast just as the latter was drinking, and the runaway had resulted.

Meantime Jack was in an unhappy predicament and retreated to a far corner of the mow, the cold coils of straw other down his back as he heard the heavy breathing of the elephant below. Gradually the elephant grew quieter and Jack's courage began to come back. He could hear old Nell whinnying with fright and stamping uneasily in her stall. Curiosity got the better of him and he wanted to see what was going on below. Cautiously, inch by inch, he crept to the edge of the mow. In the dim light he could see the back of the elephant not two feet below him. The animal was quiet now. Presently he noticed the long trunk feeling along the edge of the mow, the cold coils of straw other down his back as he heard the heavy breathing of the elephant below. Gradually the elephant grew quieter and Jack's courage began to come back. He could hear old Nell whinnying with fright and stamping uneasily in her stall. Curiosity got the better of him and he wanted to see what was going on below. 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