

GOD'S ACRE.

The that ancient Saxon phrase which calls the burial ground God's Acre. It is just. In consecrated earth grave within its walls. And breathes a benison o'er the sleeping dust.

A VAIN RETREAT.

A Story of the Indian Plague.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter P. Lawson had come up to the Peak hotel for a month at least. They had a delightful white square villa with a deep veranda and a garden full of tropical shrubs and waxy bamboos down in Hongkong at the foot of the hill, much nicer in every way than the bare rooms at the Peak hotel and the bare rocks surrounding it.

Mrs. Lawson shuddered as she contrasted the ugly wall paper and regulation clock with a stiff image on each side that adorned her sitting room at the hotel with her own pretty drawing room, and she shivered in the long matted corridors, so straight and guiltless of anything like comfort. Her husband was a partner in a firm of American solicitors in Hongkong and getting on very well. It was not yet hot enough to migrate to the Peak, only the beginning of April, and the morning mists lay thick and heavy on the towering cliffs till late in the day. It was very cold there too. Still, they had all bustled up—Mr. and Mrs., the boy of 10 and the baby of 18 months.

The plague was again claiming its weekly victims in steady numbers. The year before had been a very bad one for it. Then during the winter it died out, only to recommence in March. Mrs. Lawson had been getting very nervous. Every day a kind friend told her of new cases in the bazaar, in the fish market, in all quarters of the city, but the climax had been reached the day before, when the bank manager's cook had died of it in his kitchen. The bank manager's garden joined the Lawsons' bamboos.

"Let us go to the Peak directly, Walter," said Mrs. Lawson excitedly directly her husband came in from the office.

"If you really wish it, of course, my dear," said her husband crossly, "but it's no earthly good flying away from the thing. Ann Lung got the infection from some of his own relatives no doubt or down by the harbor. He is not likely to have contracted it here in Jefferson's house."

"How do you know that?" said Mrs. Lawson, nearly crying from fright. "You people here in Hongkong don't seem to care how near the plague is to you, and yet think what a fuss they make about it if it even comes to the next country in Europe."

"And much good their fright does them," said Mr. Lawson contemptuously. "Fright won't keep it off." His real reason for objecting to the Peak hotel lay in leaving his cook, a Chinese artist in stews and soups. The cooking at the Peak was very doubtful. However, he concluded he must put up with it and resignedly packed this portmanteau.

Last summer he had been out in Hongkong alone and for many years before that had managed a branch of the firm at San Francisco. Mrs. Lawson thought Hongkong a poor exchange for the Golden Gate. Still, up to now it had been healthy, and the crisp, cold weather was even colder than she was accustomed to. Every day during the winter they had had a huge coal fire lighted at 4 o'clock in the drawing room and dining room, then again in the early morning. She had her own tidy arrangements about milk and butter and fresh rolls. What a pity to upset all this and go away to a hotel!

Still, it could not be helped. She must get away from this dreadful plague that was creeping about all around her. So, having wrung a very reluctant consent from her husband, the very next morning saw all their household goods packed up, the servants dismissed with the exception of the ayah and Mr. Lawson's "boy" and the whole family setting forth to the station of the electric railway up to the Peak. People in the streets looked calm and unconcerned as ever.

"How can they look so interested in all about them," said Mrs. Lawson impatiently, "when, so far as they know, they may be dead of the plague by tomorrow, or if not they themselves, their nearest relatives may?"

"In some cases, my dear," said Mr. Lawson philosophically, "a Chinaman would not count that a loss, especially if he got some money by the departure of his relatives. One go, another come on—he thinks the survival is to the fittest should the survivor be himself."

Mr. Lawson really felt deeply injured as he got himself and his family out of the train at the top of the hill at the starting station. The heavy mist was wet and penetrating, and there was not a gleam of sun to be seen at 9 o'clock.

"Let's go into the hotel at least," he said grumpily and stalked on in advance of his family up the stairs cut in the rocks and under the glass awning to the hotel. A few wretched gerra-

nums shivered in ornamental pots along the side of the passage and in the glass covered veranda outside the hall door. He had wired up for rooms the night before, so they went up to them at once—a stiff sitting room on the first floor with cane furniture and a big bedroom down stairs, one side of it close to the rock; in fact, one of the windows was entirely blocked up by rock not a foot off. But it was well furnished and even had electric light, which their sitting room had not.

The children's rooms were far off down a long corridor on the first floor and fronting the sea toward Kowloon, with a wretched bathroom, cold, cracked, whitewashed walls that looked as if a very small earthquake would bring them down instantly. The ayah was sulky and made the worst of everything. Not till Mr. and Mrs. Lawson and Pat were seated at a little round table in the dining room and having breakfast did the family's spirits begin to revive. Pat thought it very good fun to come to a hotel and attacked the many dishes on the menu steadily one by one, ending up with oranges and bananas.

The head waiter was a Chinaman, of course. All the waiters were Chinamen, but the head man was a very dignified person, with an India rubber kind of face and a peculiar way of taking stock of each guest as he entered.

Only to a favored few did he attend himself. The captain of an English ship in harbor and a judge of the high court were among the recipients of his attentions. Ordinary casual customers he relegated to his satellites, who slipped about actively in black shoes and very white socks, short blue trousers, tight fitting round the ankle, and loose blue collar. A little round black cap surmounting their pigtails completed this costume, the usual one for house servants in China. For late dinner they all changed to spotless white.

The large dining room was crowded with little round and square tables; the sun came out from the fog—altogether it looked very cheerful and bright. Mr. Lawson recovered his temper, added thereto by some excellent prawn curry.

"Perhaps, after all, my dear, you were right to come up here," he said. "You see more of your fellow creatures at any rate and can't sit moping by yourself all day long and imagining you have every disease under the sun." "I do nothing of the sort, Walter," cried his wife indignantly. "If it were only a question of myself, I would stay down below."

Mr. Lawson grinned unbelievably, but said no more about it.

"I must hurry up to catch the 10 o'clock train," he said, looking at his watch. "By Jove, I had no idea it was so late! Many other men hurried off at the same time to their work in the town, and the dining room was left principally to women and some few globe trotters who had no fear of an office below to hurry them over breakfast. Captain Lowry of H. M. S. Dispatch came up and sat at Mrs. Lawson's table to have a little conversation.

"Have you heard of my wretched luck?" he said laughing. "Seriously, though, it is no laughing matter for me." "No. What is it?" said Mrs. Lawson. "Well, when I was dining on shore last Friday," said Captain Lowry, "my ship somehow cut a junk in half just outside the harbor, and the Chinese authorities are making no end of a row about it. The owner of the junk says his favorite wife was on board and was drowned, and he values her at \$5,000."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Lawson, "what a bore for you! Was she really drowned, do you think?" "I don't believe she was on board at all," said Captain Lowry contemptuously; "these men are such liars. My sailors saw no signs of a woman when the junk was run down. Still, it was getting dark, and the truth of what he states is just possible. In any case, true or not, I am afraid the naval authorities will make me pay up."

"But you were not on board," cried Mrs. Lawson. "What a shame! I dare say the Chinaman wanted to get rid of his wife, too, or he would not have sent her out in a junk so late." "Oh, she was going over to some relatives at Kowloon, he says," replied Captain Lowry carelessly. "How long are you going to stay up here, by the way, Mrs. Lawson? Isn't it rather early to come up?"

"It is because of the plague," said Mrs. Lawson, coloring rather guiltily. "There seems so much of it about, and I am so afraid of it." "I believe there is a good deal in the town," said Captain Lowry, "but Europeans do not as a rule take any notice of it."

"No; I know," said Mrs. Lawson. "So my husband says." Captain Lowry laughed. "I expect he doesn't like leaving his comfortable house. I'm sure I shouldn't in his place. Well, goodbye, Mrs. Lawson. I must be off too."

Mrs. Lawson felt on the whole relieved at her fears being laughed at. "There can't really be so much danger," she said to herself, "or they would think more of it." So she went up to the public drawing room on the floor above, which was just then tenanted only by a lady in a red blouse. She and Mrs. Lawson spent quite two hours in animated conversation, though they had never seen each other before.

About 1 o'clock Pat came in and went up to see his mother. "I've been looking for you everywhere," he said. "I want you to come and see the ayah. She looks awfully hot and odd."

Mrs. Lawson hurried off with him at once. The baby was comfortably asleep, but the ayah looked half mad and had a dull crimson flush on her brown face.

"Me velly ill," she said wildly as soon as she saw her mistress; "got dreadful pains."

"What's the matter with her, mother?" said Pat. "Do you know?" "Only just an ordinary attack of fever, I expect," said Mrs. Lawson nervously. "But we will have a doctor at once."

"No, no," cried the ayah, still more wildly; "doctor put me in plague hospital! I die directly, quick!" "Nonsense!" said Mrs. Lawson. "Why should they put you there? You have not got the plague." The ayah returned no answer, but only sank crouching on the floor. Mrs. Lawson was more than miserable. If she told the manager the ayah was ill, he would probably insist on the whole family leaving at once on the chance of their having brought infection to the hotel. Yet how was she to get a doctor? Hastily picking up the baby and telling Pat to follow her she hurried away to her own room down stairs.

"Do you think she really has the plague, mother?" said Pat. "If she has, baby's pretty certain to get it." "Oh, Pat, how can you say such things?" said his mother in an agonized voice. "No, of course it isn't. It can't be the plague."

"I don't know," said Pat wisely. "She looks very odd, and I know it begins with fever. She said she had pains too."

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