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Away Behind This Home Company.

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# Planned to Seize Chinese Treasure

(Copyright, 1902, by J. E. Book.) ONLY the other day there was cabled from Peking, China, the news that \$70,000,000 worth of the imperial treasure had been dug up from its hiding place in the women's quarters of the Forbidden City and, to at least two people, the item had peculiar significance. If the plan of these two people for seizing this treasure a year ago had been carried out, the affair would have interested several millions of people and every civilized government in the world. The Chinese court would have been forced to return immediately to Peking and a part of the indemnity would have been collected without delay. Incidentally, also, two men would have been enriched by some hundreds of thousands of dollars.

According to the best report, the empress dowager is an exceedingly thrifty old woman and for years past she has been hoarding treasure, constantly augmented by presents and a part of the court income, until at the time of the Boxer uprising there was said to be a total value of 200,000,000 Peking taels (about \$140,000,000) stored away. Before the trouble in Peking all of this vast treasure was kept in the summer palace, just outside of the imperial city. About twenty-five days before the allied troops appeared, however, the empress dowager conceived the brilliant idea of transferring the treasure to the women's quarters in the inner city, and, under the pretense of guarding the concubines of the emperor, thus avoid the danger of looting at the hands of the Boxers. It was not because the imperial party feared the seizure of the treasure by the allied troops. Indeed, the empress believed Yung Lu and others in the story that the foreign devils had been driven into the sea. The sudden departure of the court, with only a scanty supply of clothing, is another proof of the statement.

### Empress Feared Boxers.

The truth of the matter is the empress feared the Boxers would find the treasure in the summer palace and she very stealthily and carefully planned a new hiding place. One hundred picked coolies were employed twenty days in the moving, each coolie carrying a small amount at a time and being closely watched all of the time, night and day. In the rear of the imperial city, and just back of the great wall, is an artificial hill, familiarly known to the foreigners as "Coal Hill," from the summit of which almost the whole of the imperial city can be plainly seen. On this elevation soldiers specially chosen for the mission watched the process of transfer of the treasure. When the entire task was completed the 100 coolies who were engaged in the labor were summoned before the imperial executioner. Dead men tell no tales and if a few of the coolies had not escaped in the general confusion this story would not have been written. It happened, however, that one of the fortunate coolies was, in times of peace, the head gardener of the inner city and it was from him that my friend, Thompson, heard the tale. Thompson, a Scotchman, who had lived in Peking for years, once befriended the head gardener. When I arrived in Peking a few days after the occupancy of the city by the allied troops Thompson repeated the story of the treasure to me and together we formed our great plan.

### Prince Ching's Fairy Story.

Following the arrival of the troops and the relief of the legations, the Japanese troops were placed on guard at three of the gates of the imperial city, and the United States troops had charge of the one remaining entrance. What little was left in the outer city by the Boxers was soon appropriated by the allies, but, because the inner city was so closely guarded, it was not disturbed. Prince Ching had been entrusted by the empress dowager with the guarding of the treasure, and as soon as he could do so he hurried to the allied commanders and informed them that a number of the emperor's concubines were still in the imperial city and if they were molested in any way the emperor and court would never return to Peking. Naturally enough it was the desire of the allies to obtain the emperor's return as soon as possible, and, for this reason, Prince Ching's threat had the effect of closing up the northeastern part of the city, where the treasure was concealed, to everyone except the palace officials. Prince Ching's soldiers and the eunuchs, who had remained there throughout the investment of the city. Any reputable foreigner could obtain a pass within the gates of the imperial city from Major Holstead General Chaffee's chief of staff. This pass was taken up upon entrance at the south gate and from the time he entered until he passed out at the opposite gate the visitor was closely watched by three or four eunuchs as well as by some of Prince Ching's soldiers. A very few of the smaller buildings were open to inspection, but the gates in the inner walls, particularly of the entire section in which the treasure was concealed, were tightly locked.

When Thompson had related to me the story of the head gardener and we had made maps of the route taken by the coolies in carrying the treasure we could

have located the particular spot where the great wealth lay in the night as easily as in the day.

"If we could only get a small part of that treasure," was the thought of both of us, and, then as the difficulties loomed up, the diabolical cunning of the dowager empress, the threat of Prince Ching, and finally the plan whereby we might enrich ourselves as well as force a solution of the Chinese puzzle which was troubling the allies, became clear. We alone had the trump card and we proposed to play out the game.

All that we needed was the assistance of the United States troops. As we look back at it now it recalls the story of the Irishman who had a match and all that he needed for a comfortable smoke was a pipe and some tobacco. We knew where the treasure was located. If we could have had the co-operation of the United States troops we could have seized the whole amount and, after taking 10 per cent for our share in the matter, as was our purpose, turn over the balance to the allies for such disposition in the way of payment of indemnity claims as seemed best.

### Took it to Chaffee.

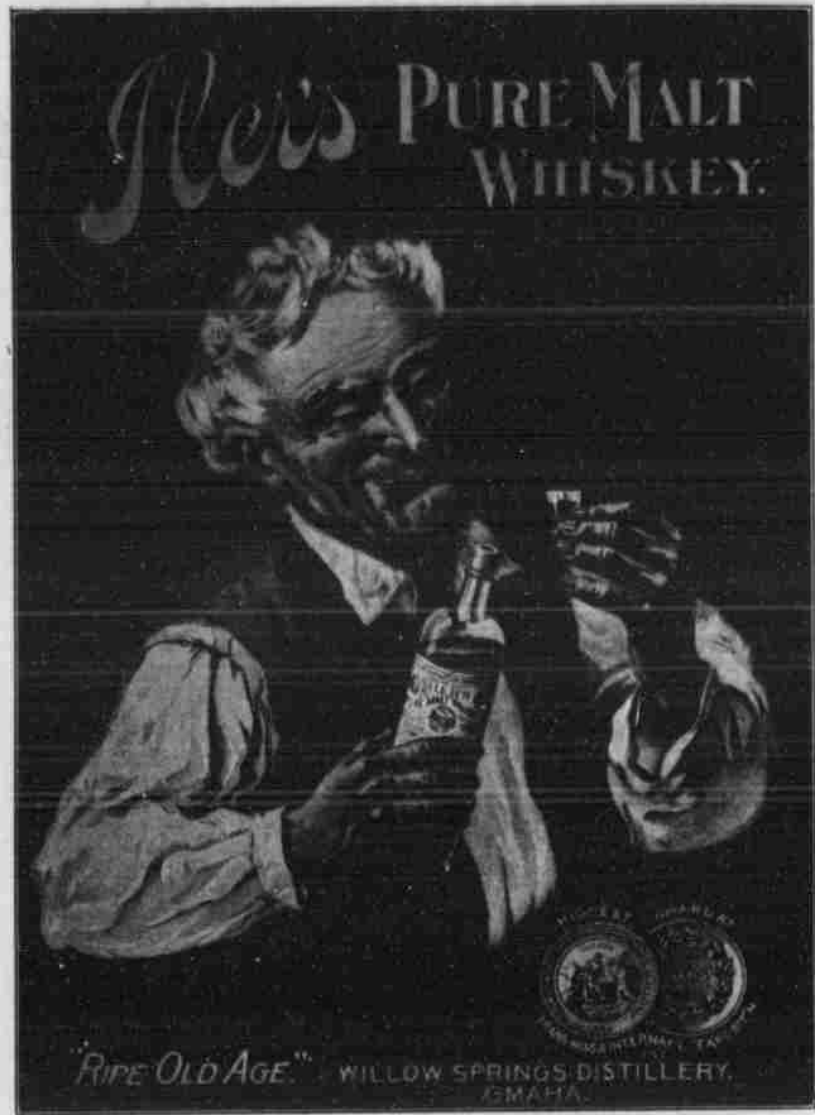
With this idea in mind I approached General Chaffee and told him the whole story, reserving only the information as to the exact location of the building in which the treasure was stored. My circumstantial evidence was so strong and convincing that he became very much interested in our plans and I believe he agreed entirely with us that it would be the very strongest lever to force the return of the emperor to Peking and that the seizure would have been entirely justifiable under the rules of war. After some deliberation, however, General Chaffee decided that he could not take the responsibility upon himself and, therefore, he called the full facts of the case to President McKinley and asked for instructions. Reply came promptly from Washington to the effect that General Chaffee should confer with W. W. Rockhill, United States peace commissioner, and take such action as was deemed advisable.

At the outset Mr. Rockhill was skeptical and, while he afterward acknowledged the value of the plan, he was compelled because of his mission for peace to avoid any complications whatever. He felt that the seizure of the treasure would antagonize the Chinese and stir up trouble among the allies. On this account Mr. Rockhill could not give his consent to the plan.

### Germans Wouldn't Touch It.

I was firmly convinced that the treasure was at the end of the rainbow and that the rainbow in this case ended very definitely in a particular building in the imperial city, so, when the Americans gave up the idea of acting in the matter, I went to some friends on General Waldessee's staff. I had several talks with General Schwartzkopf (afterward burned to death in the destruction of the summer palace) and through him asked the German forces to take the matter up. As in the case of our own troops, the Germans were intensely interested, but they, too, feared international complications, and, since the Americans and Japanese were in direct control of the imperial city, they could not act without the concerted action of the allies.

We did not dare trust the Japanese, and so, for lack of the necessary assistance we were compelled to give up our plan. I am positive that if Mr. Rockhill could have arranged for some concerted action in the matter at the time, just a year ago, it would not only have hastened the final peace negotiations, but it would have insured the speedy return of the court to Peking. It is a matter of history now, however, that the protocol was not signed for many months afterward, and the return of the Chinese imperial court was only accomplished a few weeks ago. The very recent news of the finding of \$70,000,000 of the treasure where it had been concealed more than a year before will doubtless confirm to the government officials approached at the time our plan was formed of the truth of our statements, if such a confirmation be needed.



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