

AH LEE BUNG

II. HIS STRUGGLE WITH MODERN PROGRESS

BY WALLACE IRWIN



Bung Revealed the Charred Remnants of His Eastern Pride.

THE picking season was over, and a mild California autumn had bared the fruit trees, giving the neat orchards of the Oliver ranch a look of symmetrical desolation. The dried fruit had been carted away to the warehouses,—many tons of stored sunshine. On this particular night Judge Oliver, a trifle bent by rheumatism, strolled across his acres smoking the pipe of content and formulating plans for another year of prosperity. He was leaning over the roots of a Blenheim sapling, critically investigating the soil with his gnarled cane, when there came to his ears, faintly at first, the pop-pop-popping of a motorcycle.

"By all the cycles of Cathay!" exclaimed the Judge, "here comes the Chinese Revolution!" A short haired Chinaman in a long ministerial coat, astride a gasoline monster, shot down the East Road with the rapidity of an earth-bound skyrocket. The old fruitgrower smiled; for he knew the man and what he was after. His Americanized name was Alexander Whang. He was a graduate of the University of California, an intellectual, a member of the local revolutionary committee. For several weeks he had been courting among the ranches of the Santa Clara Valley rallying the Chinese laborers to the cause of the projected Republic and soliciting their support in two directions,—in the contribution of money and the cutting off of pigtails. The Judge smiled again when he thought of what would happen when young Mr. Whang encountered the one eyed, eccentric ranch rooustabout, Ah Lee Bung.

The yellow herald of progress throttled down his engine in front of the crazy structure of secondhand fruit trays that Ah Lee Bung called his home. On his accustomed box in front of the cabin that ancient, plump philosopher sat rolling his evening stock of cornucopia shaped cigarettes. He lounged in pajamalike garments of faded blue jean, brown bare ankles showing above heelless slippers of bamboo. The intruder dismounted smartly from his gassy steed, and Bung greeted him with a single barreled glance of deadly import.

"Ah Lee Bung," began young Mr. Whang in Canton-

ese, "I come to you with a message of freedom and progress."

"How much will it cost me?" inquired Bung in the same dialect, but without enthusiasm.

"Listen till I tell you," said the young man evasively. "Perhaps you do not know the news,—our beloved Middle Kingdom is in revolt!"

Mr. Whang waited for effect; but Bung went right on rolling cigarettes.

"China," continued the enthusiast, "is in revolt against the Manchu tyrant who for untold generations has bled us of our sacred right. But no more! In every province the people are rising with guns and overthrowing the oppressor. If we succeed, we shall have a Republic like America. But we want the support of every right thinking Chinese. Let our patriots stand on their feet like men and cut off those disgusting pig-tails with which the Manchus of yore marked them like swine for the butcher."

"You ask me to cut my pigtail," said Bung, quickly brushing out of harm's way the little gray queue that coiled over his shoulder like the dragon of ancient superstition. "Anything else you want?"

"A money contribution will be acceptable to the cause."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five dollars will be acceptable, if you can afford no more."

"Twenty-five devils and a thousand-year curse on you and your wicked ideas!" shouted Bung, rising suddenly. "Go back to San José and tell your revolutionary committee that I will never part with my sacred pigtail until it is chewed off by some evil spirit."

"Progress is clogged by old fogies!" sneered Mr. Whang as he mounted his motorcycle and chugged away toward the next ranch.

WHEN Judge Oliver strolled by Bung's cottage in his evening rounds he found the patriarch swearing fluently in his native tongue.

"Well, Bung, did you join the revolution?" asked the rancher.

"No joinee—all same kick um out!" said Bung fiercely. "Too much high-tone China boy go make chin-chin 'bout revolution. Huh! Revolution no good!"

"No good! Why, I thought the revolution was going to straighten everything out for China,—bring your people up to date and teach them modern progress."

"Me sabe plogless—he no good, too!" snorted Bung.

"But don't you want to advance, to move forward?"

"Wha' fo'? Me no likee all time walk-walk. Me stand patee where am."

"Don't you want to be free?"

"Flee? Huh! China no catchee freedom from this talk-talk; she catchee more politics, that's all. Poor Chinaman must pay boss glafter all same." Bung stroked his gray pigtail affectionately. "This smart Whang boy he want me chop-chop pigtail. Ho! I no can do. My glandfather wear him all time, my gleat-glandfather wear him all same. Mebbe I go barber shop get short cut-away. What then? My glandfather ghost come to me and say, 'Bung, you 'shamed wear family pigtail all same your ancestor?' I look velly sorry and say, 'Yes, Sir, I heep 'shamed.' What my glandfather ghost do then? He send me one thousand hot devils burn my soul till he jump plenty."

"Your grandfather wouldn't be so cruel," exclaimed the Judge optimistically.

"You no sabe my glandfather," replied Bung in hopeless tones.

Judge Oliver seated himself on a pile of fruit trays and chewed a dried apricot from the stock he always carried in his pocket. "That's no argument; that's superstition," said the Judge finally. "Millions of your countrymen are cutting their queues without any serious rebuke from their ancestors. Get on the bandwagon, Bung, and see a barber."

"Ah, Judge Olivah, you all time jokee me!" chuckled the Chinaman. "Mebbe I go barber shop get hair cut. All lile! What next? I must buy Melican pant, coat, derby hat. Mebbe this makee me look plitty much white. Then I catchee heep swell-head, all same Japanese. Bime by time come when I must make myself mucche more big fool—" Ah Lee Bung drew nearer and laid a long forefinger on the white man's knee.

"What sort of big fool would you make of yourself then?" asked the Judge.

"I become a Clistian Chinaman!" said Bung impressively.

"I think it would be an exceedingly good thing for