

CHAPTER XVI

THE ARRIVAL

AS SOON as he had received from MacGregor the intimation of the return of the battalion to China, Galahad had written home. From Tsingtau he had dispatched another letter immediately upon landing, stating the approximate date of arrival, so they were on the lookout. But better still, Galahad had met a fellow villager on the streets of Chefoo. This man was starting home a day ahead of them, so he carried definite word not only to the household most immediately concerned, but to everybody in Leafy Banks, who then and there resolved, whatever other business they might have, to be on hand. And they were true to their vows.

Leafy Banks, as the name suggests, was built along a riverside halfway between the two seas. A grove of willow and poplar trees lined the low river levee, all bending to the east like the members of a ballet obedient to the gesture of the prevailing winds. Many of the willow stocks had been mercilessly cut back for firewood until the clusters of severed branches on their tops looked like heads stuck upon high poles. Twilight aided the illusion.

The valley, which had been cut by the summer floods through the mountains, was at Leafy Banks a quarter of a mile broad. The almost dry bed of the stream was uneven and strewn with cobbles. Along it passed the main road of travel from north to south. Across the valley the hills rose in terraces, giving them the appearance of crinkled crêpe paper. Green in the spring, it was at this time of wheat harvest yellow, and would in July be fresh-plowed brown. To the northwest rose a

sheer wall of granite, its top serrated, its sides shining after rain like newly minted silver, and in the late afternoons toned by a green haze. Lateral valleys ran back from the river bed. Tucked away in the mountain creases were villages struggling to draw their existence from the none too fertile hills.

The town was located on a narrow strip of land slightly higher than the river course and lying between it and the hills on the west. The broader streets of the village ran east, stepping down from the higher ground at the base of the hill and wavering along their course to the river. In the rainy seasons, they, too, were tributaries of the latter.

Leafy Banks had a history, though an unwritten one. For nineteen generations its people had squatted upon this narrow ledge. The river must have been a considerable stream in those early days before they stripped the hills of timber. They had, like most of the villagers in East Shantung, come from far-off Yunnan. A bloody rebellion during the Ming dynasty, followed by plague, had so decimated the population of the region that new stocks had been imported and planted among these hills. Laughingly, the people indicate the split little toe nail as a mark of their origin.

They were hardy folk, farmers for the most part whose land lay on the hills about. Their houses originally huddled together for mutual protection, but now from force of habit. There were no stores in the village. Peddlers and the market three miles away supplied their needs which they could not meet from the land. Silk raising added considerably to their meager income. Both the mulberry leaves and the oak leaves were used in feeding the worms. The silk factory, however, was owned by capitalists from farther west. Many of the operatives were also from the plains where "unrestrained fecundity" makes life cheap. Little, anæmic boys, eyes red with trachoma, worked in the dim light and fetid

atmosphere of the factory, spinning away their life like human silkworms. Silk costs tremendously. A butterfly is sacrificed for every cocoon unwound. Even the mulberry trees with their gnarled and twisted trunks suggest that they gave their beauty to furnish beauty for others, like hags in tatters who have sacrificed youth and loveliness to provide the daughters of men with silken garments.

The houses of Leafy Banks were for the most part thatched. A tile roof here and there indicated more affluence. The monotonous stone walls usually laid in mud made more conspicuous the few marble fronts and marble doorsteps of the wealthy. Upon some, the stone masons had lavished their skill, inserting among the finely cut stones the shapes of a circle, a peach, a gourd, and even a bottle and a teapot. Where between the houses a patch of ground had been left for onions or the succulent leeks, it was inclosed by a low wall upon the top of which pink thorn bushes had been set in mud. Mules and oxen were tied in the street, and many a soiled and sweaty farmer laid his head upon a stone ledge for his noon siesta.

It was just before noon that the palanquin came over the crest of the hill north of the village. It was not unobserved. The word passed quickly from mouth to mouth, from house to house, and from street to street.

Women began running, with that peculiar movement of those crippled by bound feet, toward the street they knew the party must traverse. Children in all stages of undress followed. Young fellows left their tasks to hurry toward the river so as to get the first glimpse. All was expectancy, laughter, good nature. They had not come out to welcome, nor had they come to scoff. It was pure curiosity, neither hostile nor friendly, innocent enough, but not to be easy for the object of that curiosity.

Galahad came first, passing easily across the little river on the stepping-stones. The *shen-tzū* followed



· PLENTY OF WILLING HANDS TO LIFT THE *SHAN-172*

closely. As they turned into the main street, now rapidly filling with men and women, Jeanne did not know whether she felt more as if participating in a triumph or as if riding in the death cart. Her husband was greeting folks naturally and cordially. Yung-fu had always been a favorite in the town and had many well-wishers.

Jeanne really did not know where to look. Everywhere she encountered black eyes staring at her. The women and girls leaned far out to look into the palanquin. Now and then a small boy ran ahead for another view. Nor did she know what to do, whether to smile at or to ignore these curious people. Though in the midst of a throng she never felt so much alone. She tried to smile and, though it seemed difficult, must have succeeded, for one of the women caught it and answered it. As her *shen-tzū* passed on, Jeanne heard them say delightedly, "She's smiling," and this comforted her not a little.

When they stopped before the great gateway of her future home, willing hands of the bystanders lifted the litter from the backs of the mules. Galahad helped her to step out from between the poles of her strange carriage, then turned to the man who had come out. Jeanne saw a resemblance to her husband and knew it must be his father. The greetings between the two men were most proper. There was no handclasp and, of course, no kiss.

"You've come back?" was the question.

"Yes, come back," the laconic reply.

Yet the old man quivered with excitement and to conceal his feelings struck viciously at the dog who knew no code of repression and was welcoming his young master with every muscle in his body and tone in his voice.

Jeanne moved forward with Galahad toward her father-in-law and offered him her hand which, strange to

say, he took and then not knowing what to do with it, dropped it, smiling, however, in a rather sheepish fashion.

There were plenty of folks to look after their baggage, so Galahad took his bride at once through the great gate and behind the brick screen which cut off the view from the street. His mother was standing just outside her door on the step. She was a frail woman with rather pinched, pale features. Her black hair, already growing thin, was drawn tightly back from her forehead and fastened in a simple knot at the back of her neck. Her costume was of dark blue cotton, severely plain. The tunic, which was wide, with flowing sleeves, came just above the knees and covered loose trousers. Jeanne shuddered as she noted the slender ankles wound with strips of white cloth and tapering off into tiny bound feet.

Galahad had moved forward ahead of her and had taken his mother's hand and gently asked, "Mother, are you well?"

"Yes, well, *Kier*," she said, using his pet name.

As Jeanne raised her eyes from those feet which fascinated her, she found the mother's eyes looking at her over Galahad's shoulder.

"And this, mother, is my wife, Chên-an." His mother did not notice that he did not use the word for daughter-in-law, for she was too much taken aback as Jeanne advanced and impulsively planted a kiss on the neat little woman's cheek, which she promptly proceeded to rub off with her sleeve. Without returning the greeting, and to avoid further demonstrations, she moved out of reach and toward the door, saying, "Come in, come in, you must be hungry." Then pointing at Jeanne with her chin she asked a bit suspiciously, "Can she eat Chinese food?"

"We'll both do justice to the best in the house,"

answered Galahad; then catching sight of a smiling face within he cried, "Well, if here isn't Auntie."

His aunt arose from before the brick range where she had been seated, feeding the fire with bits of pine branches. Joyously she came forward. Without waiting to be introduced she took both Jeanne's hands in hers and said, "It is good you have come." She did not kiss her, but she did pat her kindly on the shoulder and Jeanne knew here was one other besides her husband who was really glad she was there. It was the first sign of welcome she had had.

• One by one Yung-fu's two sisters and brother were presented to their big *sao-tzu*, or sister-in-law. They were nice-looking girls of sixteen and nineteen years. Their hair was banged in front. Over each ear a short lock hung down and the braid behind was wound with a bit of bright-colored yarn. In their flowered tunics and blue trousers they were most attractive to Jeanne, but their bound feet, tinier than their mother's, sent a thrill through her. She liked their sweet, modest appearance and manners, and they were tremendously interested in her.

"Now you have met everybody but my uncle," said her husband. "I hope you won't mind him if he is not very polite. I suppose he is at his school at this time."

The Yao homestead was like thousands of houses of the better sort in the villages of Shantung. It was formed by a triple row of one-story buildings all facing south, with courtyards between. All these houses were of the same size, about twelve feet wide, and of the same general pattern. A sort of hall with a door at front and back ran through the center of two. In the first this was used for a kitchen. Sleeping quarters opened to the right and left of these halls, while the rear row of buildings were used for a granary and storehouse.

The floors were of pounded mud, uneven in places. Some of the partitions were also of mud brick, unplastered. The rafters were exposed, covered with much dust, and festooned with cobwebs dark from the smoke which often escaped from the range into the rooms. Jeanne had no opportunity to examine the house in detail, but she peeped into the rooms on either side. They were small and seemed all but filled by the broad brick bed in each.

The second courtyard contained a shed for the animals. An ox, a donkey, and a mule were eating from their crib and did not seem interested in the stranger. Her entrance was, however, noticed and resented by a large goose which honked loudly and lowered its head for an attack upon the newcomer. Yung-fu promptly grasped the bird by the neck and bundled it into a place of confinement. A stone pigsty occupied one corner of the court and was tenanted by a fat, black sow with a litter of four small porkers, which were allowed the freedom of the yard. One could see here, with the assistance of the ducks, dogs, and hens, great promise of matin melodies.

It was to the last courtyard that Galahad's brother led them. This yard was somewhat wider than the others, and here across one side their new quarters had been built. They consisted of two rooms of one story, but higher than the older buildings. The roof was of tile. Over the clean, unpainted timbers a covering of woven withes had been laid to support the tiles. This made a really attractive ceiling. The floor was paved with square bricks and the walls were white with new plaster.

The main room was a kind of study, or guest room. Along the rear wall a long, narrow sideboard was tastefully decorated with a pair of vases containing flowers, an odd-shaped geological specimen upon a pedestal, and a pretty tea set. On the walls hung scrolls, examples of

rare penmanship, and pastoral scenes. All this Jeanne took in at a glance, as well as the fact that the windows were white tissue paper, all right for June but rather thin for January weather. A large square table, beautifully varnished, with a pair of stiff chairs to match, stood in front of the sideboard.

The inner room, about half as large as the guest room, contained a wardrobe and chest of the same dark red wood as the table, and a brick bed. Under this was a place to build a fire in winter. It was covered by a finely woven straw mat and a rug with quaint designs of butterflies. Two square pillows with embroidered ducks upon them, the symbols of conjugal loyalty, were at one end, while at the other comforters of bright cloth were folded. The aunt had pasted up gayly colored pictures which she considered suitable for a bridal chamber.

"My aunt has done this, I know," said Galahad.

It was not much like home, but it gave clear evidence of a woman's handiwork and told Jeanne unmistakably of the desire to make the newcomer comfortable and happy. As she had been drawn to her by her cordial welcome, this new exhibition of friendliness only served to deepen the feeling.

They did not eat their dinner with the family but alone, seated cross-legged at a little table which was set between them upon the kang. Galahad's brother, a fine-looking boy of fifteen, served them what was really a delicious meal prepared by his aunt. The house afforded no forks, so Jeanne was compelled to use chopsticks or her fingers. With a good deal of laughter and many mishaps, she managed to get the food to her mouth, declaring that she would learn the knack sometime.

"I guess they didn't use chopsticks in your family," taunted her husband, and Jeanne remembered the day she had used a similar expression about kissing in his family.

As they finished eating, a bird began to sing just outside the window. "Why, there's Mr. Lark," cried Jeanne.

Galahad opened the lattice window and there, hanging upon a cherry tree, was a cage the exact duplicate of the one which had been his and later hers. Jeanne looked at her husband inquiringly.

"It must be Brother's," he said.

They were silent for a little time, listening to the lark's song. Unconsciously, their hands sought each other.

"Do you suppose our larks are happy, away back there in France?" asked Galahad meditatively.

"I think they must be—for they have each other," answered Jeanne.

He turned from the window and looked down at his wife, then stooped and kissed her. At a slight sound they both turned to find the brother, who had returned for the dishes, staring at them in open-mouthed amazement.

"Fine songster you have, Brother," said Galahad.

"Eh? What?" said the youth, trying to shake off the spell.

"You've got a nice bird, I said."

"Glad you think so," said the other, blushing to the roots of his hair and departing as swiftly as possible.

"You see for yourself, my dear, that they are not used to kissing in my family," said Galahad.

"Do you suppose they'll learn?" asked his wife.

"Not unless they have the good fortune to marry French wives," was his retort.

The afternoon, or what was left of it after an unusually long siesta, was taken up with unpacking their belongings, among other things the presents for each member of the family. By evening they were quite settled and feeling much at home.

The slave girl had not been included in the family

introductions. Now the aunt brought her in to serve Jeanne and Yung-fu with tea. The former noted that she did not have bound feet. This fact indicated to Yung-fu at once what she was. Jeanne remembered seeing her at the gate pushing in no gentle manner a boy who in her opinion was crowding too close, and making faces at another who had evidently called her a vile name.

Yung-fu's face was a study when his aunt told them she had bought the child for Jeanne. His aunt did not notice his perplexity, however, but plunged into a long detailed recital of the *ya t'ou's* history. The presence of the child herself did not deter from a description of her temperamental disposition as well as of that of her former mistress.

Jeanne, of course, could not understand all the conversation, but she did get enough of it to feel a great pity for the girl. She put out her hand and drew the *ya t'ou* to her, asking, "What shall I call you?"

"Girl," was the reply.

"Yes, but what is your real name?"

"I never had a name. They just call me 'Girl.'"

"Never had a name! Would you like to have me give you one?" asked Jeanne, smiling at her.

"Oh, the *t'ai t'ai* is too kind!" cried the child, suddenly prostrating herself and kowtowing at her feet.

The action sent a queer, sharp pang through Jeanne. She could not bear it. Quickly she raised the little victim and pressed a kiss upon her forehead. The latter clung to her hand and looked at the aunt, who smiled and asked, "Now are you willing to serve her?"

"I want to serve you both," replied the girl, torn between two loyalties. Bidding the *ya t'ou* carry out the tea the aunt soon followed her and returned to her place on guard. Jeanne did not know how many curious folks had dropped in, hoping to get another and closer view of the foreigner. The aunt had successfully headed

them off from intruding, on the plea that she was resting after the tiresome journey.

"I must go and find my uncle," said Yung-fu. "He must be out of school by this time."

"You do not need to bother," said a stern but not unkindly voice.

Galahad sprang to his feet and stood at respectful attention as his uncle entered and seated himself in the chair thus made vacant. There was no further greeting. Galahad had waited a moment while his uncle looked about the room.

"Uncle, this is my wife," he said quietly, motioning in Jeanne's direction, who sat upon the kang near the window. Jeanne would have descended from the brick bed but did not know exactly how to do so gracefully.

Yao Hung-tai turned slowly and looked at her as he might have looked at a piece of furniture. He did not rise, he did not smile. He opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it again and nodded gravely with a long "Um." Then he turned to his nephew and said, "Well, I suppose you've seen all you want of foreigners and their customs and are glad to get back to civilized land once more."

"I am glad to be home again," replied Galahad, flushing slightly but restraining the reply which sprang to his lips.

"Yes, it's all right to go traveling about, to see other countries, but when all's said and done, they all have to get back to the Middle Kingdom for the best of everything," went on the old man.

He had filled his pipe by this time and continued to expatiate on this favorite theme, namely the superiority of things Chinese. Galahad, still standing as was becoming for a pupil before his teacher, let him talk on. He was in no mood for argument, and, if he had been, he realized that the mind of this man, upon whom his

carefully written letters had made no impression, was hopelessly closed to facts. He simply wanted to believe that China's education was the most profound, China's home life the most exemplary, and her civilization was the most perfect, and no amount of data could make him change his convictions.

The old man sat silent for some time, smoking. The pipe finished, he knocked the ashes upon the floor by striking the pipe against his shoe, and rose to go. He had not looked once in Jeanne's direction after the initial nod. He had ignored her as completely as if she were not in the room. Nor did he look at her now. With the remark, "I'll go home and get something to eat," he passed through the guest room into the courtyard.

When Galahad returned from the door to which he had politely gone to see his uncle out, Jeanne was sitting looking out of the window. Her face was averted so that he could not see it.

"I hope you won't take to heart my uncle's rudeness," he began.

"He doesn't like me, does he?" she asked.

"He hasn't anything against you personally. He doesn't like any one who is not Chinese."

"Well, I wish I knew, for your sake, how to make your people like me."

"They'll like you all right, but Uncle will be the last to yield. Here is somebody you'll find more responsive."

As he spoke, the two sisters, Welcome to Spring and Flowering Almond, crossed the yard and timidly hesitated on the threshold.

"Come in," called out Yung-fu, "your sister-in-law has something to show you." Then turning to his wife, "The girls would be delighted to see your finery, Jeanne."

Galahad slipped out and left Jeanne to display her pretty things. They were nothing wonderful, but they afforded a common ground of feminine interest, and they

proved intensely entertaining to these two country maids who had never been five miles away from home.

When he came back he found Jeanne sitting in a chair with her hair down over her shoulders. The younger girl was brushing the chestnut locks and all three were laughing and giggling as only girls can.

"Guess I'm not expected in here," said Yung-fu, peeking in.

"The girls wanted to see how I did up my hair, so I let them take out the pins," answered Jeanne.

"As hairdressing seems the sport of the evening, I'll go find brother and cut his pigtail before supper."

