



XXIII

NEXT day Tristram developed a nasty, feverish cold ; temperature 37.7 Centigrade, ordes on the tongue, pains in the limbs. He summoned the amah, from whom he learnt that Alba had quitted the house with a suitcase. Breakfast was brought to his bed, together with a copy of the *Argus*. He observed, greatly to his chagrin, the name Sheepshanks to be salient in the staring captions ; Fifi had evidently been at it again.

FATAL OSAKAI SAILBOAT TRAGEDY.

CONSUL PODLER DROWNS.

SHEEPSHANKS VAINLY ATTEMPTS RESCUE.

SOBS AS RECOUNTS HORROR.

DITCHLING THE HERO.

There followed in a lump of glutinous Columbianisms, inserted by Mr. Hoot Pugmeyer, who had gingered up the article, an astonishingly garbled narrative. As for himself, 'The plucky little man, despite his failure to graduate at the swimming academy, defied the elements as nobly as any of his rough-house viking ancestors. Plunging boldly into the mountain-high combers, he sought his comrade, but in vain ; James P. Podler was beyond the aid of his old friend's hereditary pep'.

The next paragraph, referring to the over-turned position of the *Caccubioni*, had been inserted, quite appropriately, upside down by the Japanese compositor. Tristram appeared in other places as Sheepshunks,

Shpshonk and Shpshks. The article, too long for a single column, was truncated at its base, where the words 'Continued on page 4' appeared in brackets. But neither on page 4 nor on any other page was the conclusion of this hectic saga to be found. Readers of the *Argus* were quite used to such eccentricities, and Tristram felt profoundly thankful for the omission.

He was now disposed to take his health very seriously and so, as his temperature was still too high next day, sent for the local Japanese doctor, who groaned sympathetically and gave him an hypodermic injection. Just at present the whole of the native practitioners were hypnotised by this mode of treatment, which was still a novelty; and they would blithely pump anything handy into their patients with, fortunately, but few fatal results. Assuring Tristram that he would be quite cured tomorrow, he pocketed his fee, and hurried off to puncture someone else.

A week later Tristram was still in bed, but well enough to settle with his landlord, preparatory to returning to Totsuka. The summer season had waned, as it always did, after the annual typhoon, which fouled the sea with rotting weed and damaged the shooting-booths, temporary theatres and tent-shops, where flashy bathing-suits tempted the girls of Totsuka, and where the men were able to equip themselves with ear-stoppers, protective caps and other channel-swimming apparatus, which made a fine impression as they bobbed up and down in four feet of water.

The beach-town and the crowd vanished almost in a night; nothing remained but the tattered pennants of 'Democratic Camping', the latest venture of the new sect of open-air enthusiasts. Mr. Sakai, middle-weight boxing champion of the country, struck the tent into which this cheerful muscular Christian would lure

unsuspecting foreigners with a 'Say, you play me the boxing some', and would bash them on the nose, a feature in which he was practically deficient. The diplomats filtered away to their social and official duties; the summer visitors from Shanghai took ship, uplifted by the news that Marshal Chang had defeated Marshal Chung, and that, no doubt, Marshal Chung would shortly rout Marshal Chang, as at that time the two War-Lords had arranged to win victories in alternate weeks. The final arrangement for the World Missionary Conference to be held at Birmingham in November were completed just about that time, and Prof. and Rev. Shieberman was invited to address the Synod. At this moment he was engaged in touching up his moving appeal for more funds (reprinted lately in the *Gospel Trumpet* under the title 'Roughing it for the Lord in Darkest Japan') as he sprawled among the cushions of his villa at Karuizawa, and took ice-cream soda at intervals. The hand of Providence was clearly seen in this move; for Mr. Kobayashi wrote to Ditchling immediately with an offer of the English teaching post for that year during which Mr. Schieberman would absent himself. It would not be Ditchling's fault if, once snugly installed at the Normal College, it became impossible to dislodge him. He had already, by the snowball process, accumulated a fair body of admirers among the students, several of whom would come and sit motionless for hours in his house, flinging out a painfully translated remark every twenty minutes.

When the agreement was signed and sealed and Mr. Ditchling, flushed with success, was designing for himself a new visiting card with 'Professor of English, Totsuka Higher Normal School', to be writ in heavy copper-plate, one of these deputations of young men came tramping up the compound path in semi-military

formation. Admitted, they sat down and consumed in silence little cups of green tea. At length the spokesman delivered himself :

‘ Sar ! You will be our beloved teacher. You are the high character. We do reverence you ’. Then, bowing to Mrs. Ditchling, ‘ Sar ! we do wish you happy deliverce. And we wish you much milk your boy ’. It was polite, of course, to assume that the expected addition to the Ditchling family would be a male. A bulging furoshiki was then produced and when opened, scattered about the room two dozen stony-hearted native pears called nashi, which contain sickly sweet water and raw turnip-flesh.

So the foundation of a good understanding was laid down ; there was no doubt that the percentage of successful candidates at the next examination would exceed all previous records.

‘ Give ’em to the servants for heaven’s sake ’, said Ditchling after the deputation had marched away. ‘ No, Geny, you’re not to have any more, or you’ll be sick. No ! I said no ! ’

‘ But, I wan’ another ; I’m going to *have* another ’. Clarence Eugene, his face juicy from the first encounter, clutched at the pile. Thus it was that for the first time in his life he found himself across his father’s knee, his ‘ after-deck ’ cleared for action. Ditchling had a good deal of pent-up emotion to work off, the smacking was a hot one, and the howling brought in an alarmed Japanese nurse, to whom corporal punishment was a strange thing.

‘ I’ll kill you ’ ! bellowed Clarence Eugene. ‘ I’ll get a knife from the k-kitchen and stick it into your bowels ! ’

One of the reasons for Mr. Ditchling’s ire was the receipt, just when the tide of fortune was beginning to flow, of a packet with a letter from McGonigle.

‘Dear Ditchling’, (he had written)

‘The enclosed documents will make it as clear to you as they have to me, that you are the victim of one of the grossest cases of piracy in the annals of literature. Not merely has the unscrupulous and audacious villain who signs himself Wiglaf Cronshaw copied word for word your epoch-making discourse, but he seems to have had (no doubt surreptitious) access to your MS. more than a month before you delivered it verbally. He must have stolen across two continents in his perfidious aeroplane while you slept, and filched the precious information from your bureau. I sincerely trust that you will not let matters rest, but will communicate immediately with your solicitors, and instruct them to institute proceedings. So fiercely, indeed, do I feel my just indignation to boil within me, that if you do not feel equal to coping with the affair, it will be my duty to take the necessary steps. In any case, I think I shall write a private letter of protest to Paul Crofter, who is the editor and an acquaintance of mine. I feel sure that you would agree to this.

‘I am fortunate in possessing another copy of Miss Walker’s masterly precis of your valuable utterances. Yours very sincerely, etc.’

This was star-blasting and taking ; nothing could be done—nothing at all. What an abysmal idiot he’d been to let Fifi publish ; he might have guessed that McGonigle took in the literary magazines. And now no doubt that Scotch clown had told Kurrie-Lewer and all the other bacchanals ; and they weren’t on good terms with Kurrie-Lewer after Toni’s *faux pas* at the harbor. Why couldn’t the woman have kept her mouth shut ? It was all her fault really, and it was she who had suggested the lecture on the French Novel. She was responsible.

He had not quite the courage to say all this when she came to him, holding out a highly gilt invitation to the Fargo-Vocadlo wedding—certificate of re-admission to ‘society’. But he showed her McGonigle’s letter, and said that as *he’d* probably be there, the wedding was a wash-out for them. Better remain quiet, and cultivate what little luck they had—better these than worse, since fate inevitably subdued him.

But the sentence of Toni was for open war. ‘It’s no use skulking; let’s meet McGonigle in the open; the odds are he won’t have the nerve to try it on there, and if he does, you can say, “Yes, funny coincidence, wasn’t it?” and then suddenly see someone you particularly want to talk to’.

He grumbled but, as usual, took her advice, and lived to be thankful that he had done so. But never during the remainder of his career at Totsuka did he enter into conversation with Professor McGonigle.

On that day another letter arrived in Totsuka, addressed in violet italic script and bearing a Gloucestershire postmark. It brought to James Podler news of chickens, Father Bland, Harrod’s stores, and the rest. But Podler was swaying gently among the brown sea-ribbons, his face staring open-eyed, with an expression of unconcern, at the little fishes who would pause to regard him hopefully.

News of his death passed to Europe and even to the Mongolian desert, where Mrs. Podler promptly married a Mexican archaeologist with whom she had been living for some time; a forceful man, who proposed to maintain the sanctity of marriage with an automatic pistol and a geological hammer—arguments that appealed to Mrs. Podler.

The scarlet death-lilies splashed with blood the edges of the gilding rice-fields, the corners of woods, and

thickets of tall, plumed grass. On rustic tréllis arbours, the snake-gourds glistened in the moonlight : autumn and the moon-viewing season were at hand, a time for sentimental parties to the river Tamagawa, now that the cruelty of the air and the mosquitoes began to abate.

