

THE CRISIS

A RECORD OF THE DARKER RACES

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Conducted by
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THE GOLDEN-FACED PEOPLE

A Story of the Chinese Conquest of America

By NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY



I. Trouble with a Laundryman.

He was a laundryman who ironed shirts superbly, yet with that irritating air of being a little above his business. His picked English showed me that he aspired to be something more than a coolie. I thought we had been friends for some months, but now old Yellow-arms clutched my week's

washing because I had lost my half of his red ticket. I showed him for the tenth time the name on the linen. I was in a hurry to dress for the Lincoln's birthday banquet. Pushing the money towards him, I jumped for the exit with my goods. He turned out the gas. I heard him scramble over the counter. He was between me and the door.

He hit me with the handle of his broom. Then I was under the delusion that I made for the alley through the side entrance.

II. Results of Being Hit With a Broom.

I found myself in a long, iron-floored passage, thick with yellow fog. Just as suddenly I was in a packed assembly room where the walls blazed with dragon-embroidered lanterns. I turned around. The door of iron behind me was closed. My pursuer was not in sight.

The place was like a sort of heathen temple. But no, the next thing that caught my eye was the phrase: "In the year of Christ." It appeared that this fantastic gathering was about to dedicate with speeches and ceremonies a tablet inscribed: "*In the year of Christ two thousand eight hundred and nine Lin-Kon was born. This memorial is set up on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth in honor of his meritorious and superior career. He was the emancipator of the white man.*"

All eyes in the room were on this tablet. It was above the speaker's platform.

The shirt-washer had hit me pretty hard. I did not realize it all at once but he had knocked me through that iron door into the next millenium. He had knocked the Chinese language into my head, for these inscriptions were written in that ideograph. And now I was amazed to behold him, or a person quite like him sitting in a pew at one side of the platform. He blinked there in a majesty that was a tremendous expansion of the streak of dignity with which he once ironed shirts. He had somehow knocked another thing into my head—that a Chinaman is so infinitely superior to a white man there is no comparison. I knew that was the meaning of the empty bench, reserved for him exclusively, despite the crowded aisles.

The audience was one-half Anglo-Saxon. The other half seemed Chinese, but it slowly dawned on me that they were not! They were Eurasians, half yellow, half white, who looked scornfully upon us who were so pure and pale. But, on the other hand, they glanced furtively in the direction of their solitary Chinese visitor with eyes of abject abasement.

III. How Chinese Superiority Came About.

I was being patronizingly escorted toward the tablet by some of these half-yellow men. I knew I was being treated with honors because of my learning, and in spite of my

color. I was being delicately and deprecatingly introduced to half a score of half-yellow speakers of the evening, there grouped about the tablet.

Then I was being proclaimed to the audience as one who had studied with zeal the Chinese conquest of America. I laid down my laundry bundle. I was in a whirlwind of astonishing impressions. And it was no longer a bundle, but had shrunken into a manuscript, in Chinese characters which I knew I myself had written. I opened it and read and commented to the crowd—something after this fashion:

"When our fathers taught the Golden People mechanics in the sordid ages of the world, the white man was the leader of civilization." There was a mighty cheer. Especially those almost white grew vociferous. Gongs were beaten. Fans were thumped against the seats till they were splinters. I continued: "Our fathers were not scared when the Golden Men instituted their thorough-going compulsory education, nor when they put up their immortal universities from Canton to Lhasa. But that was the crucial hour, the pivot of history. Then, in the Chinese mind the Religion of Science took the place of the Religion of Literature, which same had been with them from the days of Shen and Yao. Now in their laboratories were hatched the medical lodges and inventors of secret societies, infamous and sublime. They sent forth whirlwinds of tracts with sociological, hygienic and biological remedies for China. These became well nigh inspired in the eyes of sects and sub-sects, who prayed over their crucibles in their little back-rooms, with the phrenzy of Mohammedans entering battle.

"Private lists were compiled of high and low families prone to opium or vice or bad citizenship, and of many others with a tendency to crime or idiocy. When the storm broke, these were sure to fall, whatever the apparent quarrel. Two provinces below the normal, were almost wiped out. Over every temple door and city gate appeared the quotation from the scientific conspirator Dahwin: 'Science and Heaven are one.' And revolutionary banners proclaimed his more terrible saying, 'None but Superior men are fit to live.' Every revolution aims at the annihilation of some class. Here all perished but the subtle, the wise and the strong.

"In the counter-revolution Science apparently returned to her kitchen and work-

bench. The simple worship of Heaven was restored, with high Christian elements. The scholar sipped his tea, quoted the Sermon on the Mount, quoted the Apostle Paul, quoted Mencius again, and practically every Chinaman was a scholar. Machinery was now the slave and not the master of Society. The Golden Man retained, indeed, the most scientific national and family relations. But he had learned to justify them by the five classics. His revolution had not been in vain. When he nodded, Asia had to kneel. He dominated by no apparent conquest but seemingly by his sedate carriage, his level glance, his deliberate fan.

"Their novelists showed to the judicious that the golden people were still human, and their deep-burrowing sociologists made their sins seem black, but how could we realize it, who met them in public matters only? How could we resist the well-disposed, iron-boned gentlemen, when they came as the apostles of light and altruism? To be sure we had made great steps since the sordid ages, but beside them, we seemed to have been retrograding. To be sure we had sculpture and architecture greater than theirs, but they had taught us to apologize for them by showing at the right moment, dazzling textiles, ceramics and bronzes. We had a power in music they could not reach but they hinted our accomplishment in this direction was a mark of national effeminacy. They spoke lightly but confidently of their jades and mosaics, their new schools of pantomime and drama. We had a poetry of our own, but they made the poems collected by Confucius more loved by the world.

"Indeed," said one of their scholars to his prince, 'in the presence of the well-rounded daily life of China, how brash seem the unclothed inventions of this whey-faced Democracy, where the weakling or diseased are tolerated for their votes and praised for their perverseness, where forever and forever the fairest things are tarnished with stupidity.'

IV. *How the White Man Was Enslaved.*

"The Golden-faced men came to our land with that apparent humility that hides one knows not what. They were ostensibly, hired servants of our public, scientific road-builders, park-architects, expert accountants, linguists, lecturers. Later they came as the establishers of immemorial ceremonies in the courts of our governors, who found the ways of the Golden People indispensable for

the glory of their administrations. They became valuable political advisers. Ceremony blended with intrigue. Politeness became the poisoned sword of politics, and left the puzzled voters out of the government.

"Many Europeans, not in the pay of the Chinese, have maintained that our first fifty years as a Chinese province were the greatest in our history. When the pagodas began to rise, when the so-called orange-toned school of city-building, first carried by the Japanese into China, was brought here with distinctly Chinese changes, all our best spirits felt the fertilizing effect. Our young scholars, returning from Peking with the highest degrees, had the faculty of finding every man of talent and firing his zeal for constructive reform till he was like an amber flame. And in season and out these scholars were disposed to voice their gratitude to the eternal lights of China.

"Our common people did not fare as well as our cultured classes, but knew it not. In the words of one of our own historians, 'They moved about, anemic and restless, like the petted white monkeys that eat sweetmeats in the palaces of India.'

"Gradually the strength of the Golden-faced became an ingenious tyranny. They protested they meant us well, and, individually many of them did, but collectively we were the weaker because our social system was more impure. And so we had to go down through caste and serfdom to slavery. Only when it was too late did we know of the system of engines in the Chinese laboratories especially constructed, to insure our obedience."

V. *The Praise of Lin-Kon*

"In our endless nightmare we scarcely noted the young sage who was traveling around the world with his group of students, like Confucius, seeking that magistrate who would allow him to set up his ideal government. Indeed, in his majestic and superior doctrines, the great Lin-Kon was nearer to Confucius than to any other teacher."

A spiritual wind swept through the audience. Again they burst through the shame of showing emotion. They rocked in their seats and wept and shouted. They thanked Heaven and thanked God for Lin-Kon.

Indeed it was a curious audience. The wierdness and horror of Eurasianism was over it all—that which would fain be white, and yet be yellow, never knowing its own

mind. That audience was full of mixed tastes. A few still wore gowns according to the ancient fashions of white people, which, I somehow remembered, were permitted again when we were emancipated. But most of them were anxious to be in fashion rather than to be free, if their costumes told anything. The gowns of most of the women and children were embroidered with turkey-cocks, peach-blooms and demons, in the prevailing Chinese fashion. And the majority of the men were in state impractical blue and grey scholars' gowns, which looked foolish on manual laborers.

Now I found myself wandering from the text, often reading it mechanically, to reflect upon these things. There were all possible grades of half-breeds before me, and I noted with a kind of inward twitch that the heads of the men became more nobly formed in proportion as their eyebrows straightened and their hair approached Chinese black. The proudest of the women were plainly those with facial contours sleek as carved jade, with complexions neither gold nor silver, yet both. These were women, I somehow understood, who had no husbands of their own race, but had mysterious relations with certain leading Chinamen of the town, and their children, even prouder than they, sat beside them even more golden of face, even more reserved of manner, and loaded down with jewels.

"It was in these provinces," I continued, "that Lin-Kon saw men and women chained to what was actually a state auction-block, though defended under a technical name. He saw our fathers sold into hard labor and our mothers into destruction. He had been born on the hardy plains of central China where the people have a rough sort of equality, being all one race. Kneeling before the sacred image of Equality in this very town he swore 'by the Justice of Heaven' that he would some time 'hit the curse of Slavery and hit it hard.'

"And the story will be told to-night by better orators than the one now speaking, how the celestial abolitionists looked upon their humbler brethren and resolved to make them equal with themselves or destroy the reigning dynasty in the attempt, and how, led and mastered and disciplined by the immortal Lin-Kon, they secured through bloody revolution an equal place for us before the Law.

"But I must be brief. I leave these mat-

ters to these other gentlemen on the platform. I have been asked to say a few words on the issues of the hour. At the mass-meeting of the celestials of the whole city to celebrate Lin-Kon this afternoon, in the public Square, in the shadow of the statue of Equality, great pains were taken to keep white men and Eurasians off the platform or the committees, though it was a civic and not a social occasion. Naturally, but not wisely, we have been indignant. We have declared it was like playing Hamlet without the melancholy Dane. We have maintained that our voices would not necessarily have defiled their ears, neither should our rejoicings have made them sad. We were going to protest, but better councils prevailed. We can now celebrate here, in our own temple, in our own district of the city. We have privileges sufficient for rejoicing. Our right to political equality is written in the constitution, and as soon as we deserve it we will have it in fact. Already we have the full benefit of the law in many of our rights. Let us forget that we cannot wear swords. We do not need them. At least I can say we need money far more. Our next step is not sword equality but commercial equality. We must soberly and quietly look out for ourselves in business. There are no fatherly Chinese reformers watching over us. Lin-Kon is fifty years dead, and the Abolitionists are under the sod, and all that generation. We must not ask for social equality, nor to have the color-line rubbed out. Our highest dream must be, by patience and dignity, by more care for ethics and ceremony, by a sweeter Christianity to attain to a sort of *spiritual rank* with the conservative, everlasting race that still dominates."

There was a tremendous pandemonium of acclaim. I sat down deeply pleased and thrilled, for my last words had been pretty stiff medicine for the once proud Anglo-Saxon.

VI. *The Chinaman Treats Me as an Equal, Though I Am Not.*

I was sitting by the Celestial now. By an imprecipitable gesture he had called me to his side as I put my manuscript into my pocket. I forgot not his resemblance to the laundryman I seemed to have known millions of years ago, yet it did not interfere with the intensity of my present exultation at his kindness. I knew that he shrunk from me as from a leper, yet his attention was an accolade. He whispered: "Servant, can you

come with me?" I answered: "Honorable sir, I am with you." We threaded the packed aisles, the people giving way before him as before a demi-god. My heart bumped like a fire-engine. My cheeks seemed scalded with the blood in them. I knew that every speaker left behind envied me, that each one had planned a sentence or so that he had expected to roll out with special eloquence and make a hit with that Golden Man. Now I was stealing their audience.

How soft and cool was the night air. Under the dingy street-lamps of the white man's quarter there was a sad and radiant dignity about my companion that put a childish aching and choking in my throat. I said in my heart, as his measured words came to me like balm: "I would be willing to be skinned alive just to be like him. He justifies the ages." Yet he was simple enough in conversation. He said: "I was anxious to hear your Lin-Kon's birthday celebration, and compare it with our own. I have been deeply gratified at the tone of your address."

I was silent. I did not know how to thank him. With just the right deliberation we entered the brilliant celestial streets, as though crossing that invisible line were crossing no line at all. I had an eye for the pageantry, and Lin-Kon's name in golden letters everywhere. The sage by my side was saying: "Servant, I was anxious to hear the rest of your speakers, but am due at the other banquet. I feel sure that the other men on your programme will adopt the same exalted tone that you used in your address."

"Master, they will, they will," I said hastily, and then blushed. "I mean they will not say anything violent or incendiary. They will!"

"I understand what you mean," he said with the greatest kindness. "I am going to proclaim, at our banquet to-night, as the watchword of reconstruction that saying of Lin-Kon: 'The superior man shows malice toward none and charity for all.' In addition I shall read them, if you are willing, the section of your manuscript in which you counsel 'Sweet Christianity.' It is good for both races to know such a word has been given to-night."

I said: "I will feel a terrible shame, master, if you become absurd for my sake." He made a gesture as though my words of self-deprecation were tossed aside. His face

glowed with a determination to be just. He came of the oldest and the proudest of the Chinese clans. Aspirations lofty and immemorial had formed his forehead and purged his eyes of cunning and scorn. But I went on: "You cannot make me a hero in your assembly. You will lose face, and more than lose face. You and I will be misunderstood and vilified, now and hereafter. Whatever we say on *Lin-Kon's Birthday*, we know a white criminal is made more famous in a day in the gold newspapers, than a white preacher can become by endless talk of 'Sweet Christianity.'"

We paused before the statue of Equality. She was a vast Sphinx-like creature. The animals beneath her claws, supposed to represent Prejudice, and slain Tyranny, were carved like those on the avenue to the Ming Tombs. Her half-shut-eyes held unfathomable thought. Many men who passed by saluted her gravely, so I presumed it was a custom. But my noble friend did more than that. He turned and put both hands on my shoulders, made me look him in the eyes, and shook me by the hand. His inner exultation must have been tremendous to overcome his natural shrinking from my white and ghastly skin. I gave him the manuscript. I regretted it the moment it had left my hand.

VII. I Almost Wake Up, Yet Dream On.

We were at the door of the banqueting hall. We passed through long lines of white lackeys who bent respectful eyes on my companion, and supercilious eyes on me. I began to tremble. Indeed I loved the man for his unworldliness, but I wanted to get my manuscript from him before he absent-mindedly led me into the very presence of the revellers themselves. He was expounding to me his views of the Anglo-Saxon talent for Drama, glossing over the faults of Shakespeare and showing his real native worth. He was talking rather loudly in his generous excitement.

AND NOW HE HAD DONE IT. I WAS PROFANING THE INNER SANCTUARY WHERE NO WHITE MAN DARED GO UNLESS ATTIRED AS A SERVANT. There were the dazzling revelers. I had a confused picture of an enormous feast, many men drunk. And all those men at those long tables turned from their god-like nectar-drinking to stare at us. I could not but note that my companion was the most majestic presence there. But they scarcely saw him. They gazed at me as

though they would never take their eyes away. I was the cynosure of a thousand reproving and astonished glances. They were as fascinated as they would have been had a giant jungle elephant suddenly risen from the earth. And just as they could not take their eyes away, so I could not help gazing at the endless phosphorescent crystals on the sword-hilts of these gentlemen. For every one was armed with that death-dealing electrical blade that only the pure Chinese are permitted to carry.

I seemed to be waking up. I struggled to cry out. I resolved to take any means possible to wake myself completely and irrevocably—as one often does in the midst of a nightmare. I felt, in the foolish logic of nightmares, that if I could get my manuscript I could break the spell. I took it hastily from the hands of my companion as he was bidding me farewell. Instantly it changed to my own bundle of laundry. I said to myself: "I am awake at last."

But instead, I faced the most terrible part of my dream. The face of my dear friend, that philosophic spirit, that guide through darkness, underwent a complete degradation. It shrivelled like a leaf in a fire, it became petty and full of hate. Uttering inarticulate cries he struggled with me for the bundle, and fell on one knee. He was thoroughly angry because he had fallen, and because his robe of honor was flecked with dust. I still had the victory.

"Would you put me into contempt, robber?" he breathed. "You shall be punished." Then, turning, in a voice that brought the whole company to their feet with grave and sobered concern, and finally set their swords whirring in the air, he cried: "This is a robber, an insulter and an incendiary. He has just been addressing a mob of his people. He has said: 'The White Race or the Chinese must perish. The whole white quarter will be armed in an hour.'"

As he spoke, every face in that company shrivelled to the pettiness and fury of his own. "Burn him alive!" they shouted. "Burn him alive!"

I was fleeing through those time-worn splendid streets with the speed which we can only accomplish in dreams. I had the wild hope that I could reach my own people and warn them that the mob was coming. It seemed to me I could hear the whole yellow race roaring just behind. I reached our as-

sembly hall. The man on the platform was at the climax of his oration "Lin-Kon has often been compared to Confucius." . . . But even now blood was flowing. My Chinese friend who had once been so lofty and so kind was shouldering up the aisle laying right and left with his fearful magic sword. Immediately behind him came a company of the banqueters, cutting and thrusting like mad. The leader was on the platform in a flash. He struck the miserable speaker on the mouth with the flat of his hand, and then beheaded him.

The swordsmen appeared to grow impossibly emaciated and tall, yet with broad, square shoulders. They leaned over the audience like reapers. They mowed down my wailing people like weeds.

I turned. I wrenched desperately at the rings in those iron doors by which, early in the evening, I came to this place. Now I was in the yellow fog once more, crawling on the iron-floored passageway. I felt if I could get to the other end I could awake. My feet and hands were like magnets, clinging to the floor.

VIII. *The White Race Still Supreme.*

"Well, well, you brought him to, doctor. I thought that broom had finished him." . . . I was back in the twentieth century, in the laundry-shop. I was on the counter by the window. Friends in festive attire were flocking round me, good fellows all, the blooded youth of the town. I said to myself: "I am awake at last."

Three or four policemen held the door. Outside the mob howled and peered. Across the street dangled four men, hanged by the neck till they were dead. An officer pointed to the nearest.

"That's your Chinaman," he said.

"Who hung him?"

"The mob."

"Who is the next man?"

"That is a Japanese."

"Who is the next?"

"That is just a Greek."

"What did he do?"

The Irishman laughed. "I dunno," he said, "these foreigners have to keep out of the way, I suppose." Then by way of information he added: "The Greeks are an awful ignorant people."

"Who is the fourth man?"

"Oh, that's just a nigger."

"Why did they hang him?"

"Why, I suppose they did not want to burn him alive on Lincoln's Birthday."

"But why did they hang him? What did he do?"

"I dunno. I guess he was too free with his lip. The best nigger on earth is not as good as the worst white man. Niggers are all alike. There was a Negro in Indiana the other day." . . . And he told the usual story.

"Yes," agreed a Southerner. "The best nigger is not as good as the worst white man. But we don't lynch 'em in our corner of Virginia unless we know they're guilty. And, squinting up his eyes at the mob: "We don't leave the dirty work to the poor white trash."

I found myself able to stand and receive the congratulations of the company. "Now wash the blood off your head and hands, old man," continued the Southerner, "and we

will go home with you and get you ready for the banquet yet."

Sure enough there was my laundry bundle on the table. I opened it. The shirt was not soiled with blood where it would show. We managed to dodge the crowd by using the side door. In my room I made a quick change. We were only fifty minutes late. The banquet had gone on with none of the other guests knowing what was happening outside.

The Southerner gracefully ended the evening by his speech on Lincoln as an example of the survival of the fittest, accompanied by a eulogy of Darwin. Like the rest of the speakers, he did not touch on the race question or the question of equality at all. But he had everything commendable to say of Lincoln, the self-made railsplitter and backwoodsman, the perfect pioneer type.

