

THE BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE SEEDS OF ENCHANTMENT."*

An "attempt to narrate the peculiar discoveries of Dr. Cyprian Beamish, M.D., Glasgow; Commandant Renée de Gys, Annamite Army; and the Honourable Richard Assheton Smith, in the Golden Land of Indo-China."

"International Socialism, . . ." began Dr. Cyprian Beamish.

"Too hot for Socialism, old man. Give it a rest." This in the unmistakable accents of Oxford University, from the Hon. Dicky.

"It was hot, despite the fans. Outside, Singapore City steamed under an equatorial rain-drizzle. The two globe-trotters subsided into silence over their mulligatawny.

See Sim slipped deft lumps of ice into their glasses and resumed his impassive pose, hands tucked away in the sleeves of his blue silk jacket.

"Of these *Fan-qui-lo* (foreign devils)" thought See Sim, "the fair-haired one is undoubtedly great in riches, wisdom and strength. The other (Beamish) seems to me a person of lesser importance." See Sim was right in his summary.

"The eating of meat, by stimulating the animal passions," began Beamish . . . but the sentence died unfinished on his lips.

At that moment, not alone Beamish, but every single man throughout the big windowless tiffin room ceased talking abruptly. They sat, forty or fifty Europeans, motionless and staring, manners forgotten. Only the imperturbable Orientals still moved, silent on embroidered slippers, among the hushed tables. For suddenly, unexpectedly, each man saw the inmost vision of his heart, the dream girl of swamp and jungle-cabin, visibly made manifest before his astounded eyes.

She came among them, moving quietly, rhythmically, a tall, stately presence, golden-haired, rose-complexioned as women of the West, violet-eyed, white-handed, low-breasted, long of limb—a dream—and a temptation.

Her hair—she wore no hat—seemed to Dicky's eyes like a great casque of molten gold, under which the face showed flawless and alluring.

Behind her came a man, a red-haired, red-bearded giant of a man with fierce red-brown eyes, dressed un-Englishly in wide alpaca trousers, scarlet cummerbund atop, light green tropical shooting jacket, red-lined, hanging loosely on his vast shoulders.

"Good heavens!" thought Dicky, "it's de Gys."

Recognition was mutual. The giant strode across the floor, bellowing in a voice loud as the scream of a bull-elephant, "By the seven *sales Boches* I slew at Douamont, *c'est mon ami le Colonel Smith!*"

Beautiful Mélie's tragic death that same evening was the commencement of the wonderful happenings related in this book. In her possession were found the seeds, which gave such enchanting results to the eater, and set Beamish aflame with

* Gilbert Frankau. Hutchinson & Co., London.

desire to discover their source so that he might become a benefactor to the race.

De Gys confides in Dicky the mysterious circumstances under which he had first met his beautiful companion, and his conviction that she belonged to the "white women beyond the mountains," of French aristocratic ancestry, of whose descendants nothing had been heard for over a hundred years.

It was on this quest of discovery that these three ill-assorted men set forth, on the strangest and most picturesque adventure that has perhaps ever been imagined, and the description of which would be hard to surpass.

It must suffice us to relate that their quest ended in attaining the objects for which it was undertaken, and crystallised at the moment in which de Gys despaired of success.

At last they were in the Country of the Flower, and among the unearthly, cloying, tempting, enervating beauty of its atmosphere and its strange inhabitants.

"Dicky issued from between the rock-walls into sunshine. Sky above shone softest blue, rocks behind glimmered white as alabaster. Turf underfoot was softest, silkiest velvet, clumped here and there with golden daffodillies. Fragrance of strange flowers cloyed the air. Gradually the magic of this place took Dicky by the throat."

Beautiful girls, one surely dead Mélie, bathed unabashed in a turf-girdled pool of bluest water.

Even at that first encounter Dicky knew that the beauty of the Flower-folk was sterile, the beauty of an illusion. No warm humanity beamed from the violet eyes of Safrané; no flush of womanhood kindled the slender bodies of Pivoine or Pâquarette. They were perfect, but with a bloodless perfection, visions such as weary souls-fashion for a refuge from life."

Beamish at once succumbed to the influences of the seeds of enchantment, and de Gys was fed with them in his collapse. Dicky resisted the drug for some time, while the girl Safrané woos him, and asks him what brings them into the Country of the Flower.

He tells her it was for the sake of a girl called Mélie.

"It is many moon-changes since Sister Mélie grew restless," said Safrané. "We have almost forgotten her."

So it had all been in vain—horrors endured, fights fought, risks run, dangers surmounted. Life came to this in the end—illusion. Well! he too would have his share of illusion. Only the tiniest share—one hour of the ecstasy he had known in Singapore when he had tasted the berry.

Safrané proffered the seed in her fingers. With a last effort of will-power he shook his head. All the fatal procrastination of the finest race on earth called to Dicky as he bent his casqued head and took the girl in his arms.

It was as though some crimson flower had kissed him, as though the tip of her savorious tongue gave the cool seed between his teeth.

A wealth of imagination is lavished on this period of this remarkable book—the transforma-

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