

pillar. He too rose, but bowed his head.

"A Chinaman, eh?" said Lyne, looking at this unexpected apparition with curiosity. "Oh, of course, Mr. Tarling, I had almost forgotten that you've almost come straight from China. Won't you sit down?"

He followed the other's example, threw himself into a chair and offered his cigarette case.

"The work I am going to ask you to do I will discuss later," he said. "But I must explain, that I was partly attracted to you by the description I read in one of the newspapers of how you had recovered the Duchess of Henley's jewels and partly by the stories I heard of you when I was in China. You're not attached to Scotland Yard, I understand?"

Tarling shook his head.

"No," he said quietly. "I was regularly attached to the police in Shanghai, and I had intended joining up with Scotland Yard; in fact, I came over for that purpose. But several things happened which made me open my own detective agency, the most important of which happenings, was that Scotland Yard refused to give me the free hand I require!"

The other nodded quickly.

China rang with the achievements of Jack Oliver Tarling, or, as the Chinese criminal world had named him in parody of his name, "Lieh Jen," "The Hunter of Men."

Lyne judged all people by his own standard, and saw in this unemotional man a possible tool, and in all probability a likely accomplice.

The detective force in Shanghai did curious things by all accounts, and were not too

scrupulous as to whether they kept within the strict letter of the law. There were even rumours that "The Hunter of Men" was not above torturing his prisoners, if by so doing he could elicit confessions which could implicate some greater criminal. Lyne did not and could not know all the legends which had grown around the name of "The Hunter" nor could he be expected in reason to differentiate between the truth and the false.

"I pretty well know why you've sent for me," Tarling went on. He spoke slowly and had a decided drawl. "You gave me a rough outline in your letter. You suspect a member of your staff of having consistently robbed the firm for many years. A Mr. Milburgh, your chief departmental manager."

Lyne stopped him with a gesture and lowered his voice.

"I want you to forget that for a little while, Mr. Tarling," he said. "In fact, I am going to introduce you to Milburgh, and maybe, Milburgh can help us in my scheme. I do not say that Milburgh is honest, or that my suspicions were unfounded. But for the moment I have a much greater business on hand, and you will oblige me if you forget all the things I have said about Milburgh. I will ring for him now."

He walked to a long table which ran half the length of the room, took up a telephone which stood at one end, and spoke to the operator.

"Tell Mr. Milburgh to come to me in the board-room, please," he said.

Then he went back to his visitor.

"That matter of Milburgh can wait," he said. "I'm not so sure that I shall proceed any farther with

it. Did you make inquiries at all? If so, you had better tell me the gist of them before Milburgh comes."

Tarling took a small white card from his pocket and glanced at it.

"What salary are you paying Milburgh?"

"Nine hundred a year," replied Lyne.

"He is living at the rate of five thousand," said Tarling. "I may even discover that he's living at a much larger rate. He has a house up the river, entertains very lavishly——"

But the other brushed aside the report impatiently.

"No, let that wait," he cried. "I tell you I have much more important business. Milburgh may be a thief——"