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Red Book

THE HOP-LEE SYNDICATE

A face like a rose of mischievous turned to him and the laugh he loved rippled out again. "It is too bad, Tom, I know you hate a holiday spent in eating and drinking. I know you despise family parties. I know you abominate Thanksgiving dinners, but—"

The Hop-Lee Syndicate

BY J. OLIVIER CURWOOD

Author of "Miss Evangeline," etc.

"YOU see," said Hop Lee, "it's a glad-day!"

And so it was. Colonel Bangs wired as much that day to Sylvester Bumps, M. P., who was in Ottawa, and the next afternoon the ambitious member from the West strolled into the colonel's Windsor office and shook hands, expectancy mapped in delicate lines in his face.

"I've got these other little deals of ours that are a frazzle," assured the barrister, as he conducted his friend into the private room in which most of their partnership schemes had found birth. "Monday, my boy, there's a fortune in it! That little western land-grab you're planning up there with your honest M.P.'s and got a ghost of a show beside it."

Bangs, who was short and fat, paused to wipe the perspiration from his broiling face with a huge handkerchief, while his visitor slowly divested himself of his frock coat, hat, and small coat, and settled back restfully in the breeze of an electric fan. The man from Ottawa had a fondness for doing things deliberately. He had already added to the reputation he had already acquired as a smooth man of public affairs, and it did.

"Money, you say?" he inquired lazily. "Bunches of it," thundered the colonel, thumping a shapeless fist upon the table before him. "There's enough in it to make us both rich, Silver, without a doubt—"

"Any serious difficulties?" interrupted the other. "I mean, of course, any 'unpleasant' work to be done up there?"

"Up there" with Sylvester Bumps meant Ottawa.

"No work—no danger; nothing for us

to do but to go in and get our rocks," assured the colonel. "I've got everything fixed. Papers are all drawn up and waiting for your signature to a gold-basis proposition. Thing's going to be known as the 'Hop Lee Syndicate, Limited.' It's a sort of transportation company, you might say, with the slickest Chinaman on earth as the promoter and active agent, and you'll be the backers, away off in the woods, mind you, but getting the money just the same! How many Chinamen do you reckon there are in Canada, Silver?"

"The devil!" replied Bumps. "I mean it," persisted Bangs. "The last census says there's less than 20,000. But that was a good time ago, and I've got the inside stuff that proves the government didn't know, anyway. There's thirty-five thousand if there's that many hundred! Do you believe it?"

"Sure!" agreed the other, edging forward in his seat. "What the deuce has that got to do with making money?" he asked.

"Everything," wheezed the colonel, poking his fat face across the table. "Look here, Silver! Say there's only thirty thousand Chinks this side of the border. 'Ow many of 'em are you thinking wants to go back to their own country? Forty per cent, sir, forty per cent by actual figgers in 'my possession! They've all come over here to pick up gold bricks off the streets, or to go across the border; and they aint found the first and they can't do the last. I've made a study of our Chinks, Silver, and I know they've had a blooming hard time of it these past two years. And what's the consequence?

Why, that nearly 'arf of them are dying to go home! And why don't they go? For two reasons, sir. They aint got the money and they aint got to Hop Lee's method of free transportation!"

Colonel Bangs settled back and folded his hands over his projecting stomach. Bumps stared at him in astonishment, undisguised for the moment.

"You don't understand!" shot the colonel, swinging himself into action again. "I said that this was what you might call a transportation company. Well, so it is. Forty per cent of thirty thousand Chinks is twelve thousand, representing those that are ready and willing to go home. Our business is to get 'em there! I know how to do it—and make money."

The member from the West woke up. He leaned across the table and his eyes began to shine. He had implicit confidence in Colonel Bangs.

"It's this way," said the colonel, anticipating his question. "This 'ere's a Chinaman." He picked up an ink-well for illustration. "He wants to go home. From this point it's going to cost him a hundred or better to land in a China point, if he starts out himself. But he aint got a hundred. Maybe he hasn't got even fifty; but we take all he has got—and we send him to China for it. We can afford to do it cheap. And why? Because, my boy, we can get him over there—for nothing!"

A part of the colonel's secret was out, and he inhaled a huge breath from the breeze of the fan.

"You're not quite on," he said, as his companion's eyes narrowed to slits, as was a habit of Sylvester Bumps when in doubt. "Don't you see? This ink-well is one of our Chinamen. We've got 'im. Now what do we do? Why, we just send 'im across the river, he's nabbed by Uncle Sam, and soon he's being deported home—free of charge!"

Colonel Bangs threw himself back in his chair and roared. A moment later Sylvester Bumps joined him. When the two men had recovered themselves the parliamentarian's collar was unbuttoned and tears were running down the colonel's cheeks.

"Ain't it great?" he gasped. "Aint it

a huge joke on you? Uncle Samuel across the river? And, mind you, he can't help himself. He's got to take the Chinks and send over, and he's got to deport 'em. That's the law of 'is blooming' country. Figure it out Silver. If we send over our twelve thousand Chinks, and we get three dollars for each of 'em, how much does it make? It's three hundred and sixty thousand dollars, aint it? And that's only a half of the scheme. When we've got all of our own Chinks cleaned out, then what'll we do? Why, my boy, we'll just send our agents over through the states, get the homesick Chinks there; bring 'em over here, send 'em back again, and your obliging Uncle Samuel will nab 'em and deport 'em, sure as my name's Augustus Bangs!"

The member from Ottawa reestablished his collar. He recovered the dignity he had momentarily lost by cooling his face before the fan, and when he spoke there was a tone of suspicion in his voice.

"Sounds nice," he said, with a return to his parliamentary urbanity. "Sounds very good, colonel. But you're weak on facts. Two-thirds of our Chinamen are up in British Columbia, or were when we got that little head-tax bill through. I'll wager there aren't two hundred within a radius of as many miles of us. How you plan to bring the beggars over a thousand miles or more of territory free is more than I can guess, just now!"

"See here, Silver," retorted the colonel, "this is what I want to know: If we can get 'em, what do you think of the scheme?"

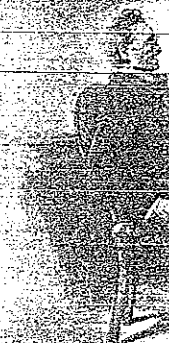
"It's a winner!"

"Well, we can get 'em, and Hop Lee will prove it!"

At the mention of Hop-Lee the parliamentarian's eyes narrowed again. The colonel saw suspicion brewing in his face, and he waited anxiously.

"Seems to me this Hop Lee is playing a pretty big part in the game, isn't he, colonel?" he asked. "What's he after?"

"If he proves his scheme O. K. he'll see a price," explained the colonel. "Don't you see? He's got to show us, and after that if we think his idea is worth the price, why—we'll buy it. Of course



BY T. MARY HENDERS

...to keep Hop L...  
...for us. It would...  
...and me to get mixed up in...  
...it's dead easy to get...  
...Chinks mean—but if we...  
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The man from Ottawa...  
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"It's risky—blamed risky...  
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WALKER'S ILLUSTRATION

"It's got those little dears of ours best to a frazzle!"

"We'll have to keep Hop Lee to run the business for us. It wouldn't do for you to get mixed up in anything like this. It's dead easy to get 'em over—the Chinese I mean—but if we were discovered—Heavens!"

The man from Ottawa was not content. He got up and paced back and forth across the office, twirling his thumbs behind his back, as was his habit when musing in thought.

"It's risky—blamed risky!" he suddenly stopping before the colonel. "See here! What if it should leak out in some way that we were mixed up in the business? Where would my seat as an M.P. be? And you? Great Scott, Bangs, you couldn't be able to earn your salt anywhere in Canada after that! If we were discovered, we'd be queered for life. And that's no Easter—and safer!"

"But we won't be discovered," assured the colonel. "Hop Lee will do everything. Personally we won't touch the business. Unless we want to we won't touch a Chinaman—except Hop Lee. He'll run the game according to our instructions. And think of the money, man! Three hundred thousand—

"That's just it!" interrupted the parliamentarian. "If there is such a fortune in it, and Hop Lee knows it, why doesn't he hang on to his scheme and work it for himself? What does he want to sell out for?"

Colonel Bangs smiled broadly. "Right there is where I think he's foolish, Silver," he said. "But to a Chinaman five thousand dollars is a lot of money, and that's what he wants—besides a ten per cent rake-off. That's pretty good, anyway, isn't it? Mind you, Hop Lee has got the scheme, but he wants good English brains behind it—and he knows it! And if Hop Lee proves his idea is a money-maker, what kick have we got coming if he wants to make a fool of himself? And he'll prove it, I tell you!"

And Hop Lee did. Word was sent to him that evening and the member from Ottawa met him for the first time. The two shook hands.

There was something about Hop Lee that inspired this amount of deference. With the erudition of a born politician Sylvester Bumps valued him at full measure, and the colonel's stock rose accord-

ingly. Hop Lee wore gloves and a silk hat. His feet were immaculate in patent leathers. His dress was English, and cut by a tailor. There was something peculiarly attractive even in the narrowness of his eyes. He did not cringe before the great men: to the colonel he was a trifle supercilious; the parliamentarian he met as an equal.

Hop Lee had brought with him a number of papers. These officially certified that he was one of the many running-managers of the Underground Railway, the object of which organization was to smuggle Celestials from Chinese ports into the United States, and that he was also a lieutenant in the Six Companies, otherwise known as the White Lily.

Sylvester Bumps was delighted by this evidence. He knew that the White Lily was the most powerful secret society in China and that its Canadian branch had successfully smuggled hundreds of yellow aliens into British Columbia since the passage of the five hundred dollar head-tax bill. He was inclined to be patronizing. He wished to show Hop Lee how pleased he was to have made his acquaintance.

But Hop Lee did not give him the opportunity. He produced other papers, describing certain conditions existing in Vancouver and the West, which seemed to show beyond doubt that hundreds of overworked, poorly fed Chinamen were leaving the mines for eastern cities, and that the Chinese population of cities like Winnipeg, Montreal, Ottawa, and Quebec had doubled within six months. There were at the present time, said Hop Lee, five new Chinamen in Windsor who wished to return to their own country, and who, under his seal as an officer in the White Lily, would entrust themselves to the care of the syndicate.

Hop Lee's proposition was reasonable and convincing. He would first give a sample of his work by drumming up passengers for a time. At the end of a set period, if the financial returns warranted it, Colonel Bangs and the member from Ottawa were to pay him five thousand dollars for all rights to the scheme, after which his perquisite was to be ten per cent of the business he worked up through

himself and his agents. Hop Lee departed with this agreement in writing. The next day a telegram announced that he was in London, and that he would first work the small towns between that point and Toronto.

Soon after this, Colonel Bangs was left alone with the responsibilities of the scheme. The member from the West had important engagements in Ottawa, and immediately after Hop Lee's communication left for the dominion capital to aid in the development of a certain piece of legislation in which the colonel himself was not a little interested. This left the man in Windsor with time upon his hands, and he waited impatiently for further news from Hop Lee. For two days none came. On the morning of the third he ran up to London, nosed about for a few hours without finding the Chinaman, then returned to his office in Sandwich street. A telegram awaited him. It was from Hop Lee, and, in a way, the intelligence it conveyed was startling. Hop Lee had shipped three Chinamen to the syndicate, in care of Colonel Bangs.

This was not what the colonel had expected, and for a few hours it acted as a dampener upon his enthusiasm. He had taken it for granted without special assurance on Hop Lee's part, that Hop Lee himself would return with his first batch of homeseekers and would personally see to their conveyance across the river. It was agreed that the agent should arrange for the trans-border railroading of his countrymen, and this new turn in the scheme was perplexing. After a little, however, the colonel persuaded himself into the belief that Hop Lee would closely follow the passengers he had secured, or would at least send instructions by them.

So that night he wrote Sylvester Bumps that everything was progressing splendidly. Until a late hour he indulged in rosy visions of the future, with Mrs. Bangs and when that lady grew unappreciative because of drowsiness he retired to his own room, smoked a last cigar, and went to bed. Even then he could not free himself from the elation of Hop Lee's first consignments. For the twentieth time he figured that if Hop

Lee could drum up three passengers in as many days he would do something like ten thousand dollars worth of business a year. And Hop Lee was but one, while the syndicate planned to have at least half-a-dozen agents scattered through Canada.

Early the following morning Colonel Bangs hurried to the local telegraph office. Nothing had come for him during the night, but huddled half-way up the gloomy stairway leading to his rooms in Sandwich street he found three hungry-looking Celestials waiting for him. A few moments later he was apprised, by certain slips of paper in their possession, that they were Messrs. Ben Tong, Lee Lock, and Wah Chang, of London, and that the price they were to pay for transportation aggregated ninety-eight dollars. Each presented a card bearing Hop Lee's signature and the emblem of the White Lily.

Beyond these facts the colonel was still metaphorically at sea. Hop Lee had sent no word. No one of the three could speak English. To this effect the colonel wired Sylvester Bumps, at Ottawa. Afterward he pocketed the ninety-eight dollars, shut the aliens in a room back of his office, and went out after a basket of rations. After the feeding operation, he locked his doors and sat down to figure some way out of a situation which was fast becoming embarrassing. His recess was brief. The telephone upon the desk beside him rang interruptingly, and in response to his "Hello" he was told that the station-master was at the other end, and that he wanted Colonel Bangs.

"This is his office," replied Bangs, equivocally.

"Well, when he comes," said the station-master, "tell 'im there's a bunch of Chinamen come in on the 8:10, and they're inquiring for somebody that sounds like him. Can't make 'em out, exactly. Is the colonel expecting anything of that sort?"

"You bet!" shouted Bangs. "He wants 'em for a job out West. How many are there?"

"Oh, a dozen or so. I guess. I'll send 'em up."

Five minutes later the following tele-

gram was sent to Sylvester Bumps, M. P. I'm flooded with them. Can't find Hop Lee. Don't know what to do. Come at once.

BANGS.

At the same time the local office received instructions to cover every town between London and Toronto with messages addressed to Hop Lee, Chinaman, which read as follows:

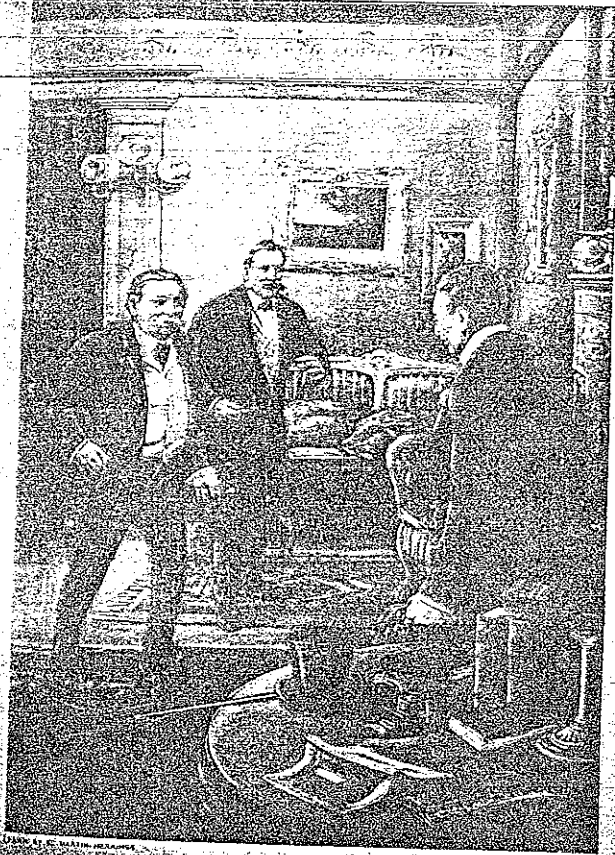
Return at once. Important.

COLONEL BANGS.

For the ensuing half-hour the colonel hovered half-way between elation of hopes fulfilled and a panic. Hop Lee's scheme was a success. Within three days he had proved the reality of their fortune. Canada was filled with Chinamen willing to pay for being properly deported. All that was needed now to secure a full realization of his dreams were two or three Chinese agents distributed along the border to receive and get rid of Hop Lee's passengers as they arrived. But his present situation cooled the colonel's enthusiasm. In one moment he saw himself rich, in another his professional reputation was gone. The flooding of Windsor by such a large number of Chinamen would in itself create a sensation; his own reception of them, unless he could offer a good excuse, would assuredly breed suspicion. If Hop Lee did not return soon how could he rid himself of the Celestials?

He turned a dozen plans over in his head, and rejected them all. He could not personally conduct his charges to some secluded point along the river and embark them in a small boat. The risks would be too great. Besides, he would require an interpreter. He knew a Chinese laundryman, but to bring another into the scheme would not only be dangerous but suicidal to both his hopes and his reputation. If Hop Lee were there the whole thing would be simple. He could tell the Celestials what to do; he could caution them; one by one they could slip along the shore without attracting attention, and he would be in no way mixed up in the affair. There was only one thing for him to do. He would have to keep the Chinamen in the room until the last minute.

Twice, after sending the messages, he cleared up to a window and peered out



Col. Bangs who was short and fat, was inclined to be picturesque.

THE HOP LEE SYNDICATE

down into the street. Then he sat down and tried to smoke himself into tranquility. Soon after this he heard the sound of feet shuffling up the stairs and after a moment's silence outside there came a timid knock at the door. The colonel opened it, and Hop Lee's countenance appeared. There were nine of them, and not until they were safely packed with the others in the back room, and the doors were locked, and the curtains at the windows drawn until only slanting streaks of light came in, did he feel at all relaxed. Then he recalled the newcomers, one by one, received Hop Lee's slips and their money, and in the end sent a third telegram to Sylvester Bumps with the information that up to 10 A. M. the business had aggregated \$507, and that Mr. Sylvester Bumps was needed upon the field of action without the delay of a precious moment; also that he, Augustus Bangs, was at his wife's end and would surely be compelled to refund the said \$507 and thus relieve himself of the entire situation unless Hop Lee or the parliamentarian put in an appearance soon.

Toward noon the colonel telephoned Mrs. Bangs to have their next-door neighbor's hired-man bring him lunch for thirteen, the lunch to be packed in such parcels as would not create suspicion. This feat accomplished, and the food distributed, he went out upon the street, explained to certain parties his project of furnishing Chinese labor for railroad construction-work, and cursed himself into hot sweats between times because he received no word from Sylvester Bumps. Occasionally he returned to his office to see if a telegram had been left for him, and the last time, which was late in the afternoon, he was greeted by the man from Ottawa.

"I didn't wait to wire you," explained Bumps, as he shook hands. "I had only time to catch a train. Allow me to congratulate you, my dear colonel!"

While almost tender crept into his eyes, well kept face, and as Colonel Bangs wiped the perspiration from the forehead and pores of his own countenance, he wondered what the devil the other man had so expressed himself in such a familiar way. "Have struck a gold

mine, Gus," said the parliamentarian. "Five hundred and seven dollars in three days! Why, I tell you, you've made a discovery which sooner or later will necessitate new legislation at Washington! They can't stop us. There's an honest fortune in it. Where have you got 'em?"

"There," nodded Bangs, fishing in his pocket for a key to the inner door. When he had opened it the member from Ottawa peered in curiously. He saw the Chinamen huddled in various attitudes, most of them asleep, and among them were scattered the indigestible articles from Mrs. Bangs' lunch-basket.

"Are you feeding them well?" he asked, backing quietly, as if his intrusion might awaken the others into aggressive action. "Must do that, colonel," he added more loudly, as the door was closed. "We've got to keep them in good company until Hop Lee returns. By the way, where the devil can Hop Lee be?"

The man from Ottawa voiced this question half-a-dozen times during the next two hours, and each time the colonel answered by describing some new phase of his scheme for ferreting him out from among the little towns scattered between London and Toronto, at last acknowledging that he must be in the larger city, where a message might lie for a week without finding him.

"One of us must run up there and dig 'im out," he suggested. "Better go up yourself, to-night. If you don't find Hop Lee by noon—" The colonel shrugged his shoulders. "If you can't find 'im, I say, just let me know and I'll return their money and show 'em down into the alley by the back way to-morrow night. Hop Lee has proved his case, anyway!"

"The devil!" lamented Bumps. "Five hundred gone to—"

At this moment Mrs. Bangs cut in over the telephone to ask her husband if he intended to come home for his supper. Bangs replied that he did, and that he was going to bring Mr. Bumps with him. Being overheated and considerably out of humor, he hung up his receiver immediately after this remark, notwithstanding the fact that Mrs. Bangs seemed to have something exciting to tell him.

At the Bangs home, Mrs. Bangs, after cordially greeting the member of parliament, vouchsafed in a *trigid en sotto* that if her husband had been courteous enough to have listened at the other end of the phone he might have heard something which would have given him pleasure. The colonel, however, was in too irascible an humor to make further inquiries, and for that reason it was not until an hour later, when he and Sylvester Bumps were smoking their after-dinner cigars that Mrs. Bangs casually announced Hop Lee's presence in the parlor, where he had been waiting for something like an hour and a half.

The colonel looked at his friend with joyous bewilderment; in the eyes of the man from Ottawa there flashed for an instant a look suggestive of the glittering edge of a keen knife. When they entered the parlor Hop Lee arose to meet them, bowing with a dignity which showed that he was conscious of the insult of which he had unintentionally been made the victim. His deportment charmed the parliamentarian. It assuaged what doubts he might have had as to the caliber of achievement represented in Hop Lee, and there was more than usual warmth in the handshake with which he honored the Celestial.

During the half-hour that followed, Hop Lee recounted his experiences of the past few days, ending with the determined assertion that he could round up twenty of his countrymen in Toronto, where he had received the colonel's message. For the remainder of that night Hop Lee then disappeared. When he turned up at the colonel's office the next day he announced that the twelve Chinamen were safely across the border, and submitted proof through the medium of a morning-paper that three of them had already been taken by the United States authorities. No argument could have been more convincing. Even Sylvester Bumps, whose great stock was level-headed judgment, was satisfied. So a little later Colonel Bangs accompanied Hop Lee to a local bank, and the sum of five thousand dollars was turned over to his credit, being receipted for as payment in full for all rights of the institu-

tion known as the Hop Lee Syndicate, Limited.

When the colonel told Sylvester Bumps how the thing had transpired he swore there were tears in Hop Lee's eyes when the money was turned over to him.

"I don't doubt it; it's a great fortune—in China," remarked the man from Ottawa.

And it was that thought that burned its way through and through Hop Lee's brain until it seemed that he must go out upon the streets and shout it to the people he met. But nobody saw the joy that was in him. After a little he returned to the bank and asked if his money could be transferred to a certain Ng You Kuen, whose residence was in Hong-Kong, China. It could, and Hop Lee ordered it done. Then he went out and filled his pockets with expensive cigars and visited his Chinese friends.

But he told them of none of his luck. In Moy Kim's laundry he met three of his countrymen, whom the colonel and Sylvester Bumps supposed were over the border. Hop Lee talked to them volubly, and threatened them with mischief unless they got out of town, as he had directed them to do, secretly and at night.

When evening came he walked slowly down toward the ferry. There was mist in the night, and across the river the lights of Detroit twinkled like hazy stars a vast distance away. Hop Lee stowed with the water lapping at his feet and imagined that they were the lights of Hong-Kong. His head was full of Hong-Kong; he had come from there out to this great unknown land across the sea to make his fortune, and he had made it. Over there, in Hong-Kong, he would be a rich man and honors would be heaped upon him. The sound of the ferry-boat bell jangled upon his dream. He thought of Colonel Bangs of Sylvester Bumps—and he smiled. His footsteps led him to the gangplank; his eyes were riveted ahead; where his imaginary Hong-Kong lay, and the light in his eyes and the smile upon his lips were expressions of sweet contentment.

Colonel Bangs sat in his office, and on the opposite side of the table from

...at Sylvester Bumps' face was dis-  
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THE COLONEL STARED AT HIM BLANKLY.

THE COLONEL STARED AT HIM BLANKLY.

Lee was clever. He deserves what he got. I'm glad I met him."

"Great Scott, don't you see the light yet?" exclaimed the parliamentarian. "Hasn't it dawned upon you that perhaps there aren't half-a-hundred Chinamen in the whole of Canada who want to go home? Hasn't it struck you that Hop Lee may have hired a few of his countrymen to help him out in his little game, and that all of those innocent-looking pigtails we had back there were helping him to make a brace of roofs out of us? Can't you imagine that-Hop Lee is going back home to enjoy his little fortune, and that he let Uncle Sam get hold of him so that our suspicions wouldn't be aroused? Heavens, my poor boy, don't you see the light?"

Lee sat Sylvester Bumps, M.P. The colonel's face was distorted with rage; the parliamentarian was smiling, still content in the face of what his friend had just described as "the vilest fraud ever perpetrated upon a subject of the crown." For the twentieth time the colonel read, while his red neck bulged with the ferocity of his feelings, the newspaper-clipping he held in his hand; it bore no heading for it was considered of small news-value on the other side.

Last night a Chinaman, who gave his name as Hop Lee, was taken in charge while attempting to leave one of the Windsor ferries on this side. He says he has no business here, but hoped to smuggle himself in. He will be deported.

"Gee! I want to tell you, our lovely Hop Lee said the Ottawa man suavely.

of late, sweater tried he 's eyes to him, fortune from turned Lee's go out y peo y that sed to could King, Kong, fered d his ished luck. of his Sel- the ably, tless acted avly: just the stars good and of ng, to set it ull be er- He ter ps are ry, us re of a