

NARRATIVE  
OF  
LORD ELGIN'S MISSION  
TO  
CHINA AND JAPAN.

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CHAPTER I.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WAR—THE ARROW CASE—POLICY OF SIR JOHN BOWRING—HOSTILITIES AT CANTON—RIGHT OF ENTRY INTO THE CITY—BOMBARDMENT OF YEH'S YAMUN—THE RESULTS—INSULT TO AMERICAN FLAG—DESTRUCTION OF THE FACTORIES—ABANDONMENT OF THE FACTORY POSITION—POSITION OF AFFAIRS IN FEBRUARY 1857—EFFECT OF THE FOREGOING OPERATIONS.

THE earlier incidents of the political rupture with the Chinese Commissioner Yeh, which occurred at Canton during the autumn of 1856—and which led to the appointment of a Special Mission to China, for the purpose of settling existing differences, and if possible of placing our relations with that Empire upon a new and enlarged basis—were too thoroughly canvassed at the time, to render it necessary to renew here any

discussion, or their merits, or recall at length their details. As the "Arrow case" derived its interest, then, from the debates to which it gave rise, and its effects on parties at home, rather than from any intrinsic value of its own, so does it now mainly owe its importance to the accidental circumstance, that it was the remote and insignificant cause which led to a total revolution in the foreign policy of the Celestial Empire, and to the demolition of most of those barriers which, while they were designed to restrict all intercourse from without, furnished the nations of the West with fruitful sources of quarrel, and perpetual grievances.

But though in this particular instance the "alleged insult" itself claims but a brief notice, and that merely as a matter of history, the steps taken by our diplomatic and naval authorities on the spot to redress it, are worthy of a fuller consideration, because there can be little doubt that it was in consequence of the results which these entailed,—coupled with other causes which will be hereafter mentioned,—that Lord Elgin was compelled to adopt a line of policy not altogether in accordance with his original instructions, as defined in the House of Commons by Lord Palmerston, during the session of 1857. That this may be the more clearly apprehended, and a correct estimate formed of the embarrassing nature of the difficulties with which the High Commissioner found himself surrounded at the outset, it will be necessary to narrate briefly the course of events

which occurred in the Canton River previous to his arrival. Their consideration will enable us at once to perceive, how humiliating was the attitude we were occupying in the eyes of the Chinese, and more especially of the Cantonese—how grave the injury which our national prestige was suffering in consequence—and how inconvenient were the complications arising out of the anomalous position in which Great Britain found herself placed with reference to other nations.

It will be remembered that on the 8th of October 1856, a party of Chinese executives in charge of an officer, boarded the lorcha Arrow, a vessel registered under an ordinance passed at Hong-Kong eighteen months before, tore down the flag, and carried away the Chinese crew, refusing to listen either to the remonstrances of the master, or of the Consul, and insisting that the vessel was not British, but Chinese. Her papers were at the time in the Consulate, but her register had expired more than a month before. Still Mr Parkes maintained that she was entitled to protection under clause 10 of the ordinance, she not having been in the waters of the colony since the date of the expiry of the register. Mr Parkes at once wrote to the Imperial Commissioner, Yeh, complaining of the outrage, and offering to investigate any charge that might be brought against the persons seized. He also acquainted Sir J. Bowring and Commodore Elliot, the senior naval officer at hand, with the particulars of the

circumstance. In the correspondence that ensued, Yeh refused to admit to Mr Parkes that the lorch was British, and maintained that some of the crew were pirates. He offered to return nine men. Mr Parkes, however, was instructed to demand an apology in writing from Yeh—the return of the Chinese arrested to their ship—and their delivery to the authorities, if delivered, by and through the Consul. Yeh persisted, in his reply, that the lorch was not foreign property, had no flag flying, promised that Chinese officers should not seize foreign lorchas, and urged that foreigners should not sell registers to Chinese subjects building vessels. Meantime Sir John Bowring had threatened the Commissioner with an application to the naval authorities; and a junk, supposed to be an Imperial junk, but afterwards found to be a merchant vessel, was seized by way of reprisal, and released. On the 15th of October, Mr Parkes informed Yeh of this seizure, also that a naval force was at the Barrier Forts. On the 21st inst., Mr Parkes, under instructions, advised Yeh that, unless the requisition made was complied with, within twenty-four hours, ulterior measures would be adopted.

In consequence of this threat, an hour before the expiry of the term, the twelve men were sent to the Consulate, but without an officer of rank, or any letter of apology. Mr Parkes wrote again to Yeh. Nothing resulting, he circulated among the foreign community the letter containing the ultimatum of the 21st. The same day Yeh had written,

repeating his former arguments, and remonstrating against the seizure of the merchant junk. On the 22d Mr Parkes replied to this as before, and in the evening warned the community by circular that the question was now in the hands of Her Majesty's Senior Naval officer. Correspondence to the same effect passed between Yeh and Sir John Bowring. It had in the mean time been decided by Sir John Bowring, in consultation with Admiral Seymour, that "the most judicious measure of compulsion" to be adopted would be "the seizure of the defences of the city of Canton." In pursuance of this policy, on the 23d October Admiral Seymour took possession of the four Barrier Forts, Blenheim Fort, and Macao Fort, without loss, and scarce a semblance of resistance, and, through the Consul, advised Yeh of his arrival and intention to continue hostile proceedings against the defences, public buildings, and Government vessels, until reparation should be made for the wrong done. "His Excellency's reply," says the Admiral, "was very unsatisfactory." On the following day the Bird's Nest and Shameen forts were taken, without any attempt at opposition; and preparations were made for the defence of the Factories, which were garrisoned: a body of American officers, seamen, and marines, provided for the interests of the American community.

On the 25th the Island and Fort of Dutch Folly were taken, and occupied without opposition. This act completed the series of operations, upon the

efficacy of which the civil and military authorities had, to all appearance, confidently relied ; but the result was as far from being attained as ever. The Admiral writes :—"14th November 1856.—All defence of the city being now in our hands, I considered the High Commissioner would see the necessity of submission ; and I directed Mr Parkes to write and state, that when his Excellency should be prepared to arrange the points in dispute in a satisfactory manner, I would desist from further operations ; but the reply did not answer my expectations." So far from anything like submission, it appears that "an attack was made at 12.30 by a body of troops, supported by a much larger force, which occupied the streets in rear. Mr Consul Parkes was on the spot at the time, and warned them to retire, but ineffectually. The guard of Royal Marines, in charge of Captain Penrose, then drove them back, with a loss, as we understand, of fourteen killed and wounded." The next day Yeh closed the Chinese Custom-House.

Such were the steps taken, and violent measures resorted to, in the vain attempt to induce the Imperial Commissioner to make the *amende honorable*. His power to resist even this trifling demand was now proved beyond a doubt. Our inability to enforce it had been no less unmistakably manifested ; nevertheless another letter to Yeh was despatched on the 27th, by the Admiral, who thus alludes to it : "I concurred in opinion with Sir John Bowring, that

this was a fitting opportunity for requiring the fulfilment of long-evaded treaty obligations, and I therefore, in addition to the original demands, instructed Mr Parkes to make the following communication." These additional demands involved the right for all foreign representatives of free access to the authorities and city of Canton. Hitherto the point at issue had been one simply of principle, and turned upon the right of the Chinese Government to seize a lorcha under certain conditions. It is just possible that even this stubborn functionary may have had his doubts on the subject, and been disposed to purchase peace and quietness at the price of so immaterial a concession. But now any momentary weakness, if it ever existed, was passed for ever. A grave question of policy had been raised—an old and much-vexed one, in the successful battling of which his predecessors had covered themselves with glory. Moreover, this sudden change of issue rouses the whole suspicious nature of the Chinaman, and he draws an inference somewhat discreditable to us, but not to be wondered at, which he thus expresses in a proclamation issued to the Cantonese :

"Whereas the English barbarians have commenced disturbances on a false pretence, their real object being admission into the city, the Governor-General, referring to the unanimous expression of objection to this measure on the part of the entire population of Canton in 1849, has flatly refused to concede this, and is determined not to grant their request, let them carry

their feats and machinations to what length they will." Whereupon Yeh intrenches himself behind a triple mail of mandarinic pride and obstinacy, and retreats into the innermost recesses of his official dignity, from which we dug him out some fourteen months after. Meantime he does not condescend to answer the last letter, so at 1 P.M. his residence is bombarded. "The first shot was fired from the 10-inch pivot gun of the Encounter, and, at intervals of from five to ten minutes, the fire was kept up from that gun till sunset. The Barracouta, at the same time, shelled the troops on the hills behind Gough's Fort, in the rear of the city, from a position she had taken up in rear of Sulphur Creek." Under these circumstances, Yeh offered a reward of thirty dollars for the head of every Englishman.

The afternoon of the following day, from noon to sunset, was occupied in firing at slow time upon the houses opposite Dutch Folly, the inhabitants having been warned to evacuate them. The yamun of the Imperial Commissioner was distant about 150 yards from the river bank. By the afternoon of the 29th, a breach had been effected to this spot, which was visited by the Admiral, with a force of marines and blue-jackets. The Chinese offered some resistance, killing three and wounding eleven of our men. For the three following days desultory firing was kept up on the town, and much of the suburb was destroyed by fire, but not intentionally. On the 1st November the Admiral again addresses Yeh, who answers, de-



fending himself, without receding. He was nevertheless responded to by the Admiral, and rejoined, in a letter, "recapitulating his former correspondence."

The Admiral accordingly recommences operations, pulls down some Chinese houses to secure the factory position, and bombards the public buildings steadily, but slowly, for several days consecutively, during which French Folly is taken, and twenty-three war-junks are destroyed by the *Barracouta*, with a loss of one killed and four wounded. Another communication is also made to the Commissioner, who seems to gain confidence from the frequency of these missives, for he answers curtly, and enters upon a vigorous course of retaliatory measures. Having neither armies or fleets to cope with ours, he makes war upon us in a desultory, irregular way, eminently harassing. Our ships in the river narrowly escape destruction from fire-rafts : night-attacks are made upon them ; passenger steamers are fired upon, and foreign vessels, indiscriminately. An incidental result is an insult to the American flag, which is fired on from the Barrier Forts, which had been re-armed. As a measure of retaliation, these are taken and destroyed by Commodore Armstrong, of the United States navy. Here the matter ends. Dr Parker thinks the insult offered to the flag has been sufficiently avenged, and shortly afterwards resumes correspondence with Yeh. The episode is interesting, as furnishing a contrast between our policy and that of the United States, under somewhat similar circumstances.

Meantime we demolish some of the Bogue Forts, and Howqua and other Canton notables address, and are answered by, Sir John Bowring and Admiral Seymour. On the 17th, Sir John Bowring arrives at Canton, and puts himself into communication with the Imperial Commissioner on the 18th. The Admiral (24th November 1856) states that he "reopened fire on the Government buildings in the Tartar City from the guns in the Dutch Folly, but ceased at noon, to allow time for a reply to a note sent in by Sir John Bowring, proposing an interview with the High Commissioner in the city ; and his Excellency added, that, if it was granted, he was prepared to request me to cease hostilities. The reply was received the next day, declining the interview." The reward for barbarian heads was now raised from thirty to one hundred taels. On the 22d the French flag was struck at Canton.

On the 4th December, French Folly, having been reoccupied and strengthened by the Chinese, was retaken, with a loss of two killed and several wounded. On the following day a seaman and marine are cut off. A few shells are still occasionally thrown into the city, and, on the 14th, the Admiral states that he "feels a confident hope that the measures which have been taken will prove successful." The next day, Chinese incendiaries burn down the whole of the foreign factories. The Admiral writes (29th December 1856) : "The great importance of holding our position at Canton being evident, and the church and barracks having been preserved, I determined to intrench a portion of the Factory gardens." On

the 17th the Admiral commences to intrench himself accordingly, and garrisons the fortified position with a force of three hundred men.

Encouraged by this success, Yeh carries on the war, in his own peculiar fashion, with greater vigour than ever. On the 23d, Mr Cowper is kidnapped from Whampoa. On the 30th, the Thistle postal steamer is seized by the Chinese on board; eleven persons murdered, and their heads carried off. The Chinese gentry of the district opposite Hong-Kong interdict supplies being furnished to the colony. The magistrate of another district orders the servants to withdraw from foreign employ. Placards are issued interdicting trade, and promising rewards for heads. On the 4th January, the Chinese attack the ships about Macao Fort in force, and sink junks in one of the neighbouring passages; also nearly succeed in blowing up one of our ships with explosive machines. On the 12th, our position in the Factory Gardens having been threatened, we burn the suburbs right and left of the Factory site. During this operation, a party of the 59th, approaching the city-wall, is repulsed with loss. The Admiral (14th January 1857) at once decides upon retreating from his position in the Factory Gardens and Dutch Folly, and, falling back upon Bird's-nest Fort and Macao Fort, applies to his Excellency the Governor-General of India for the assistance of 5000 troops. He subsequently finds himself compelled to abandon Bird's-nest Fort (30th January 1857), which he had intended to hold as his advanced post, and, with-

drawing the garrison he had placed there, retains only Macao Fort. It was even at one time in contemplation to evacuate the river entirely, and this was a course strongly urged upon the Admiral by some of his advisers. Fortunately, however, bolder counsels prevailed; and although the Chinese kept up a series of pertinacious and harassing attacks upon our garrison in Macao Fort, commanded then by the gallant but lamented Captain Bate, we suffered no further reverses at their hands. Meantime an attempt had just been made to poison the whole foreign community of Hong-Kong.

From this condensed account, some idea may be formed of the stage which war and diplomacy had reached in the south of China at the beginning of February 1857. But little change had taken place in either up to the time of our arrival there, about four months afterwards. The diplomacy remained in abeyance; the war was apparently being kept up upon very much the same principles on which it had been begun. The Chinese continued to kidnap, assassinate, seize steamers, and annoy us in sundry cunningly-devised methods. We continued to hunt them down in creeks, burn villages where outrages had been committed, and otherwise pay them out to the best of our ability—not, it must be confessed, in a manner calculated to increase their terror for our arms, or their respect for our civilisation. With the exception of the affair in the Fatshan Creek, no fighting of any consequence occurred.

It is not difficult to perceive how, under these circumstances, every month that passed by inspired Yeh with fresh confidence in his own resources, and, inasmuch as we never made a move in advance, with increased contempt for ours. Never before since the abolition of the old monopoly had Englishmen made so poor a figure in the eyes of the Chinese populace. If one went into a curiosity-shop at Hong-Kong, he was the object of the quiet irony of the sleek vendor of carved ivory behind the counter, who informed him that his choice collection was at Canton, and asked, "Why you no can come my shop Canton? allo same fore tim: my gotchie too muchee olo handses culio that side." The very urchins in the street considered a Briton a fit subject for "chaff," while their respectable parents took a mercenary view of his head. Hong-Kong was neither a safe nor agreeable abode in those days.

It was too late then to consider whether the Arrow had in the first instance been British or Chinese, or whether the claim for redress made eight months previously was just or unjust; nor did it seem to avail now to discuss the wisdom of the policy which had superadded a second and infinitely more obnoxious demand, just at the period when it seemed most hopeless that we should obtain even the first. It was small consolation to be told that we ought never to have abandoned the Factory position, and that a little sharp cannonading, instead of a shot every ten minutes, would have soon brought Yeh to

his senses. These were professional questions, on which it would have been presumptuous to offer an opinion ; but there was one conviction arising out of it all which irresistibly impressed itself upon the mind of every new-comer, and which was,—that a continuance of this state of matters would not only injure our colony, impair our prestige, embarrass us in our relations with neutral powers, and imperil our commerce at all the other ports of the Empire, but enhance materially the difficulties in the way of any negotiations which might be attempted directly with the Court of Peking. It could hardly be expected or hoped, that while Yeh was waging a successful war with us in the Canton River, we could be treating upon favourable terms in the Peiho.

It so happened that other causes combined to give increased weight to these considerations : these will come to be noticed in their turn. Meantime I have thought it better, at the outset, to cast this brief retrospective glance over the events of the half-year preceding our arrival in China, partly in the hope that it may enable the reader to form some idea of the actual posture of affairs at that juncture, and partly because it may be presumed, that the insight which a review of these proceedings afforded, both as to the character of the people with whom he was about to deal, and the nature of the difficulties against which he would have to contend, was not lost upon Lord Elgin.