

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVAL AT HONG-KONG—TRIP UP THE CANTON RIVER—A COMPLICATED INTERNATIONAL QUESTION — CHUENPEE — MONSTER CANNON—APATHY OF POPULATION—MACAO FORT—UNHEALTHINESS OF THE RIVER—SPREAD OF THE MUTINY—ITS INFLUENCE ON LORD ELGIN'S POLICY—RETURN TO SINGAPORE—ADDRESS OF MERCANTILE COMMUNITY—ARRIVAL AT CALCUTTA—SENSATION CREATED—MORAL EFFECT PRODUCED ON THE NATIVES.

WE had scarcely been a week at Singapore before our anxieties were relieved on the score of the speedy continuance of our journey, by the arrival of the magnificent frigate which had been placed by the Government at the disposal of Lord Elgin. The Shannon had made a remarkably quick passage from England, under the energetic command of the gallant Captain Peel ; and we congratulated ourselves on the favourable auspices under which our first experiences of the Celestial Empire seemed destined to be made.

A further delay of a few days was, however, involved, as Lord Elgin had determined not to leave Singapore until the most ample and complete arrangements had been made for the speedy transmission of the Chinese expeditionary force to India. With this view, vessels were sent to the Straits of

Anjier, to divert from that point the transports conveying the 90th and 82d Regiments, so as to avoid the unnecessary detour through the Malacca Straits. Meantime the Simoom had arrived with the 5th Fusileers, and was immediately despatched to Calcutta. On the 23d June we bade adieu to Singapore, not without regret, as, in spite of the shortness of our visit, the community had contrived to render our stay there so agreeable, that the favourable impression we then formed was not afterwards effaced by any of our subsequent experiences in the East.

The prevalence of the south-west monsoon, and the admirable sailing qualities of the Shannon, enabled us to dispense almost entirely with steam on our voyage up the China Sea; and on the evening of the ninth day after leaving Singapore, we thundered forth a noisy intimation of our arrival to the inhabitants of Hong-Kong.

On the 6th July, Lord Elgin landed under a general salute, and proceeded to Government House for the purpose of holding a levee, and going through those official formalities incidental to his entry on the sphere of his future labours. As, however, in consequence of the Fatshan Creek affair, and other events which had recently occurred up the Canton River, the scene of our present operations there was invested with so much interest, Mr Loch and I took advantage of the departure of H. M. S. Inflexible for Macao Fort on the day following, for the purpose of collecting information with as little delay as possible.

The scenery in the immediate neighbourhood of Hong-Kong, and for the first eight or ten miles after leaving it, is not unlike that of the Western Highlands of Scotland. We dexterously steered between high grassy islands, round sharp corners, past little hamlets at the end of secluded bays, and through narrow devious channels, till at last we might fancy ourselves threading the Kyles of Bute, instead of the Capshui-Moon, or straits which separate the island of Lantao from the main. From it we emerge upon the Bay of Lintin.

We can hardly consider ourselves upon the Pearl River (as the Canton River is properly called) until we reach Chuenpee; for here the opposite coast is not visible, and the white sails of innumerable junks dot the horizon—each high-sterned craft a matter of curious speculation to every naval officer who sees her, and who, in the condition in which our diplomatic relations with the Empire then were, is thrown into a state of profound perplexity as to whether she is his lawful prize or not: he finds himself at once entangled in a maze of knotty points, involving intricate questions of international law, upon which he is called to decide on the spot. She may be a smuggler in British interests, in which case he is to let her pass; or a peaceful trader in American interests, taking up charcoal and saltpetre for gunpowder to be exploded against us, in which case he is not to let her pass; or a peaceful trader in purely Chinese

interests, and as such to be respected ; or a purely Chinese smuggler, when her capture is optional ; or a regular out-and-out pirate, when it is advisable ; or a merchantman, but suspiciously well-armed, when it is discretionary ; or a mandarin (man-of-war) junk in the disguise of a merchantman, when it is imperative. Under these complicated circumstances, the simple plan of proceeding manifestly is, to make a prize of the junk, and settle afterwards whether she is pirate, trader, snake-boat, mandarin-boat, smuggler, or fast-boat, together with the law that applies to her.

Formerly boats had been allowed to go up armed, but not to come down ; but recently a system of passes had been introduced, which only served to render matters more complicated. Meantime trifling affrays were daily occurring, reflecting but little glory on those engaged,—injuring our prestige with the Chinese, but yet rendered inevitable by the anomalous condition in which our relations stood, with reference not only to China, but to other nations engaged in carrying on commercial operations with her. Notwithstanding this species of constant irritation which was kept up on the river, our ships maintained the most amicable intercourse with the inhabitants on the banks, who supplied them with meat and vegetables : indeed, each ship had usually a bum-boat specially attached.

In about four hours we reached Chuenpee, and, in spite of the heat, scrambled to the top of the hill, from where we had a magnificent view of the sur-

rounding country, out of which rise the naked hills, washed bare by violent tropical rains, so that the beauty of their slopes may be said to have been sacrificed by nature to fertilise the rich alluvial plains at their base. In the distance was the walled town of Hoomanchai, celebrated for the signing of the supplementary treaty. The creek by which it was approached was staked across as a means of defence.

Though of comparatively a trifling elevation, the little barrack at the top of the Chuenpee Hill answered the purpose of a sanitarium. The fort was held at this time by 130 men and one small gun. Some monstrous cast-iron Chinese cannon, weighing 5 tons each, measuring about 13 feet in length, and of a calibre larger than a 95 cwt., had been buried by the Chinese without ever having been fired, and were now being exhumed.

At Chuenpee we met Commodore Keppel and Sir Robert Maclure, and accompanied them to the Bogue ; upon this occasion taking but a hurried view of those forts already so celebrated in the history of our Chinese wars, and with which we were destined to become much better acquainted. A little beyond them we passed a creek in which the Esk's boats had been engaged the day before, and had succeeded in capturing a snake-boat, which we saw, though with a loss of three men killed and seven wounded.

After passing the Bogue we are fairly in the river, and the navigation begins to be impeded by shoals. At the second of these is a Pagoda, known as Second

Bar Pagoda ; then we turn off to the left into Blenheim Passage, along which, at the period of our visit, junks were not allowed to pass. Though these waters were exclusively traversed by our men-of-war, the agricultural population little heeded the puffing of the numerous steamers which were constantly engaged in keeping up the communication between Macao Fort and the other ships stationed on the river ; and though rarely a day passed without the sound of a distant cannonade falling upon their ears, they had become accustomed to the strife by which they were surrounded, and worked as busily in their paddy-fields as though Fatshan were a myth, Canton in another world, and British gunboats a necessary condition of their existence.

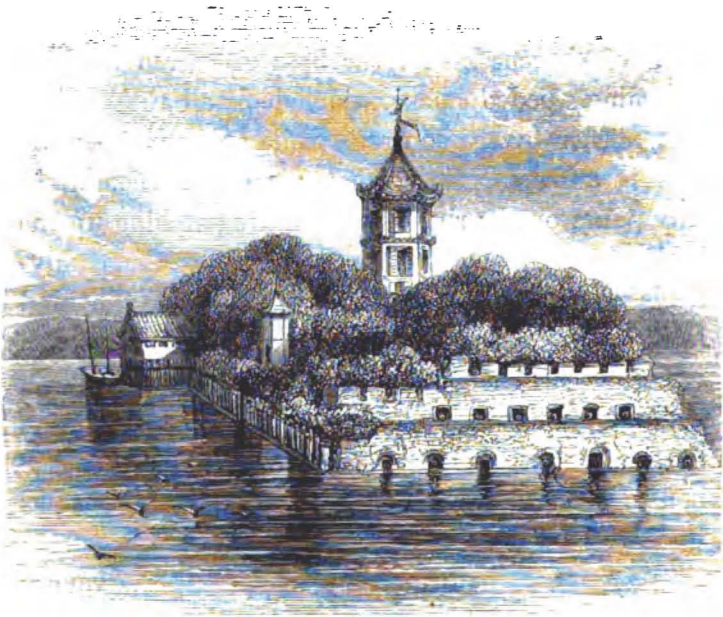
It was our first introduction to Chinese scenery : numerous villages dotted the river banks, some of them utterly destroyed and depopulated, either by rebels or ourselves ; others densely crowded among trees, the most conspicuous object being the high square tower with massive loopholed walls, rising in proud eminence above the surrounding roofs, indicative not of some old feudal baron, who, secure in his stronghold, holds the lives of his vassals in pawn for their good behaviour, but,—significant of the character of the race,—of some old usurer who needs a fortress for the preservation of sundry goods and chattels which he holds in pawn for the credit of his victims. The number of these pawnbroking towers inspires one with rather a low estimate of the solvency of the

community. Then there are tall red poles, scattered in pairs among the villages, betokening a joss-house, or the residence of a mandarin. The carved gables of the better class of houses project above the other roofs like gigantic gravestones, while the graves themselves resemble the mouths of large wells.

Here and there a hill is crowned by a tall pagoda, while lesser pentagonal towers, four or five stories high, with pointed roofs, rise above the trees like those of churches. At the base of barren hills are charming wooded nooks, which look all the greener and fresher by the contrast, while an active population is swarming everywhere; men are fishing in tiny punts on the river; women are patching up the basket screens which retain the mud of the paddy-fields on the banks, or wading about in the mud looking for something; coolies are traversing with swinging gait the ridges of the fields, heavily loaded; while under the shade of the spreading branches of the giant *Ficus Indicus*, or at the doors of joss-houses, motley groups are collected, gazing at us as we sweep past.

We found the *Fury* and *Highflyer* the advanced ships, and transferring ourselves here into a gunboat, proceeded towards Macao Fort, past the boom which had been stretched across the river by the Chinese, close to the entry up the Fatshan Creek. The Fort, so gallantly stormed by Commodore Elliot, was distinctly visible. Macao Fort is distant about three miles from Canton; situated on a little island nearly

in mid stream, it occupies a favourable position as an advanced post ; though with a more active enemy the small garrison could never have maintained themselves there, as they did, for a year. The present force consisted of 160 men, and the Fort mounted 14 guns. From the top of the tower, which was used as an hospital, we had a good view



Macao Fort (Canton River.)

of Canton and the White Cloud Mountains in rear, on which sundry white tents betokened the presence of troops.

The garrison was composed of men from the Raleigh, and seemed to pass an existence in which

the hardships of war were not altogether untempered by the refinements of civilisation. The admirable band belonging to the "late" frigate, played some elaborate pieces with great execution, while we discussed *patés de fois gras* and champagne, seated, it is true, on upturned boxes and round a table of primitive manufacture, while our sideboard had apparently done duty at some former period as the altar of a joss-house. As habiliments were scarce, the costume of the sentry exhibited a pleasing mixture of John Chinaman and Jack Tar.

A good deal knocked up ourselves by our day's labours, we could not but sympathise with the naval forces stationed along the whole length of the river, at so unhealthy a season of the year. The thermometer was standing at 102° under the shade of the awning on board the *Esk*; and it was not to be wondered at that, under the combined influence of sun and miasma, one vessel alone, out of a small complement of 130 men in perfect health, should have put 60 on the sick-list in the short space of three weeks. Under these circumstances we were not tempted to linger up the river longer than was absolutely necessary, though the change to Hong-Kong, which we reached on the following day, was only tolerable by contrast.

A few days after our return to Hong-Kong news arrived, the serious nature of which increased, if possible, the already existing complications of the position in which Lord Elgin found himself placed

on his arrival in China. The prolonged resistance at Delhi, the rapid spread of the rebellion into the lower provinces of Bengal, and the urgent representations of Lord Canning of the exigencies of the situation, not only deprived the Ambassador of any hope of saving any part of the China force from the vortex into which they were being swallowed by the inexorable necessities of India, but rendered it extremely improbable that they could ever be made available for the objects for which they were originally designed. His only consolation was that he had appreciated the true position of affairs in India at a sufficiently early date, to enable him to divert the troops to that country at the most critical period of its fortunes. But the difficulties of the situation in China had been immeasurably enhanced by the sacrifice.

It was clear that any attempt to negotiate in the immediate neighbourhood of the capital of the empire, unaccompanied by any force, must depend very much for success upon the moral effect created by the aspect of affairs in the south. The presence of an army at Hong-Kong might have sufficed to produce this, but not only was our force there contemptible, but our naval operations had resulted in failure. Yeh had vindicated the policy of his treatment of the barbarians, and triumphal arches had been erected to commemorate his success; while, to import a new set of considerations into the question, Baron Gros was not expected to arrive in China for some months.

Under these circumstances, only three other courses remained open, either to take Canton, to remain inactive at Hong-Kong, or to leave the country until the diplomatic questions at issue there could be approached under different and more favourable auspices. The season of the year, and the weakness of the force to be employed, rendered the capture and occupation of Canton impossible in the opinion of the Commanders-in-chief. A residence, involving total inaction, at Hong-Kong, was calculated to injure the prestige of the mission, while it was attended with no one single advantage.

On the other hand, this evil was avoided by an immediate departure, while in choosing Calcutta as his destination, and taking with him as many marines as could be spared from the river, Lord Elgin adopted a course which enabled him not only to satisfy himself as to the probable fate of the original China force, and to judge of the possibility and expediency of supplying their place, as was subsequently done, with quasi-mutinous Bengal regiments, but to bring a moral and material support to Lord Canning at a moment when it seemed probable that the safety of Calcutta itself was menaced. Indeed, so urgent appeared the exigencies of the case, that Lord Elgin even then determined to give up the Shannon to the Indian Government, if Captain Peel considered that the organisation of a naval brigade to operate in the provinces of Upper Bengal was a feasible scheme. That officer expressed no hesitation on the subject, and the

high reputation which he had already earned in a similar service in the Crimea, operated as an additional inducement with Lord Elgin to proceed with him to Calcutta. This resolution was no sooner formed than acted upon, and within thirty-six hours after the Indian intelligence was received, the Shannon was once more ploughing her way over the China Sea, accompanied by the Pearl, whose assistance was required for the conveyance of the troops.

The following address, presented to Lord Elgin by the merchants of Singapore on his arrival there, was satisfactory to his Excellency, as proving that the course he was then adopting carried with it the approbation of a community whose most important interests were at stake both in India and China :—

“To his Excellency the Right Hon. the EARL of ELGIN and KINCARDINE, K.T., Her Majesty’s High Commissioner and Plenipotentiary to the Court of Peking.

“SINGAPORE, *July 20, 1857.*

“MY LORD,—We, the undersigned mercantile firms and others interested in the trade of Singapore, are induced by a consideration of the serious aspect of affairs in India, and of the important bearing which it must have upon those questions which it was the object of your Excellency’s mission to settle in China, to present this address to your Lordship, believing that at this critical juncture, when complications have arisen involving such grave interests in both countries, it will be gratifying to your Excellency to know

that the mercantile community of Singapore, although closely connected in trade with China, and anxiously desirous for the speedy and satisfactory resumption of commercial relations with Canton, have nevertheless cordially concurred in the resolution which your Excellency has taken, of diverting the China expeditionary army from its destination, to the assistance of the European force now engaged in the defence of our Indian possessions. The decided step which your Lordship has so promptly taken of following that army yourself, has afforded us the most lively satisfaction. Its absence from the sphere of its operations in China, and the uncertainty attending the period of its ultimate despatch to that country, would, in our opinion, have rendered your stay there comparatively useless, more particularly as the extent of our naval force is amply sufficient for the protection of trade and the maintenance of the *status quo* until your Lordship's return.

“On the other hand, we feel that the magnitude of the stake in India, and the fearful nature of the crisis which is now impending there, supersede all other considerations.

“We believe that the arrival of your Lordship at Calcutta in this emergency, will be of the greatest advantage in producing an important moral effect throughout India, and in affording the Governor-General most valuable support.

“At the same time we sincerely trust that the progress of events in India may shortly assume such a

character as will enable your Lordship to return to the original field of your labours under more favourable auspices.

“ We have, &c.,

(Signed)

“ A. L. JOHNSTON, & CO.
and twenty-seven others.”

The awful intelligence of the massacre of Cawnpore reached us here, and we did not therefore remain longer than was absolutely necessary to take in 400 tons of coal—a feat which was performed in the almost incredibly short space of twenty-one hours—and to pick up 300 men of the troops wrecked in the ill-fated Transit. Distributing these between the Pearl and ourselves, we at once proceeded on our voyage, cheered by the news that the Himalaya had already passed, and that ships were on the watch at the Straits of Anjier, for the diversion of the Assistance and Adventure, now daily expected. Our own decks were densely crowded with nearly a thousand souls, whose condition was not improved by an atmosphere in which the thermometer continually stood over 90°. Notwithstanding the utmost exertions of Captain Peel in “carrying on,” in consequence of the prevalence of the south-west monsoon we had been a fortnight beating down to Singapore; but we were favoured up the Bay of Bengal by the gales which had been adverse to us in the China Sea, and reached the Sandheads in exactly three weeks from the date of our leaving Hong-Kong.

The interest which we felt as we approached the theatre of the terrible drama which was then being enacted in India, was converted into a still livelier emotion by the intelligence which we received when we reached Diamond Harbour, of a rumour that a large body of mutineers were marching down from Berhampore upon Calcutta. The more ardent spirits amongst us at once imagined that we were fated to arrive there just in time to take an active share in the defence of the city ; whilst Lord Elgin, who knew not what credit to attach to the report, at a time when every successive mail had so far surpassed our worst anticipations, immediately telegraphed to Lord Canning his proximity with 1700 men (the Pearl and blue-jackets included).

As we swept past Garden Reach, on the afternoon of the 8th August, the excitement on board was increased by early indications of the satisfaction with which our appearance was hailed on shore. First our stately ship suddenly burst upon the astonished gaze of two European gentlemen taking their evening walk, who, seeing her crowded with the eager faces of men ready for the fray, took off their hats and cheered wildly ; then the respectable skipper of a merchantman worked himself into a state of frenzy, and made us a long speech, which we could not hear, but the violence of his gesticulations left us in little doubt as to its import ; then his crew took up the cheer, which was passed on at intervals until the thunder of our 68-pounders drowned every other sound ; shattered

the windows of sundry of the "Palaces;" attracted a crowd of spectators to the Maidan, and brought the contents of Fort William on to the glacis.

As soon as the smoke cleared away, the soldiers of the garrison collected there sent up a series of hearty cheers; a moment more and our men were clustered like ants upon the rigging, and, in the energy which they threw into their ringing response, they pledged themselves to the achievement of those deeds of valour which have since covered the Naval Brigade with glory. After the fort had saluted, Lord Elgin landed amid the cheers of the crowd assembled at the Ghaut to receive him, and proceeded to Government House, gratified to learn, not merely from the popular demonstrations, but from Lord Canning himself, that though happily the physical force he had brought with him was not required to act in defence of the city, still that the presence of a man-of-war larger than any former ship that had ever anchored abreast of the Maidan, and whose guns commanded the city, was calculated to produce upon both the European and native population a most wholesome moral effect, more especially at a time when the near approach of the Mohurrum had created in men's minds an unusual degree of apprehension and excitement.