

## CHAPTER X.

DIPLOMACY IN CHINA—POLICY OF THE NEUTRAL POWERS—PROPOSED EXPEDITION TO THE NORTH—OPINION OF COUNT POU-TIATINE — PROCLAMATION RAISING BLOCKADE — PUTINQUA'S GARDENS—RIVER SCENES—LORD ELGIN'S VISIT TO THE PRISONS — STATE OF THE PRISONERS—FATE OF YEH—LORD ELGIN'S LETTER TO YU—DEPARTURE FOR SHANGHAI—AMOY—ARRIVAL AT SHANGHAI—DEPARTURE FOR SOO-CHOW—FACILITIES OF WATER-COMMUNICATION—CANAL SCENES—STATE OF THE POPULATION—MR MACLANE'S VISIT TO SOO-CHOW—BOAT LIFE ON THE CANALS.

THE position which the Chinese Empire has hitherto occupied with reference to the rest of the world, has always invested the conduct of diplomatic relations in that country with peculiar difficulties. Not only are questions of the most exceptional character constantly arising with the Imperial Government, but out of them are often evolved complications in our intercourse with other European nations, which have no analogy elsewhere, and are unprovided for by any principle of international law.

Thus, the capture of one city in an Empire, whilst we were trading peaceably at others, was not a more abnormal proceeding than the reopening to the commerce of other nations a port of which we retained military possession, and governed under martial law.

Yet it was manifestly a condition of things out of which international difficulties might easily spring, more especially if there should chance to be any disposition to create them. No doubt we confined ourselves to a strictly military occupation of the city ; the customs duties were to be collected by Chinese officials, and paid into the Chinese treasury ; still foreigners were not on the same footing here as at other towns in the Empire, and, within certain limits, placed themselves within the somewhat arbitrary jurisdiction of martial law.

The suspension of diplomatic relations with the Imperial Commissioner Yeh, which had taken place in the autumn of 1856, had necessarily caused serious interruption to the commercial intercourse of other nations at Canton ; but so unanimous was the desire on their part to take advantage of the opportunity, then afforded, of renewing relations with the Chinese Government under other and more favourable conditions, that France, Russia, and America sent out plenipotentiaries, whose very arrival in China, if it did not imply a tacit approval of our ground of quarrel, at all events evinced a determination to make it available for the attainment of the objects they desired.

So far as France was concerned, she had her own grievance, and her policy was laid down without any attempt at mystery. With Russia and America, however, the case was different. Not conceiving themselves entitled to the attitude of belligerents, they were driven, during the progress of hostilities,

into a false position, from which the restoration of peace could alone relieve them. They were, however, so far fortunately placed, that under no circumstances could they be losers by a quarrel in which they were not involved, while they might derive equal advantages from its results with those who were. As it had never been the policy of England to attempt to monopolise those advantages, and as a united pressure might more probably extort, without recourse to arms, those demands which the four nations were preferring in common, the time seemed to have come, in the opinion of Lord Elgin and Baron Gros, to invite the co-operation of the neutral powers, and thus not only to increase the moral pressure, but to avoid the chance of those difficulties, to which I have already alluded, being raised.

The plan of operations which Lord Elgin had proposed for himself, in the prosecution of his policy, was, to proceed in the first instance to Shanghai, and to invite a properly accredited minister to meet him there, for the settlement of all questions in dispute between the two countries. Shanghai being at a considerable distance from the capital, and being, moreover, the place where the relations between foreigners and Chinese were of the most friendly character, Lord Elgin considered this proposal the most conciliatory which it was in his power to make. In the event of his not being so met, his intention was to push northwards without delay, for the purpose of approaching Peking as nearly as was practicable, with

gunboats of the lightest draught. This scheme he had already discussed with Count Poutiatine, whose local knowledge was of great assistance (see Blue-Book, 14th November 1857, the Earl of Elgin to the Earl of Clarendon), in which his Excellency says : “ Count Poutiatine was very decided in the expression of his opinion that nothing could be done with the Chinese Government unless pressure were brought to bear upon Pekin itself ; and that the use of vessels drawing so little water that they could navigate the Peiho would be the best means of making such pressure effective. The mandarins on the spot, if I rightly understood him, had, in conversation with him, adverted with exultation to the fact that our ships of war could not perform this feat. I told him that we were pretty strong in craft of the description to which he referred ; that we had, as he no doubt knew, a quarrel of our own in this neighbourhood, but that, when that affair was concluded, we should be prepared to go northwards in force, and very glad to be accompanied by the flags of other nations interested with us in extending commercial relations with China, and inducing that Court to abate its absurd pretensions to superiority.”

In furtherance of these views, Lord Elgin shortly afterwards addressed a communication to the Admiral, requesting him to despatch the lightest draught gunboats to the north, for the purpose of “ bringing pressure to bear at some point near the capital.” \*

\* Blue-Book, the Earl of Elgin to Admiral Seymour, 2d March 1858.

Meantime, in answer to communications addressed to Mr Reed and Count Poutiatine, those gentlemen at once cordially accepted the invitation to unite with France and England in the projected expedition to the north, and, either at Shanghai or at a point nearer the capital, press their common demands jointly on the Cabinet of Peking. It only remained now to issue a proclamation announcing the raising of the blockade, and to make the necessary arrangements for the reopening of trade. As Lord Elgin and Baron Gros did not participate in the general opinion that this measure was premature, or believe in the almost universal prediction that the raising of the blockade would not be the signal of the renewal of foreign trade, they determined to name the earliest day possible for the experiment. It was settled that the consular flags should be hoisted, and the customs levied by Chinese officers at Whampoa; while Canton itself, and its immediate suburbs, with the exception of Honan, should remain under martial law, and only be entered by Europeans under passports containing certain printed restrictions, to be granted by the allied naval and military authorities.

On the 6th of February a notification was published by the allied Commanders-in-Chief, announcing the raising of the blockade, and the nomination by them of the mixed commission already mentioned, and consisting of Colonel Holloway, Captain Martineau, and Mr Parkes, to preserve good order, and to inquire into infractions of their regulations, or of

martial law, &c. And on the same day a further notification was issued by the Plenipotentiaries, declaring "that the city and suburbs will continue in military occupation, and under martial law, until further notice ; but that hostile operations against China, except such as the Commanders-in-Chief of the allied forces may consider it necessary to adopt for the security of their military position in Canton, are for the present suspended." With the exception of what was implied by the necessary clause announcing the suspension of our hostilities with China generally, no restriction whatever was placed upon the action of the allied Commanders-in-Chief, upon whom alone rested the responsibility of dealing with braves or disaffected populace as they should deem most expedient.

The 10th of February was the day fixed for the raising of the blockade ; and although, in consequence of the Chinese New Year, and the festivities incidental to it, the reopening of trade was delayed for some weeks, the extent to which it increased within the next few months, and the fact that about one-third of the exports were paid for in British goods, fully justified the Plenipotentiaries in their view of the expediency of the measure.

We had now spent two months in the Canton River, and had exhausted the attractions of its banks and the resources of Canton. We had visited the Fatee Gardens, situated in a creek crowded with the boats which had taken refuge there on our occupa-

tion. Here box-trees were cut in the shapes of animals or dragons ; young bamboos were fantastically twisted ; gaudy and sweet-scented flowers bloomed in rows of pots ; quaint little bridges led over pools, the water of which was hidden by broad-leaved languid lilies ; and grotesque pavilions surmounted rocky islets. All Chinese gardens partake of much the same character. About four miles from Canton is the country house of Putinqua, deserted by its owner on the occasion of our visit, but very singular in its arrangement to European eyes. A tall white pagoda, situated on a rocky island, affords a bird's-eye view of several acres of water surrounded by a wall, with here and there islands and bridges, and pathways leading to them, paved and covered-in with trellis-work, and overrun with creepers, and in the centre of all, the mansion of the owner, built on piles in the water, with draw-bridges communicating with the bedrooms, and canals instead of passages. It was the principle of Venice applied to a single residence.

As it was not safe to walk into the country for any distance, our explorations in the neighbourhood of our anchorage were necessarily limited. Sometimes we visited the handsome nine-storied pagoda, which, from being slightly out of the perpendicular, is known as the inclined pagoda, about a mile distant ; at others explored in a light boat the narrow creeks in the vicinity, where extensive villages of junks and sampans lay concealed between banks cultivated with rice and water-chestnuts. The very existence of a

vast population within a short range of our ship was totally unsuspected ; some of these creeks were almost bridged by rows of houses built over them on piles, the whole presenting a quaint and novel appearance. As these villages contained a lawless and desperate population, who in a great measure depended for their livelihood upon river piracy, a distant walk involved a large party and revolvers. One day we captured a gang of eight of these plunderers, rifling one of the Chinese bum-boats attached to the ships ; they were kept in irons all night, and sent to Pihkwei next morning.

On another occasion we observed a portion of the population of a village turn out, in pursuit of a gang who were escaping in a boat they had evidently stolen. The chase was a most exciting one, but unfortunately night closed in before we saw its results. Some of the gentlemen attached to the French embassy were attacked one evening in a sampan, and found it necessary to shoot one or two of their assailants with revolvers. Under these circumstances expeditions, either afloat or ashore, were always invested with a tinge of excitement, which relieved the monotony of the occupation. For a few days we were employed in blowing up a monster brass gun, which had been left in one of the barrier forts taken by the Americans. They had endeavoured to remove this prize in vain, so it became our perquisite. A remarkable specimen of Chinese workmanship, it measured twenty-five feet in length, and more than five feet across the breech.



One of the most interesting incidents which occurred about this time at Canton was the discovery, by Lord Elgin, of the public prisons ; and the horrors which were disclosed induced him to remonstrate strongly with Pihkwei on the subject. The old mandarin was more roused by this act of interference on our part than by the capture of the city, and, in a letter he addressed to Lord Elgin, makes an indignant appeal to his Excellency's "enlightenment and rectitude," &c. "Would your Excellency," he asks, "hold it correct, or not, were I, for instance, without giving you information, to desire any one to remove, by force, British prisoners confined in a British jail?"—and he concludes pathetically, "I am not a man greedy of life, and sooner than be thus unreasonably oppressed, I would gladly give my life to the State. The matter is of great importance; and I write that your Excellency may, when you have considered it, inform me without loss of time of the course to be followed. I avail myself of the occasion to wish your Excellency the blessings of the season.\*"

But old Pihkwei was not so unreasonably oppressed as the wretched victims of Chinese legislation. Their condition has been graphically described by Mr Cooke, who was present at their discovery. Pihkwei was therefore informed that, in spite of his sensitive feelings on the point, he must take the unhappy beings into a room in his yamun, where I first saw them, wan and emaciated, but slowly recovering under

\* Blue-Book. 17th January, Pihkwei to Earl of Elgin.

medical treatment ; in return for which their countenances expressed gratitude more strongly than I had supposed possible in a Chinese physiognomy. One boy had been so tightly bound in a squatting position that he was unable to assume any other ; while several of the men's legs and feet were a mass of bruises and ulcers, the effect of severe bastinadoing.

On the 7th of February the 70th native regiment of Bengal Infantry landed. They were the first-fruits of our trip to Calcutta ; but at Canton their arrival was inaugurated by an unfortunate accident which occurred the same day, partly owing to their ignorance of the regulations, and partly to the impetuosity of a French patrol, which fired upon some stragglers engaged in collecting firewood and looking for cooking-utensils, and shot three men. The arrival of this regiment was most opportune : it was followed at a later period of the year by the 47th and 65th, also from Bengal, an accession of force which enabled the General to detach the 59th "Queen's" to the north at a critical point in the negotiations. Meantime, ever since his capture, Yeh had remained a prisoner on board the "Inflexible" at the Bogue Forts. As his presence so near the scene of his exploits was supposed to exercise a disturbing influence upon the minds of the Chinese population, and as a useful ship was kept unemployed while serving as his prison, it was decided that he should be sent to Calcutta, where Government were in the habit of accommodat-

ing political state prisoners. Until he was informed of his fate he seemed never thoroughly to have realised the fact that he was our prisoner, and had constantly expressed his astonishment at Lord Elgin's absence, and the postponement of those negotiations to conduct which he professed was his object in living on board the "Inflexible." He manifested not the slightest emotion, however, on learning his destination, and expressed himself entirely satisfied with any arrangement that was come to in his regard.

Meantime the four powers, acting in concert, had decided on addressing a communication to Peking, demanding a plenipotentiary possessing full powers to treat on the several points specified in their letters, to be sent to Shanghai, which was named as the place of negotiation in the first instance. In the event of an imperial commissioner not being sent there before the end of March, the allied Ambassadors declared it to be their intention to proceed to some point nearer the capital, with the view of placing themselves more directly in communication with the high officers of the Chinese Government.

Lord Elgin's letter was addressed to Yu, the senior Secretary of State. It enclosed copies of the correspondence which had taken place with the Imperial Commissioner ; explained the present position of affairs at Canton as resulting from the conduct of that functionary ; announced the intention of the allied Powers to continue the occupation until those demands, which we had reserved to ourselves the

right to make, under the altered attitude of affairs, had been satisfied ; adverted in general terms to the nature of those demands, as having for their object the placing of our relations on a safer and more satisfactory basis. A resident minister at or near the Court, a more extended intercourse throughout the country, were the principal points insisted upon in addition to those claims for indemnity, to which we already considered ourselves entitled. The letter concluded by stating that, in the event of no plenipotentiary presenting himself, or presenting himself without sufficient powers, or proving unwilling to accede to reasonable terms of accommodation, the British Plenipotentiary "reserves to himself the right of having recourse, without farther announcement, delay, or declaration of hostilities, to such measures in vindication of the claims of his country on China, as in his judgment it may appear advisable to adopt."

This letter was dated the 11th of February, or the day after the raising of the blockade ; and on the following morning I left Canton in company with the Vicomte de Contades, the bearer of the French note, for Shanghai, for the purpose of having it forwarded with the least possible delay from that point to the capital. The American and Russian notes were despatched by U. S. frigate Mississippi about the same time.

If the reader is only as tired of Canton and its neighbourhood as we were, I shall have the less scruple in requesting him to accompany me to the north,

more especially as no event of political interest occurred during the few weeks which formed the remainder of Lord Elgin's stay in the south, and my own journey terminated in a manner far more interesting than I could have anticipated.

We reached Amoy in the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steamer *Formosa* on the morning of the 16th. Though only here for a few hours, we saw enough of Amoy to reconcile us to a speedy departure. A walk to the British consulate led us through the centre of the town, along streets narrower and more filthy than those of Canton, crowded as it so happened with a gaily dressed population, engaged in feasting and visiting at one another's houses, and celebrating the New Year. Children swaddled in finery were borne about like bambinos, their mothers resplendent in gaudy petticoats, glittering hoops, faces powdered white, and hair bedizened with flowers of brilliant hues. Numerous toy-shops displayed, in tempting array, their fantastic contents, and the population seemed given over to merry-making. The British consulate is a handsome residence, situated under the walls of the citadel, through which we afterwards walked, the Chinese guard betraying little interest or curiosity. The island of Amoy is a rocky barren spot, unattractive in a picturesque point of view, and owing its importance chiefly to the trade in tropical produce, which it maintains with Singapore and the Straits. A good deal of sugar is also imported here from *Formosa*, and it has hitherto enjoyed the un-

enviable distinction of being the chief port of coolie emigration (so called) to Cuba and the West Indies.

At daylight on the morning of the 20th we found ourselves in the muddy waters of the Yang-tse-Kiang,

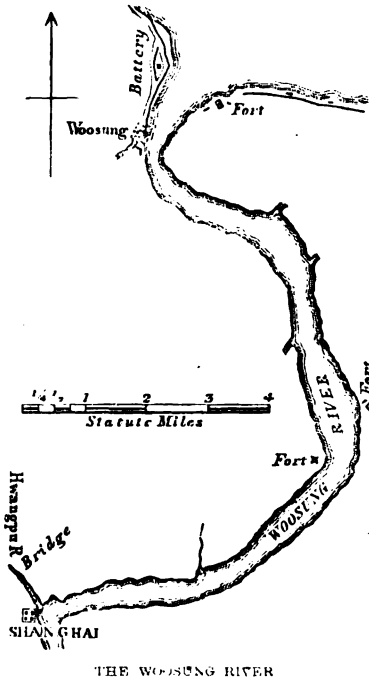
though out of sight of land, and reached Woosung the same afternoon. This is simply an opium station, and the European population is compos-

ed of the occupants of receiving-ships. It is only twelve miles from here to Shanghai. The banks of the river are flat. Farm-houses are situated in clumps of trees, leafless at this

time of year, and surrounded by meadows; and the whole aspect of the country very

much resembles some parts of Holland. The wind was bitterly cold; but the piercing blast, so far from being disagreeable, produced a most exhilarating effect upon systems more or less enervated by tropical heats.

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We found that the Taoutai or Intendant of Shanghai, the highest Chinese official in that place, was absent on his annual new-year visit to his superior officers, the Governor of the province and the Governor-General of the Two Kiangs. As in his absence there was no functionary of a sufficiently high rank to intrust with the transmission of letters of such grave importance to the capital, it became a matter for our consideration whether we ought not to deliver them in person to Chaou, the Governor of Kiangsu, to whom they were in the first instance addressed. This high functionary resided at the celebrated city of Soochow, which, since the occupation of Nankin by the rebels, has taken the rank of the provincial city.

The arrival of the Mississippi devolved upon us the charge of the Russian and American notes, and upon consultation with Messrs Robertson and Montigny, the English and French consuls, and the American Vice-Consul, it was decided that we should proceed thither without delay, accompanied by those gentlemen and their respective interpreters. As Soochow had rarely been visited by Europeans, and these generally only when disguised as Chinamen, or concealed from observation in boats, the success of our experiment was very doubtful. Thus much, however, was certain, that if we were prevented from entering the city we should be met by the governor outside the walls, as in the case of the American Commissioner, Mr Maclane, on the occasion of his visit in 1854. Mr Lay, the Inspector of Customs at Shang-

hai, whose knowledge of the language and local experience rendered him a most valuable addition to our party, also accompanied us.

We left Shanghai on the afternoon of the 24th. As the journey was to be performed by water, and our party was a large one, our seventeen boats formed quite a formidable fleet ; and, as our destination was not a mystery, a number of Chinese were collected to see us start on so novel an expedition.

The whole delta of the Yang-tse-Kiang is intersected in every direction with water-communication, so that there were two ways of reaching Soo-chow : as some of our boats were of a large draught of water, we did not adopt the shortest and most common route, but continued for some distance up the river Wang-poo, on which Shanghai is situated. This accidental circumstance turned out the principal cause of our ultimate success. We anchored for the first night at a pagoda a few miles above Shanghai, and observed a mandarin boat immediately moor in significant proximity to us. We subsequently discovered that the suspicions we entertained at the time were correct, and that our every movement had been minutely recorded by a petty mandarin sent to watch us.

On the following morning we proceeded up the river, our progress being somewhat retarded by the difficulty we found in keeping our squadron together. The river was about a quarter of a mile broad, the character of its banks remaining unchanged. About



mid-day we left it, and turned into a broad canal. Where nature has provided such abundant water-communication, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what is artificial from what is natural; indeed, most of the channels are a combination of both. No doubt it is in a great measure owing to the extraordinary facility which exists for the conveyance of produce in every direction, that the traffic does not appear so extensive as it really is, and as the density of the population would lead one to expect. Still, although the canal on which we journeyed was in no degree crowded, the sails of numbers of junks were visible above the level country, through which they seemed impelled by some mysterious and hidden influence. The population here is not so much collected into large villages as in the south, but is scattered over the country in farms and hamlets, imparting to the otherwise uninteresting scenery that air of domestic comfort and civilisation which is more particularly the characteristic of Belgium and the Low Countries.

Everywhere the population were industriously engaged in agricultural pursuits; not an inch of ground seemed uncultivated, not a resource neglected for increasing the fertility of the soil. Men in boats were scooping the rich mud from the bottom of the canals with primitive dredges made of basket-work, which opened and shut on the principle of snuffers; and as they vomited their contents into the bottom of the boat, they opened their wide jaws like some river monster disgoring itself. This mud was discharged

into a receptacle for it on a level with the water, where the bank had been excavated for the purpose. Half-way up the bank, one on each side of this hole, stood two persons, each holding the end of a rope, to the middle of which was attached a bucket which they ducked into the mud below, and then jerked to the top of the bank, where it was received in troughs and carried away to manure the fields. Such and many other novel and ingenious contrivances we observed employed by the labourers with whom the fields teemed, and who were so absorbed by their occupation that nothing less exciting than the appearance of a posse of barbarians would have interrupted their labours. One could not help making the unenlightened and antiquated political economical reflection, that the introduction among them of European enterprise and discoveries would be a doubtful boon to persons who seemed to possess all the elements of material prosperity, and who so richly deserved whatever comforts they had obtained by their industry and ingenuity. Of course it was impossible for the mere passer to do more than guess how far they enjoyed substantial happiness, and how the system of government under which they lived might affect their domestic comfort. I have heard precisely opposite opinions expressed on the subject by persons whose long residence in the country, and knowledge of its language and government, entitled their authority to respect.

According to my own observation, however, the

condition of the population varies as much in different parts of China as in the British dominions, and it would be as unfair to judge of the merits of the government, or of the general state of the population of the empire, by the people of Chili or Kiangsu, as it would be to form any like general theory in our own country, one way or the other, by the counties of Tipperary or Kent.

We passed numerous junks flying little yellow flags, to indicate that they were loaded with their annual tribute of rice. These junks were private, but pressed for the time into the service of the government. Towards evening we reached and crossed the lake of Meaou, a shallow sheet of water, but of considerable extent. The opposite shore was not visible from the point at which we entered it.

We continued our voyage during the greater part of the night, and observed strings of lanterns hoisted upon poles, which we supposed to be signals of our progress. Next morning I was told that a mandarin had been on board the boat of the American Vice-Consul, and informed him that the Governor Chaou was waiting for us at the village of Kwan-shan, upon the other route from Shanghai, where he had held his interview with Mr Maclane, the Plenipotentiary of the United States. This was a piece of information which we were determined to ignore, as it proved the existence of a strong desire on the part of the authorities to prevent our entering Soo-chow, and of binding us by the same precedent (which we

had determined if possible to break through) on which they had insisted in the case of the American Minister. Some light has been thrown on this event by the papers seized in Yeh's yamun at Canton. Among them is the memorial of Iliang, Governor-General of the Two Kiangs, upon the subject of his interview with Mr Maclane at Kwan-shan, in which that functionary states that, in reply to Mr Maclane's request to be allowed to deliver a letter in person, he wrote as follows :—" If the chief (Maclane) desired to present a letter from his government in person, he should follow the precedent furnished last year in the case of Marshall,—hasten back to Shanghai, and there wait till Wu-kien-chang should bring him to Kwan-shan to introduce him. In obedient accordance with the above reply, the chief did presently turn back, and having transferred himself to a native vessel, was brought, on the 25th of the 5th moon, to Kwan-shan by Wu-kien-chang. Your slave, having with him Ping-han, the acting Prefect of Soo-chow, for long employed in that department, and thoroughly versed in business, had started from Soo-chow on the 24th, and also arriving at Kwan-shan on the 25th, on the following day assembled the officials present in the public hall of Kwan-shan, and summoned the chief to come forward and pay his respects. The chief's manner, it must be admitted, was reverential," &c. &c. Then follows a detailed account of the audience, and the arguments used by Iliang to dissuade Mr Maclane from visiting the Peiho.

Having been favoured by fair winds, we made good progress. Most of our boats sailed admirably, the tall masts giving our enormous flat sails such an elevation that we glided rapidly through the water under the influence of light airs. The weather was lovely. In the early morning a thick hoar-frost covered the fields ; at mid-day it was pleasant to sit on the deck, and bask in the sunshine ; and at night, to retire into the snug cabin, stir the coal fire in the stove into a bright glow, and enjoy our cigars together after dinner, preparatory to separating for the night to our respective boats. We usually stopped for breakfast and dinner, and all met in a boat reserved expressly for a common dining-room. I was indebted to my kind host at Shanghai, Mr Moncreiff, for a most comfortable boat. Indeed, the circumstances under which I made my first experiences of travelling in the interior of China were calculated to impress me most favourably ; and now that the whole of this vast continent is about to be thrown open by treaty to European exploration, there can be little doubt that the great facilities of transit which its network of water - communication affords, will be duly appreciated. Seldom, indeed, does it fall to the lot of the adventurous traveller in an unknown country, to pursue the work of discovery surrounded by so many of the appliances of comfort and civilisation, as he may enjoy when engaged in the "*exploitation*" of the Celestial Empire.