

CHAPTER XIV.

PERILOUS POSITION OF DESPATCH GUNBOATS—STRENGTHENING OF THE FORTS—ARRIVAL OF CHINESE REINFORCEMENTS—THE QUESTION OF FULL POWERS—ANGLO-AMERICAN VISIT TO THE PEIHO IN 1854—INTERCOURSE ON THAT OCCASION—INTERVIEW WITH TSUNG AND TAN—MEMORIAL OF COMMISSIONERS IN 1854—REFERENCE TO PEKIN—CONTEMPTUOUS TREATMENT BY THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT—ANXIETY AS TO FUTURE MOVEMENTS—MEMORANDUM OF SIR M. SEYMOUR—COMMUNICATION WITH TAN—THE FINAL SUMMONS—INSOLENCE OF THE GARRISON.

For the next three weeks our life in the Gulf was one of absolute inaction. This was the more trying as the cool season was slipping rapidly past. The hot gusts came oftener, and in one week the thermometer rose from 42° to 74°. During all this time, hundreds of grain-junks were passing into the mouth of the river, bearing the annual tribute of rice, on which Peking is so entirely dependent. The interception of this grain-fleet had been one of Lord Elgin's principal objects in pushing northwards early, and desiring to be accompanied by the gunboats. It was impossible, however, to establish a blockade while negotiations ostensibly pacific were still in progress, and it was equally impossible to bring those negotiations to a close, until the naval authorities announced

that they were in a position to take the forts ; because, if a state of hostilities had been produced before they were able to effect this object, the despatch gunboats which were over the bar, and unable to recross it except at spring-tides, would obviously have been in a very perilous situation. Meanwhile Count Poutiatine had pushed his little steamer across the bar, and was living in the river and in daily communication with the Chinese. Mr Reed also had frequent intercourse with the Commissioners ; and neither time nor opportunity were wanting to enable the neutral powers to exercise the blessed functions of the peacemaker.

There were now a sufficient number of ships inside the bar to induce us to pay them frequent visits, partly as a break to the monotony of our life, and partly to watch the progress of the fortifications and the arrival of Chinese reinforcements. From the maintop of the Nimrod a most interesting bird's-eye view was obtained of the flat peninsula on which the forts were placed, and the steppe country stretching away to the horizon. Immediately beneath was the line of batteries, in which Chinamen were working like ants, happily thoughtless of throwing up any works in their rear, solely occupied in getting more guns into position, and strengthening the front face. These defences were properly known as the forts of Tungkoo. Behind them the plain extended across the neck of the peninsula for about a mile, to the town of Takoo, situated on a bend of the river. Man-

darins in state, officers on horseback, surrounded by their military retinue, Tartar couriers, soldiers, and camp-followers of all descriptions, were seen constantly passing across this plain ; while here, for the first time in China, we saw carts drawn by horses or mules, generally tandem. In the town of Takoo, a pagoda or two marked the residence of the Commissioners, and the principal temples ; while, behind it, a line of trees denoted the course of the river, and furnished a green background refreshing to look upon.

On the north bank of the river, two square forts, built more in accordance with civilised ideas of fortification, were undergoing repair and armament ; while in rear of them, upon the arid salt pans, a large camp, the tents scarcely distinguishable from the salt tumuli, betokened the arrival of an extensive body of troops from Peking. A cavalry regiment forming part of this force was an attractive object of inspection. Near this camp another battery was in progress of erection, in a position which commanded a long reach of the river.

The masts of junks, forming a forest of dry sticks beyond Takoo, showed how thickly the river was packed with craft ; while innumerable white sails dotted the horizon, and the clumsy hulls of others, which had reached their destination at low-water, were imbedded in the vast expanse of mud which stretched out to seaward.

On the 6th of May the Plenipotentiaries found

themselves compelled to seek a new pretext for correspondence, in order to gain time, and for that purpose reopened negotiations with Tan and Tsung. As the Chinese Commissioners, when required to produce the proper credentials, were in the habit of declaring that it was not in accordance with the usages of the Empire to grant to Ambassadors full powers similar to those conferred by European sovereigns on their representatives, Lord Elgin transmitted to them a copy of the full powers granted by the Imperial Government to Keying and Ilippo on the occasion of their treating with Sir Henry Pottinger, and intimated that he would be satisfied if they could procure from the Emperor similar credentials for themselves. Their refusal to comply with this demand furnished additional evidence of the fact, that they had not authority to settle the important questions pending between the two governments.

In order to a better appreciation of the peculiar conditions under which diplomatic relations in China are conducted, a perusal of the state papers discovered in Yeh's yamun, some of which have already appeared in the Blue-Book, and which are shortly to be published *in extenso* by Mr Wade, will be found very useful; those bearing upon the visit of Sir John Bowring and Mr Maclane to the Peiho in 1854, and the circumstances incidental to it, were especially edifying and instructive to us, more particularly as the great bulk of the memorials were written by

Tsung, the associate of Tan in the present Commission. That functionary little dreamt that his most secret and confidential opinions upon the subject of the English barbarians were undergoing the closest scrutiny, by those identical barbarians, at the period he was communicating with them in tones as conciliatory as was consistent with his hostile feelings. Certainly the circumstances under which we appeared off the Peiho were somewhat different to those under which it had been visited in 1854. Then, the force was composed of one English and three American vessels, only one of which was inside the bar. Now there were upwards of twenty men-of-war in the Gulf, of which nine were inside the bar ; for an American steamer, as well as the Russian, had taken up her anchorage in the river. Then, the foreign Plenipotentiaries had manifested the strongest desire to be received in audience, and had visited the Chinese Commissioners in the tent erected on shore for their accommodation. Now, these latter had fixed two several days for interviews, and expressed their anxious readiness to receive the foreign Plenipotentiaries : but their festive boards had been spread and their soldiers paraded in vain ; instead of the Plenipotentiaries they only saw Messrs Wade, Lay, and some of the members of the staff, and so far forgot their dignity, in their anxiety to conciliate, that they entertained them officially. On the former occasion, Drs Medhurst and Parker had been received by two subordinates, Wan-kien and Shwanjin, whose memorials on the subject are in the highest degree

amusing. This was pending the arrival of the Imperial Commissioner, Tsung.

To judge from their account of the intractability of the barbarians, they must have undergone most trying experiences in their endeavours to carry out the Emperor's injunctions "to discomfit their (the barbarians') deceit and arrogance, and foil their malicious sophistry." "There is no fathoming their (the barbarians') minds." They in one place despondingly remark, "nor is it at all certain they are not covering a mischievous purpose, their real object being to find a pretext for misunderstanding with us." Most determined are the combats they seem to have had with the interpreters. "To judge by appearances, Medhurst is much the most crafty," they think; but elsewhere they exultingly exclaim, "your slaves lectured them upon the obligations of duty. Medhurst and Parker hung down their heads, having nothing to rejoin, and apologised for their error. They further observed, that as a high officer was to be at Tientsin immediately, to look into the questions pending, there would now be peace between us, and (at this they were so delighted) that, though they should die, they should not care. They seemed greatly ashamed, and their language was most respectful."

Indeed, considering how constantly Wan-kien and his colleague are "peremptorily enjoining" and "authoritatively commanding" the barbarians, they seem to produce but little effect: doubtless feeling the futility of their efforts, one of them, after suggesting that

the Governor-General be sent to inquire into the matter, winds up in the following modest manner : "The opinion that is within the range of his stolidity, your slave, in the rashness of his ignorance, humbly declares ; and, unequal to the excess of his trepidation, awaits your Majesty's commands."

I had not the advantage of seeing Tsung, but those of our party who were received by that dignitary and Tan, describe him as an ill-favoured, suspicious-looking man with a squint, who maintained a truculent silence throughout the short interview. Perhaps the following memorial, which I have extracted from among Mr Wade's translations of the same papers, will account for the evil eye with which he regarded us, while it is interesting, at the same time, as throwing much light upon the motives and modes of action of Chinese officials : it is supplementary to a long and very interesting memorial, in which he and his colleague describe their interviews with Sir J. Bowring and Mr Maclane, their peremptory refusal to listen to any of their demands, and the means by which, in their opinion, they can be induced to waive them. "Further, they say, your slaves, having received your Majesty's commands to administer barbarian business together, could they have so set the right before the barbarians as to prevent them going back from their engagements, would they have dared to trouble your sacred Majesty with further matter of thought, by the application which they respectfully make for a Celestial decision ?

“The English barbarians are, however, full of insidious schemes, uncontrollably fierce and imperious. The American nation does no more than follow their direction. Every movement is the conception of the English. A perusal of the list of propositions presented by them shows that they are in general the views of a single self. They consist neither with right feeling nor principle. They have been mildly remonstrated with, but so crafty and slippery is their disposition that it is hard to set the right before them.

“Your slaves, having duly taken counsel together, have resolved to point out to them what articles in their paper admit of discussion ; and for the discussion of these, whether important or otherwise, to refer them to one of the five open ports. The place to which they might prefer to proceed your slaves would report to the throne ; high authorities in the province in which it lies receiving instructions from your Majesty, to consult together and make their disposition according to the particulars of the case, as ascertained by them on investigation, and to oblige the barbarians to return, and abide the issue ; to reject the rest of their propositions, one and all ; and, on receipt of your Majesty’s approval of this course, to write them another letter for their instruction, and return them (*lit.* throw back) their paper of articles. Should they be wilfully perverse to take no notice of it, but to be more than ever active in preparing secretly for defence, and to wait spear in

hand, with the right on our side and the wrong on theirs, it does not seem that they can have anything to allege against us. It is the nature of the Mwan and I,* while they dread the strong, to insult the weak. Without some display of power, they will not, perhaps, be deterred from their purpose of prying and spying (*lit.* their heart of spying will not be awed).

“It is proposed, in reply to them, to show a certain amount of indifference, thus to enhance the dignity of the state, and annihilate their treacherous projects. The barbarians are in no wise to be informed that the paper of propositions tendered by them has been laid before the throne. They were told, in the first instance, that it was taken away to be studied more carefully; that on anything in it that might be of advantage to both sides, or in no way to the prejudice of either, your Majesty’s pleasure would, after due deliberation, be requested for them ; that the remainder would be negatived, article by article, as being, from their offensiveness and impertinence, harmful and impracticable ; and that the paper would be returned to them on the 18th. The barbarians have never been given to understand that a copy of it could have been submitted to your Majesty for perusal. As in duty bound, they add this enclosure to the foregoing details.”

* *Note by Translator.*—The four barbarian races, surrounding ancient China proper, were the Mwan, the I, the Jung, and the Tih. The second is now almost generic for all races not Chinese.

There was no reason to suppose that Tsung, who adopted this tone with reference to barbarian affairs in 1854, had changed his mind in the interval, more especially as the policy he adopted on that occasion was eminently successful. He got rid of the barbarians, who were not more heard of, until the "Arrow case" once more roused "these troublesome pests" into action.

Upon the above occasion, the question of powers did not seem to arise, the Commissioners untruthfully alleging, not only that they were unable to entertain the demands of the barbarians, but even to refer them to Peking. It appears, however, that they were so referred, and the Emperor's decree on the subject was among our papers. Upon the occasion of our visit, they evidently wished it to be considered in the light of a concession that they offered to make reference to Peking; but it was clear that this was a principle totally inadmissible, as being not merely inconsistent with the dignity of the Powers represented on the occasion, but incompatible with the speedy or satisfactory progress of negotiations.

The practical inconvenience of treating with irresponsible functionaries is exemplified in a decree from the Council of State to Yeh, informing him of the proceedings of Sir John Bowring and Mr Maclane, in the north, in which they say: "They (the foreign Plenipotentiaries) presented a number of requests: more than one of them objectionable, by reason of their unreasonableness and impertinence. We con-

fidentially instructed Tsung-lun and his colleagues to disapprove and negative the whole of these, but to write a reply, promising, as it were of their own motion, that three of the questions—viz., the misunderstandings between the people and the barbarians, the arrears of duties at Shanghai, and the tea-duties in Kwang-tung, should notwithstanding be looked into and disposed of." This view of the subject was doubtless founded upon the opinion of Tsung-lun, as stated by him in one of his Memorials, in which he says: "Their (the foreign Plenipotentiaries') object (was to obtain consideration of) the arrear of duties at Shanghai, the surcharge on the tea-duties at Canton, and trade up the Yang-tse-Kiang. The remaining articles were mere talk (or lies), to produce an effect." Our subsequent silence upon the subject, for so long a period, must have confirmed this opinion, while the Council of State, commenting upon the indignant departure of the squadron from the Gulf, sagaciously remarks, "They will go back to Kwang-tung—their averment that they will return home for instructions from their government being nothing more than another of their fictions." Then follow instructions to Yeh, that, when they get to Canton, he is to be as peremptory with them as Tsung-lun was. Above all, that "their proposition to trade up the Yang-tse-Kiang must be peremptorily negated, nor must the barbarians be led to suppose that the idea was ever communicated to us."

With the advantage which these papers afforded

him of an insight into the character of Chinese diplomacy, Lord Elgin was naturally desirous to avoid being entangled in this labyrinth of finesse and word-fencing; and the delays in the Gulf were doubly annoying to him, because they had a tendency to involve him in discussions of this nature.

Meantime the Chinese were daily gaining confidence; there was little doubt that they had now made up their minds to resist, and every day's delay was weakening our position morally. At one time it seemed probable that the whole force would leave the Gulf of Pechelee without accomplishing any object whatever.* The time was a most anxious

* The following men-of-war were at this time anchored in the Gulf:—

		ENGLISH.		
		Guns.	Men.	
Calcutta,	. . . . .	84	700	} Anchored in Gulf of Pechelee.
Pique,	40	270		do.
Furious, paddle steamer,	. . . . .	8	220	do.
Nimrod, desp. Government vessel,	. . . . .	6	120	Peiho.
Cormorant,	do.	6	98	do.
Surprise,	do.	6	98	Gulf of Pechelee.
Fury,	. . . . .	8	160	do.
Slaney, gunboat,	. . . . .	5	48	
Leven, do.	. . . . .	5	48	
Bustard, do.	. . . . .	3	48	
Opossum,	. . . . .	3	48	
Staunch,	3	48	
Firm,	3	48	
Coromandel, paddle-steamer,	5	44	Peiho.
Hesper, storeship,	0	54	
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one, for the Plenipotentiaries considered that any such abandonment of the enterprise would tend to increase the arrogance of the Court of Peking, and perhaps compromise the safety of Europeans in other parts of the Empire.

Finally, it was resolved that a movement up the Peiho, of a mixed hostile and diplomatic character, should take place, as described in the annexed Memorandum of Sir M. Seymour, of the result of the conference held on board l'Audacieuse frigate, 18th May 1858.

“ Proposed by the Ambassadors—

“ To take the forts, and, in accordance with language held to Tan, the Chinese High Commissioner, to go nearer the capital to treat; to advance paci-

FRENCH.

Nemesis, frigate,	Gulf of Pechelee.
Audacieuse, frigate,	do.
Primanquet, steam-corvette,	do.
Durance, storeship,	do.
Meurthe,	do.
Phlegeton, steam-corvette,	do.
Mitraille, gunboat,	Peiho.
Fusée, gunboat,	do.
Avalanche, gunboat,	do.
Dragonne,	do.
Renny, store-steamer.	

AMERICAN.

Minnesota, steam-frigate,	Gulf of Pechelee.
Mississippi, steam-frigate,	do.
Antelope, chartered steamer,	Peiho.

RUSSIAN.

Amerika, paddle-steamer,	Peiho.
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fically up the river with a view to meeting a Plenipotentiary.

“It was remarked that the ministers of Russia and the United States would unite in this movement, after the capture of the forts.

“I stated that I was quite prepared to operate against the forts, and afterwards advance the gunboats in aid of the proposed movements up the river.

“The official authority requiring me to act is to be furnished by Lord Elgin.” *

In keeping with this arrangement, a communication was addressed to Tan, in which the Ambassador stated, that, the various delays accorded having expired without producing any satisfactory result, it had at last become necessary for him, in accordance with his expressed intention of “placing himself in more immediate communication with the high officers of the Imperial Government at the capital,” to move “towards” Tientsin. “As a preliminary measure,” his Excellency goes on to state, “it will be requisite that the forts at the mouth of the Peiho be placed in the hands of the Commanders-in-chief of the allied force. Their Excellencies will signify the time within which the Imperial troops will be called on to evacuate these works. The forts once in possession of the allied force, the Under-signed will ascend the river, trusting that the Imperial Government will, without further delay, admit the

* *Vide* Blue-Book, page 306.

expediency of appointing a duly qualified representative to meet him."

On the 18th of May the Plenipotentiaries and Admirals met in conference, and it was finally arranged that the above summons should be sent in on the 20th; and that if the Chinese should decline accepting our offer of temporarily garrisoning their forts for them, force should be employed to obtain possession of them.

So at last, after five weeks of total inaction at anchor in one spot, there was some prospect of escape from a situation which was gradually becoming intolerable. During this period, which seemed an age, we had passed through every variety of temperature and every phase of sentiment. We had been hot and hopeful, cold and despondent, shrouded in fogs, beset with doubts, choked with sand and disgust, tempest and passion-tossed, becalmed and torpid. We became wonderfully expert at games with rope quoits, and profoundly indifferent to sublunary affairs generally. News of the change of ministry at home, which arrived about this time, did not create nearly so much sensation as a present of fresh fish, for we were reduced to living on potted meats.

Information came from those in the river that the Chinese were working harder than ever in constructing stockades and abattis, that the camps were increasing in size, and the soldiers in bravado, insomuch that they hooted and waved flags at us jeeringly,

wondering why we did not "come on:" all this was refreshing to the spirits of those who had become bloodthirsty, more especially the officers of the ships over the bar. The Nimrod and Cormorant had been quietly edged so close to the forts that, considering their escape was impossible, no other nation but the Chinese could have resisted the temptation of firing upon them ; but in vain did their commanders watch for a little puff of white smoke which might have enabled them to cut the gordian knot which we in the Gulf had been so long endeavouring to unravel ; in vain did parties of sportsmen look for snipe under the very guns of the batteries ; the imperturbable garrison contented themselves with waving flags, well pleased to be allowed to play the part of the Earl of Chatham as long as we should continue to personify Sir Richard Strachan.