

## CHAPTER XV.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE ATTACK—DELIVERY OF THE ULTIMATUM  
—THE SIGNAL OF ATTACK—ADVANCE OF THE CORMORANT—  
THE NIMROD HOTLY ENGAGED—CHINESE ARTILLERY-PRACTICE  
—THE BATTERIES STORMED—“SAUVE QUI PEUT”—TERRIFIC EX-  
PLOSION—ASPECT OF THE FORTIFICATIONS—ATTACK OF THE  
NORTHERN FORTS—CAPTURE OF THE LAST BATTERY—A VISIT  
TO TAN'S RESIDENCE—IMPERIAL EDICT—FATE OF TAN—HIS  
ACCOUNT OF THE ACTION—TAN'S YAMUN—A POEM “IN ME-  
MORIAM”—RETURN TO THE FURIOUS.

As if to compensate to us for all the delay and discomfort to which we had already been subjected during our stay in the Gulf, the climate for the last few days would have been a credit to the Mediterranean. The sky was cloudless, and fresh breezes from the seaward had driven the salt waves into the Gulf, and forced back the muddy waters of the Peiho, until that river indulged in the poetic license of “meandering level with its font.”

On the 19th I crossed the bar at an early hour. The batteries maintained their usual aspect of repose. Here and there groups of soldiers were squatted round some big brass guns, or mandarins of rank with umbrella and banner bearers went their rounds; but as the day wore on they saw enough to rouse

them to vigilance and activity. Six gunboats came dancing merrily over the bar, each thronged with human beings, and forming a centre round which clustered a crowd of ships' boats, like chickens nestling under the maternal wing. Spasmodically puffing forth their six jets of white smoke, they steadily approached the awestruck garrison, who, however, to do them justice, manifested no external signs of alarm. That even the hardy progeny of the soldiers of Genghis Khan should have felt some degree of trepidation at witnessing a phenomenon of this description for the first time was natural; but not only did they conceal their intimidation, but had the hardihood to send off a message through Count Poutiatine, inviting us to "come on." So we came on, and looked very pretty as we did so; the setting sun glancing on red coats and waving flags, and shedding its warm bright glow upon the devoted garrison, so many of whom were looking at it for the last time. These latter, however, probably not much given to sentiment at any time, were evidently more engrossed with the approaching foe than the departing day, and seemed to suspect that we were going to attack the same evening. Officers moved briskly about the batteries on horseback; the whole garrison stood to their guns, and turned out in a long and imposing line upon the glacis; but their prowess was not yet destined to be tried. The gunboats came to an anchor at a long range from the forts; the garrison relapsed into quiet and security; the

waves, so lately burnished gold, became polished silver as the rising moon tipped their crests, and the hoarse pant of the steam-engine was succeeded by the gruff chorus of the British sailor, who was too much excited by the prospect of "thrashing the fokees" on the morrow, to go to sleep until he had exhausted his repertory of appropriate songs. At length the last barbarian strain died faintly away, and tar and Tartar were buried in profound repose.

At eight o'clock on the following morning, the English and French flag-captains, accompanied by Mr Lay, landed under a flag of truce with the ultimatum, and an intimation that a delay of two hours would be accorded for the exchange of garrisons, as required in the ultimatum. These gentlemen were received by a petty mandarin near the blue tent, where a repast had every day been spread for the entertainment of any such barbarians of distinction as should honour the Commissioners with a visit. To this official the ultimatum was handed, and the party retired. An interval of two hours then elapsed, at the expiry of which, as no further communication was received from the forts, it was concluded that the authorities preferred their own garrison to the one proposed as a substitute, and had determined to abide by the consequences. At ten o'clock, therefore, the signal was hoisted for the ships to take up their respective positions.

The Cormorant, Mitraille, and Fusée had been told off to the attack of the two forts on the northern

side ; while the three forts on the southern bank, with their long connecting-line of sandbag batteries, fell to the share of the Nimrod, Avalanche, and Dragonne. This apparently unequal distribution of French and English gunboats, by which the former appeared to have monopolised an undue share in the operations, was rendered necessary by the inefficiency of the French gunboats for performing sundry functions for which our smaller class of gunboats are alone adapted, and which we were compelled to do for them. Thus the Leven and Opossum were told off for French service throughout the day, and towed in their landing parties. During the subsequent period of our residence at Tientsin, our gunboats were constantly employed on the French account, bringing up provisions, supplies, &c., and performing the entire river service for both squadrons.

To return to the signal of attack. Cameron and I had taken up our position for viewing the operations of the day on board the Nimrod. For a few moments before this signal was hoisted, the river presented a most animated appearance. The advanced ship up the river was the Cormorant, letting off impatient puffs of steam, as she waited like a greyhound till the leash should be slipped, and she should be started to burst through the bamboo barrier which was stretched across the river, and run the gauntlet of the fire of forts to which she would be exposed before reaching her position. Immediately behind her lay the Nimrod, her decks cleared

for action, the men at their guns, and every soul eagerly longing for the welcome order. Some distance astern of her were our own gunboats, surrounded by their small fry, crowded with men, and the four large French gunboats.

The signal flag had hardly reached the truck of the Slaney when the Cormorant darted off like an arrow : as her men were all lying flat on the deck, not a soul but her commander and two or three officers was to be seen on board. A moment had scarcely elapsed before Captain Saumarez had reason to congratulate himself on the wisdom of his precaution—puff, and a cloud of smoke like that of an exploded mine was followed by the whistle of a round-shot, then another, and another, till all three forts had opened on her in full chorus. But the Cormorant disdained reply ; suddenly there was a shock, a tremor, and a start ahead—she had burst the barrier, composed of five seven-inch bamboo cables, buoyed across the river. In a moment more she was in position, and giving the batteries on the southern bank one gun by way of a recognition of the compliment they had paid her ; she concentrated her tremendous fire on the northern forts, which were completely silenced in about eighteen minutes, at the expiry of which term the Fusée and Mitraille came up, too late, however, to participate in the bombardment.

Meantime the Nimrod had been no less alert, and being already almost in position, opened incontinently a telling fire on the southern forts, thus diverting

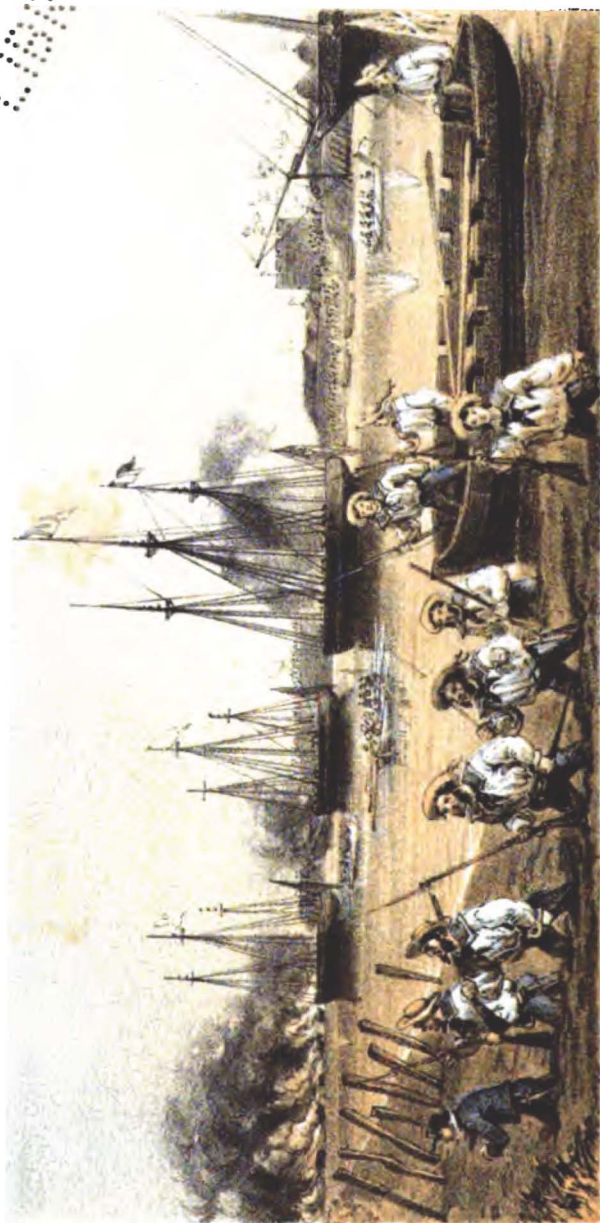
their attention from the Cormorant, and attracting their concentrated fire on herself. For about a quarter of an hour we held the distinguished post of engaging single-handed the whole three forts. Presently, however, the four French gunboats, two of them on their way to support the Cormorant, and the other two (Avalanche and Dragonne), our supports, came slowly up: the strong tide and the narrow river considerably embarrassed the movements of these craft, which were of unwieldy construction and insufficient steam-power. However, when the Avalanche and Dragonne did get into position, just ahead of us, they did their work well, and for the next half-hour we all three hammered away at the forts with great good-will and pertinacity,—the Tartars standing to their guns better than we anticipated. The shot for the most part passed over us, some of them flying as high as the top-gallant cross-trees. One went through the topsail yard, and we saw them bobbing in all directions into the river beyond us. The French gunboats had poops; to this may no doubt be attributed the mortality among the officers: they lost no less than four killed, and only two men, if we exclude those killed afterwards by an explosion.

The Nimrod was hulled in half-a-dozen places, but we had only one man killed, and three wounded. The gingall fire was more telling than that of their large guns. The construction of a Chinese battery renders it a somewhat difficult matter to silence them effectually. Behind the gun is a bomb-proof cham-

ber, containing the ammunition, and to which the men run for shelter. After the gun is discharged the gunners disappear into this retreat, and remain until the enemy, having given the battery a full fit of shot and shell without reply, conclude it to be silenced; then the gunners stealthily emerge, and if possible to load and fire the gun without being perceived, rushing back to their hiding-place immediately afterwards. Of course, upon this system the firing can never be very rapid, but there is no reason why it should not last for ever, unless the gun is disabled. To prevent this, they generally run it behind the solid earthwork after it is fired. By minute investigation with an opera-glass, we could often detect the gunners popping like rabbits out of a warren, from the chamber into the battery, and then a shell, judiciously dropped amongst them, would shut up the gun for a quarter of an hour. As, however, there were 140 guns altogether in position, a good deal of firing went on notwithstanding.

A little before eleven, the Admirals, followed by their fleet of gunboats, passed up the river, receiving on their way a good many stray shots that passed over us. As the interest was now to be transferred to their operations, I went up with my companion to the maintop of the Nimrod, from whence we obtained a magnificent bird's-eye view of the scene. The batteries, with their active garrisons, lay immediately at our feet. We could see the gunners running in and out of their chambers, and working away like

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL  
WASHINGTON, D. C.



CAPTURE OF THE PIRATE PORTS  
30<sup>th</sup> MAY, 1858

W. P. W. W. W.

W. P. W. W. W.



ants ; and in the plain behind, a large crowd, probably a force in reserve, who, to their intense amazement, were favoured with a shell or two immediately on our informing Captain Dew of their position and direction.

As the storming parties landed within 300 yards of us, we could, from our elevated position, inspect their proceedings with great minuteness. The attention of the fort being concentrated upon the gunboats in front of them, the garrison seemed unconscious of the fact that some hundreds of "barbarians" were landing just above them. Not knowing that our practice was to take batteries by assault, they were evidently taken completely by surprise ; and as but a few yards of mud were to be traversed at that time of tide, the men were in the embrasures at once. In the late unfortunate attack, the distance of mud to be crossed was much greater, and the garrison doubtless fully expected that we should land and storm as we had done before, and were prepared accordingly. We saw the leading blue-jacket jump into the battery ; an instantaneous panic spread itself like lightning along the line of batteries at our feet ; and in the "sauve qui peut" which followed, some amusing scenes occurred, as Jack, at the top of his speed, dodged and chased the terrified soldiers, who, with outstretched arms and nimble legs, scattered in every direction. Here and there one more courageous than his fellows would attempt to make a stand, or apparently disbelieve the report

of a flying Tartar, who pointed to the rear and sped on with redoubled speed; but no sooner did the flash of the cutlass glance before his eye, than the bravest of them lost heart, and in ten minutes the whole garrison, together with the body in reserve, were scattered far and wide over the plain. Those who had a good start could afford to save their dignity, and walk composedly away; but the stragglers in rear fled as though demons were on their track, and for the most part fairly outran our gallant tars, whose wind was soon expended, and who were obliged at last to content themselves with stray shots at their light-heeled foe. After a race of this description their aim was somewhat wild, and I saw a marine aim with great deliberation at a man whom he had almost succeeded in running down, at a distance of about five yards, and miss him.

We now lost no time in landing ourselves, and were soon exploring the batteries and the plain behind. We met the marines and blue-jackets coming back from their chase, and the few corpses I observed on the field and in the batteries confirmed me in the impression that the Chinese loss had been comparatively trifling, probably not above 200 in all, including those killed on the north bank. There can be no doubt that, if it had been desired, we might, by sending a force round to the village of Takoo, have cut off their retreat, and caught the whole garrison in a trap from which they could not possibly have escaped.



THE IMPERIAL COMMISSIONERS.

RECEPTION TENT OF THE IMPERIAL COMMISSIONERS, TAKOU.

We were the first to make an inroad upon the oranges and pomegranates, which formed part of the repast spread out for our (pacific) entertainment in the blue tent, through the canvass of which two or three round-shot had let in daylight. Then we proceeded to pull down the Chinese banners, and demolishing parties were set to work to upset the guns and dismantle the fortifications. We found them to be more solidly constructed than we had supposed, the three forts being composed of square blocks of stone masonry, the sea front faced with earth ; they were about twelve feet in height, and ascended from the rear by a broad flight of stone steps.

While standing near the base of one of these, which we had just been investigating, and which was now filled with Frenchmen, we were startled by an explosion so close as to make us involuntarily retreat some yards, and inexpressibly shocked by the sight which met our eyes. A crowd of French sailors rushed wounded and panic-stricken out of the falling buildings ; some of them, tortured beyond endurance by the horrible agony, threw themselves headlong over the glacis into the ditch at the base. One of these wretched sufferers I observed scramble out upon the opposite bank, after rolling in the muddy pool, and though blackened to a degree which gave him more the appearance of a cinder than a man, shout with characteristic vivacity, "Vive l'Empereur! Vive la France!" as he feebly waved his cap over his head. But those who first rushed out were only the less

injured ; the severely wounded were now being carried down from the fort by their comrades, and the objects were so painfully disfigured, and as they writhed and groaned with agony presented so heart-rending an appearance, that, as we were only in the way, we hurried from the spot ; nor could I banish the scene from my memory for some time afterwards. The French Admiral was close by as this tragical event happened, and every assistance was instantly rendered to the sufferers, in spite of which, out of about forty who were more or less severely injured, the majority never recovered.

This incident cooled the ardour of our investigations into the fortifications. We had indeed been over the entire length of the works, and were amazed at the calibre and exquisite finish of some of the brass guns. The sandbag battery, which connected the forts, had been well constructed, and had afforded sufficient shelter to enable the gunners to annoy us considerably. Numbers of beautifully-made rockets were piled up in different directions, and bags of powder lay scattered about. Some good canister-shot was lying about, as well as hollow 8-inch. There were also several English guns in the batteries. A battery of 200 gingalls, all laid close together in line, each about ten feet long, and carrying a pound ball, looked like a gigantic "infernal machine," and, properly worked, makes doubtless a formidable defence. Camps were situated behind the forts, and looting parties rummaging out the tents for swords, &c. &c.

every now and then unearthed a Chinaman. One of our own men, who had foolishly dressed himself in some of the clothes he had discovered, was unhappily shot by mistake for one of the enemy.

As it was not yet mid-day, and we still heard firing round the bend of the river, we were anxious to push up if possible to Takoo, and were glad to take advantage of the gunboat Firm, which was despatched to the front for the purpose of collecting wounded. On our way we observed some stranded fire-rafts, which were still burning, having been towed on shore. An attempt had also been made to send down some lighted junks, filled with straw, which fortunately proved abortive.

As we passed the northern forts, and saw the flanking fire to which they had been exposed from the Cormorant's heavy guns, we did not wonder at the rapidity with which they were evacuated—our landing-parties, under Captains Sir Frederick Nicolson, Sherard Osborn, and Commander Cresswell, together with the French landing-party, having entered them without opposition. After the usual amount of tricolors, &c., had been stuck up, the French crossed over to the left bank, and the men of the Pique, Furious, and Surprise, followed the garrison of the forts, who were in full retreat upon two intrenched camps, one of which contained the cavalry force already alluded to. These camps were situated close to the river, and were protected in that direction by a formidable battery, which commanded the entire

length of the reach. The shore party, advancing over a flat salt plain, were covered on their left flank by the Bustard, Opossum, and Staunch, which were exposed to the whole fire of the battery as they advanced up the reach. A sharp engagement followed between these three little gunboats and the battery, in which they lost two killed and five wounded ; but upon the landing-party coming up at the double, and taking them in flank, the panic usual in such cases was followed by an utter rout, and the assailants, whose attention was particularly directed to the flying cavalry, only succeeded in knocking over a few of them as they fled across the open.

This episode had just terminated when we arrived. Each camp contained about twenty-five field-pieces, 6-pounders, four heavy brass guns throwing 68-pound shot, and a dozen iron guns of a new construction, on capital carriages, throwing an 18-pound ball. There was computed to have been about a thousand men in each battery, with abundance of admirable gingalls. We now moved up to Takoo, where a barrier of junks, moored right across the river, debarred our further progress. A battery of eighteen field-pieces, which was deserted as we approached, flanked this barrier, and so we immediately landed and took possession of it. Just behind this battery was the village of Takoo, the houses of one story, built of mud, and divided by narrow streets, and in every respect similar to a fellah village on the banks of the Nile. A crowd of people had collected about fifty yards distant, conscious,

apparently, that we should not mistake them for soldiers, and watched our proceedings with great coolness and interest.

We were enabled to communicate with them through Mr Wade, who now arrived, together with some others of our party. In answer to our inquiry, they informed us that the joss-house in the neighbourhood had been the residence of the Imperial Commissioner Tan, so we immediately decided on paying it a visit. We were accompanied by several villagers, who appeared so perfectly friendly that three or four blue-jackets formed our only escort. On our way we found the headless trunk of a man lying across the path, who, the villagers informed us, had been beheaded in the morning for running away. We soon broke open the doors of the joss-house, proved to be the Hai-chin-Miao, or Temple of the Sea-God (the same at which Lord Macartney visited the Governor of the Province), and were received by some priests, who not unnaturally betrayed a little nervous agitation. We assured them we only wished to ransack Tan's private room for papers. We discovered none, however, of any importance; though, from the confusion in which we found his apartments, he had evidently left in a hurry. A mandarin officer of some importance, who had committed suicide by cutting his throat, was also found in the house. We afterwards discovered that this was Tehkwei, the acting commandant at the defence of the forts. The following extract from the *Pekin Gazette*, showing how the



Government of China deal with their officers who are guilty of failure, will prove that this unhappy mandarin only anticipated his destiny by a few months:—

“The Prince of Hwui and others have in concert with the Board of Punishments presented a memorial setting forth the penalties they find the laws to award to the different officers whom We had directed them to try for the loss of the port of Tien-tsing. The following officers already degraded—namely, Chang Tien-yuen, Commander-in-chief of the Chinese army of Chih-li, Tanien, acting as General-in-command of the Tien-tsing division of the same, and Tehkwei, Acting Commandant of Takoo, had been directed by T'an Ting-siang to occupy and defend the forts at Takoo, on the north and south banks of the river; Fulehtunt'ai, Lieutenant-general of Banner-men, had encamped at Chung-páu, in rear and in support of Chang Tien-yuen and the rest. When the barbarians opened fire they made every effort to keep them off, striking and wounding four barbarian ships, and killing several barbarian soldiers; notwithstanding which all the forts and all the guns were taken. Certainly, their offence is without excuse! Let Fulehtunt'ai, Chang Tien-yuen, and Tanien, who, according to the award, should properly be decapitated, be imprisoned until after the autumn, and then put to death.”

As our intercourse with Tan terminated shortly

after, in a note from that functionary announcing the appointment of his successors, we may not inappropriately take leave of him, now that we have completed the search of his premises. In the same Pekin Gazette we find the following punishment awarded to him : "Tan Ting-siang, already degraded from the office of Governor-general of Chih-li, has been found not guilty of cowardice and desertion ; but, in that his operations were without plan or resource, his offence is no less without excuse. Let him be banished to the frontier,\* there to redeem his guilt by his exertions."

Poor Tan was the victim of circumstances over which he certainly had no control ; and it seems hard that his government should refuse him full powers in the first instance, and then punish him for the inevitable consequence of his being without them.

The tendency of which our own government has been accused—of rewarding incapacity—renders its service sufficiently discouraging to meritorious officers ; but even it must be preferable to one which unrelentingly visits misfortune with disgrace.

Although we did not find any papers of political importance in the residence of Tan, the following account of the memorial he addressed to the Emperor on the loss of Takoo, if true, furnishes an amusing illustration of the desperate falsehoods to which his unhappy servants are compelled to resort in hope of averting the imperial displeasure. The subjoined

\* The confines of Siberia, on the far west of the Chinese dominions.

letter was received by Mr Lay on his arrival at Tientsin, from a Chinese correspondent in the city, who doubtless hoped to curry favour with the barbarians by sending them information ; it must therefore be taken *cum grano* :—

“ Tan tells the Emperor in his memorial respecting the loss of Takoo, that he gained a great victory the day before” (by the day before is meant the 20th, or day of the capture), “and destroyed several barbarian ships. That the capture of the forts was attributable to a circumstance which it was not in his power to control. An unusually high tide on the day in question, and a sudden rush of water from the Gulf, swept away the south-east battery, and any defence of the place was rendered impossible. Long before your admiral reached Tientsin, Tan had fled, and with him every soldier and brave. The magistrate is the only one who remained in the city. Before the fight at Takoo the Emperor issued two edicts to Tan, desiring him to accede to your demands so far as ports were concerned. Tan, however, did not dare to show these edicts, because they contained the word “barbarian,” and he was afraid that the sight of the objectionable expression would only incense you. He therefore determined upon risking a trial of strength. The Emperor is going to appoint Toh-mingah to treat with you. He does not appoint Sang-ko-lin-sin, because of his warlike disposition. Our high officers dread a personal meeting with your Ambassadors ; they think they would be made prisoners, as was Yeh.’

Such, according to popular gossip, was Tan's mode of accounting for his defeat at Takoo. It is highly probable that the imperial edicts above spoken of actually did exist, although Tan had evidently had time to carry off all his political documents. A poem, however—translated, I believe, by one of the gentle-



The "Temple of the Sea-God" (Residence of Tan at Takoo.)

men attached to the American legation—was afterwards discovered, which rouses our sympathies in behalf of the unhappy mandarin, and which I have thought worthy of insertion for the benefit of those who deny the existence in the Chinese bosom of the sentiment of domestic affection :—

TRANSLATION OF A POEM *in Memoriam* of Tan's wife. Found in his room at Takoo. (The characters of black velvet, each on the representation of a Chinese fruit. In couplets of four characters each.)

*Right hand.*

" In the Mé\* bowered window the Spring is mild."

*Left hand.*

" In the lan † bordered pathway the breezes are fragrant."

[The following twe-lien, or scrolls, on blue and white silk, are funeral tributes to the virtues of a distinguished lady, presented by mourning relatives; blue and white being the appropriate colours of mourning.]

" Combining the qualities of Tan and Ki, ‡ the Vermilion Pencil has honoured her with a title.

Uniting the graces of Ha and Chang, the Scarlet Tube § has published her excellence.

Possessing high rank of Imperial bestowment, favour rested on her door-posts, and abundant grace upon her household.

Decorated with an Imperial distinction, her virtues were published through her native district, and diffused the reputation of her worth.

With a stimulant made of bears' gall exciting the studies (of her son), her excellent example is worthy of imitation.

Clad in ivory-adorned vestments, she has gone to worship the True (one); and her benevolent countenance, where shall we look for it?

\* Mé (pronounced *may*) is the name of a kind of plum indigenous to China.

† Lan is the designation of a bulbous flowering plant of ravishing sweetness. It is the *Aglaia odorata* of botanists.

‡ Tan and Ki were women famed for their virtues. Ha and Chang were ladies celebrated for their accomplishments.

§ Vermilion Pencil and Scarlet Tube are identical figures denoting the Emperor.

Having taught her son to respect her example and hold fast the classics, she saw him pluck with his own hand the sprig of the qué-hwá.\*

Having aided her husband to display his virtues, her gentle influence flowed over her kindred, and she long commanded the hearts of her relations."

Our search was soon concluded, and as the day was now advanced, and the enemy had become invisible, we thought it time to return to the Furious.

In the evening the second division moved up, embarked in our own gunboats, supported by Captain Dew (of the Nimrod), to the line of junks moored abreast of the Takoo joss-house.

\* The qué-hwá, or qué flower, is the *Olea fragrans*, the blossom of which yields a rich perfume. This plant is accepted as the emblem of the degree Kin-jin, equivalent to our M.A. ; and plucking a sprig of the qué-hwá is, therefore, equivalent to attaining his second literary degree.