THE CHINA REVIEW.

THE BOMBARDMENT OF PAKHOI.

AN UNRECORDED EPISODE OF 1882.

(*Continued from page* 104.)

PART III.

We did not spend a very comfortable night; Père D. was occupied with Paternosters and Aves, for I could give him little hope of escaping the Admiral's clutches, and what would happen when in them it was only too easy to divine. I assured him, however, that though the means to which the Admiral proposed to resort might, probably would, ultimately be successful, I would never surrender him of my own free will. The rest of us spent the time at a sort of Council of War, discussing the position we found ourselves in, and coming to the conclusion that our only chance—a slender one at best—lay in the arrival of succour from without.

In the face of our common danger all differences of social standing were obliterated or rather our respective position became reversed. The Commissioner of Customs could pretend to no military experience, nor could the merchant; the doctor had naturally his proper place already marked out for him; the missionary was by profession a man of peace, and I myself had no pretensions to lead. In some sense I did, as the embodiment of civil authority from a centre round which all rallied, but, when it came to a question of attack and defence, I sank at once into the position of a mere volunteer ready to carry out the orders of those whose experience was greater. Now it was that two men on the lowest rung of our social ladder sprung to the top; my constable, E. P., though a young man, was an old soldier and had served for some time with credit in the Artillery; C. W., a tide waiter in the Customs, was the other; he had been a sailor in the German marine and was familiar with naval gunnery. These two became our natural leaders, and it was not long before their services were required.

It was now the morning of the third day since the trouble began, and we had a reasonable prospect of being relieved, could we but tide over twelve hours longer. Diplomacy had said its last word; '*arma virumque*' (which may be freely rendered 'Powder and Pluck') was to be the future burden of our song. All that was to be done in the way of preparation had been done, and we were resting from our labours, each smoking an after breakfast cigar, perhaps our last. Suddenly a shout was heard from our sentinel on the verandah: he had sighted the smoke of a steamer. Regardless of consequences we all rushed out; a steamer *was* coming! What would she prove to be? A man-of-war? Impossible; and yet not quite impossible after all, for our junk might have fallen in with one on her way. So for

ten minutes we were balanced between hope and fear. Alas! we soon found that it was no man-of-war. Our glasses made it out a merchant steamer and, worse still, under French colours; she little suspected what a hornet's nest she was putting her head into; probably there was a mail on board which would never reach us. No sooner had she come to an anchor than she was surrounded by armed boats and the dragon flag was quickly run up above the French ensign.

At nine o'clock the Admiral sent on shore for the last time, to know whether I intended to comply with his demand or not. I wrote back that my determination remained the same, and warned him that, though he might annihilate our small party, the vengeance of England would surely fall upon him and his country. For all reply he sent on shore a Hongkong paper taken from the French steamer, with one long telegram conspicuously marked. It was truly of the most startling character and was nearly to the following effect.

'Dissolution of Parliament. Appeal to the country. New members returned. Larger Liberal majority than ever. Two-thirds of the constituencies elected Quakers. Gladstone returned for Liverpool at the head of the poll, Biggar being the second member.

'The Premier speaking after the election said that, with his present following in parliament, he intended to inaugurate an entirely new policy. The Army and Navy would be abolished; the ships disposed of, where suitable, to the mercantile marine or else broken up for old iron and firewood. The guns and arms of all sorts would be sold for nominal sums to the Fenians and Home Rulers. He hoped soon to be in a position to state that every Irishman was in the enjoyment of an ancestral estate and a Martini-Henry. The Right Hon. gentleman went on to say that, though blood-thirsty Tories might be of another opinion, he was convinced that England's policy—too long persevered in—of objecting to be kicked was unchristian; that the blood-guiltiness incurred in avenging insults was too heavy a price to pay for what was styled in Conservative slang "obtaining satisfaction"; with the economy thus effected he proposed to take a penny off the Income Tax and with the capitalised residue purchase European Turkey from the Sultan and make a present of it at Christmas to his esteemed friend, (if he might call him so), the Czar. He was confident that other nations, impressed by England's gentle trustfulness, would be too magnanimous to take advantage of her weakness. Burke had called chivalry the "cheap defence of nations," but he (Mr. Gladstone) was going to prove to the world that abject grovelling was cheaper still and more effective. Telegraphic orders would be sent to our troops and navies in all parts of the globe to return home at once to be disposed of. The officers would be allowed to volunteer into the Salvation Army; the men might go to—. . .'

[Here the cable was interrupted; it is supposed by Arabi Pasha.]

This was indeed a blow!—at least if it was true. Could Reuter be indulging in a hoax? We all refused to credit it: yet it had the Gladstonian ring, and then that item about the Quakers was very circumstantial. So if we fell we were not to be avenged. There was still time to escape; we had but to give up the fugitive. Yet we never even thought of it. Punctually at ten o'clock an armed boat approached the Consulate and summoned me to surrender the Frenchman or—. Our reply was to cock our rifles and say, 'Gentlemen in the boat, fire first.' A volley followed but was quite harmless; not so ours: the spokesman in the bow fell and several of the crew were wounded. They then attacked the door, but it was fast closed and before they had time to bring their axes into play three-fourths of the attacking force was *hors-de-combat*, and the remainder had to sheer off. In this action we only fired one round from our rifles; our assailants were so near that we could economise rifle ammunition by using our revolvers. When

the boat had left, we hastily opened the door and picked up the wounded whom their comrades had been too discomfited to carry off. The doctor took them—some half dozen men—under his charge, and we combatants sat down to breathe awhile.

Up to the present the town was ignorant of what had been going on. Neither the attempt to arrest Père D. nor the reasons which led to it were known. But after the attack on the Consulate the news spread like wildfire through the place, and in a very short time we heard the din of rapidly beaten gongs—the Chinese tocsin. I called my servant and asked what the noise meant, he told me the 'train bands' (or local militia) must be mustering. My worst fears were realised: we were going to be attacked on both sides and could not hold out long. I informed my companions and we gave ourselves up for lost.

PART IV.

Now a strange thing happened; probably—nay, certainly—unparalleled in the history of China. One of my people came rushing up to say that all Pakhoi was under arms and that a large body of armed men was knocking at the street gate. I went down to parley, expecting to be greeted with the usual opprobrious cries, 'Foreign devil' and so on; but to my astonishment the people outside remained quite orderly, with only the subdued hum peculiar to crowds, and their spokesman addressed me in the friendliest and politest terms. He said that I naturally must distrust their intentions but that, if I would admit himself and only two others as a sort of deputation, they would explain their purpose in coming.

There was something in the man's voice and mode of speaking which inspired confidence and induced me to comply; so three of them were admitted and certainly the remainder continued perfectly quiet and made no effort to force a way in on their companions' heels. When the door had been closed, the spokesman—who was, I found, the headman of Pakhoi—proceeded to make at considerable length his explanation which may very well be condensed.

On the night of the 21st February last, there was a very extensive fire in the east part of Pakhoi, which threatened at one time to spread and involve the whole town, but it was arrested, little short of miraculously, by a house which happened to be occupied by the very missionary whose life was now in danger. The Chinese are well known to be most superstitious, and they ever since firmly believed that the presence of Père D. was essential to the safety of the town. Moreover during an endemic which carried off its hundreds last spring, our doctor was most indefatigable, going among the poor, braving the danger of contagion, with such good results that he had succeeded in saving many lives. Therefore, though the Commissioner of Customs and his staff (always excepting the doctor), might have been cut to pieces with impunity, and while it was little that they cared what became of me, the Pakhoi populace were not going to put up with any attempt on the lives or liberties of their two 'guardian-angels,' and for the sake of these graciously took us all under their protection. The importance of this turn of affairs to us is evident, our rear was secured, and we need no longer fear either want of water or dearth of provision.

The Pakhoi 'trained-bands' numbered about 1,000 all told and were easily supreme on shore. There were government troops in garrison, but they only mustered some fifty men of whom thirty formed the local police, while there were ten stationed in each of the two forts situated at the East and West ends of Pakhoi. These forts had quite lately been armed with bran-new 64-pounders under the stimulus of the French scare, and the garrison was to be augmented. The additional troops had not yet arrived, however, and our gallant allies had no difficulty in ousting the insufficient

force the forts contained. I have already mentioned that two of our number were experienced gunners; they were detached to take command each of a fort and to superintend, if necessary, the working of the three guns with which these were severally armed.

The Admiral had by this time recognised that the force he had sent at first was not nearly strong enough; he was determined not to err in that way again and despatched a body of 100 men in five boats to be sure of overcoming all resistance. One boat advanced towards the front of the Consulate, the three others made for *terra firma* some distance off where the men were to be landed for a rear attack. We had of course observed and understood the manœuvre and were prepared for them in a way they little suspected, for as yet they could not know of the revolution on shore. To all appearance the street at the rear of the Consulate was deserted, but in reality every house on each side for some distance gave shelter to a posse of militiamen, imperfectly armed it is true, but still likely to do considerable execution from the bare fact that their assault would be unexpected. The crews of the three boats advanced boldly along the street till our door was reached and then their leader gave a loud whistle, which was to mark the onset and give the cue to the boat in front. Our ambuscade was most successful; so complete was the surprise that the sailors fled like sheep before their fellow-countrymen, dropping rifles and swords at every step; only about a dozen regained the boats and made their way back to the ships. The attack from the sea fared no better, for, knowing how well our rear was protected, we were able to direct all our attention to the front and our position was impregnable to small arms; we made such good practice with our Martini-Henrys that the boat was soon forced to turn tail.

The fleet had now lost nearly one third of the men it could spare to land and more serious measures were about to be adopted. The vessels were lying in a lump off the west end of the town about a mile and a half from the Consulate. The deepest water and most convenient anchorage is there; but some of the gunboats were of very light draught and these were moved to a position opposite the east fort; others took up an intermediate station and we could see them clear for action. It was well on in the afternoon before the first shot was fired, but soon the engagement became general all along the line, and though the forts did their best to answer, it was soon obvious that raw Chinese militia-men are not the best gunners. If the truth must be told, after a dozen rounds they ran away, and their commandants had no resource but to make their way back to the Consulate as best they might. When the bombardment had lasted an hour, Pakhoi was in a blaze from end to end and the position no longer tenable. The Admiral saw that his moment of victory was at hand and lowered his boats once more.

There was not an instant to lose. We all had ponies except the unfortunate Frenchman; they had been kept ready saddled and bridled ever since the town had declared in our favour. I called my garrison together and begged them to fly while there was time; the country people were favourably disposed and there might possibly be no pursuit. I entrusted Père D. to their care, and told him my pony was at his disposal. I myself would remain at my post and trust to the protection of my flag. They all went except my constable, who declined to budge if I did not, as the flag would protect him as well as it would me.

The Consulate had in some wonderful manner escaped the general ruin; not a shot or shell had struck it, nor had it suffered from the flames as had almost every other building in the hapless town; the inhabitants had fled long before. There was nothing to be done but to await our

fate philosophically. I sat down and took up a book; the constable, at my recommendation, took another: and so we were found by the landing party. I think they were a little astonished at our coolness, but, being infuriated at the escape of their intended prey, to my protests against having our liberty interfered with, they not unnaturally turned a deaf ear. We had our hands bound behind our backs and were rowed off to the Admiral's ship. With refinement of irony he received us with a salute from his guns. On arrival we found we were not the only prisoners; Captains S. and C. had refused point blank when called upon to fire on the town and had been put in irons. We found them manacled on the deck and exchanged a sorrowful smile with our countrymen. The Admiral had us dragged before him and assailed us with very choice abuse for our audacity in daring to resist his demands. Then he grew sarcastic and alluding to the telegram, asked if we were still proud of being Englishmen. Though a little doubtful on the point myself, I replied undauntedly that I was, for that the act of one insane fanatic could not blot out the heroic record of centuries. 'And if we are to die,' I continued, 'be not so confident that you will escape the summary vengeance of an outraged people. You boast of your assured immunity, but see, (I said pointing to the westward), the avenger is already at hand.' For sure enough, while every eye was rivetted on us, three vessels had appeared at the entrance of the harbour; two were French and the third flew the white ensign of England. The Admiral turned pale, as well he might, for in this land-locked bay he was caught like a rat in a trap. As an earnest of what was coming, a puff of smoke darted from the foremost vessel and a shot flew whistling through the rigging of the Chinese flagship. The Admiral gnashed his teeth and cried, 'With you at least I shall settle accounts. Send aft a firing party.' The order was not very briskly executed, and the Admiral began tapping the deck impatiently with a cane he carried. At the same time I was rudely pushed sideways and, coming against a coil of rope in my bound state, could not keep my balance, but fell heavily on to the deck, while the tapping grew louder and began to resemble knocking at the door.

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Then the familiar voice of my boy sounded in my ears, 'Eight o'clock, master,' and I came to myself to find I had tumbled out of bed and was sitting on the floor rubbing my eyes.

I had been reading in the *Times* the day before an account of the bombardment of Alexandria, and, curious as the fact may seem to the student of Natural History, there is no doubt that lobsters are often the parents of nightmare.

G. M. H. Playfair.