



太平天国

TI-PING TIEN-KWOH;

THE HISTORY OF

THE TI-PING REVOLUTION,

INCLUDING

*A Narrative of the Author's Personal Adventures.*

BY

利

LIN - LE.

FORMERLY HONORARY OFFICER, CHUNG-WANG'S GUARDS; SPECIAL AGENT OF THE TI-PING  
GENERAL-IN-CHIEF; AND LATE COMMANDER OF THE "LOYAL AND FAITHFUL  
AUXILIARY LEGION."

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THE route by which I returned to the broad expanse of "The Son of the Sea" was, if possible, more infested with so-called custom-houses than that by which I had reached Sin-ya-meu. Every two or three *le* some wretched little bamboo-hut would make its appearance round a bend of the creek, with a long pole and a dirty white rag on the end, containing huge red and black characters, setting forth the official nature of the den. Then sundry opium-stupified, villanous-looking mandarin soldiers would rush from their pipes and gambling, catch up their rusty gingalls and long bamboo spears, and loudly call upon my Chinese captain to "soong mow" (let go the anchor), and pay a duty, or squeeze, into their dirty hands. Upon such occasions P—— and myself would be compelled to get on deck with our fowling-pieces, and drive the harpies off, when they would sullenly retire to their opium and cards, muttering curses upon the *Yang-quitzo*, and trusting for better prey next time.

This sort of thing may seem very like smuggling, but it was really far from being so. The duty upon my cargo was levied at Sin-ya-meu, previous to embarkation, and was paid to the customs officials; and from that town to

Kwa-chow the fifteen to twenty custom stations were every one of them charging in excess of the legal duty. Chinese have frequently informed me that the governor of a province lets these squeeze stations out to subordinate mandarins, who then farm them at discretion. The mandarins have *braves* enough to enforce their extortion; all passing junks are stopped until payment is made; and if the aggrieved people should complain, their petition goes before the governor who thrives upon the system. This is one of the many forms of Government corruption throughout China; to many the extortionate régime of the Manchoo must appear incredible, though it is a fact pretty widely known, even by those who are striving to uphold it.

Although during our dinner a couple of *braves* succeeded in getting on board from a squeeze barrier, which led to their tailor becoming acquainted with our shoemaker during the process of summary ejection, myself and friend reached the great river without further mishap than an occasional exposure to the ill-aimed gingall balls of some of the baffled plunderers. At Kwa-chow, the entrance to the Grand Canal on the northern bank of the Yang-tze, we passed through a large fleet of Imperialist *Ti-mungs*, row-gunboats, and a big customs station; the officials evidently wished to squeeze us, but, I imagine, the vicinity of the treaty port Chin-kiang deterred them. Shooting into the yellow waters once more, a fair wind carried us bravely over the strong adverse current.

Winter having now set in, and the north-east monsoon commenced to blow up the whole length of the Yang-tze-kiang, thus enabling vessels to sail against the tide very well, we made considerable progress on our way to Nankin before anchoring for the night. At daylight we were underweigh and sailing merrily along, myself and P—— keeping regular watch and watch—a course rendered necessary by the danger apprehended from the numerous Imperialist gunboats and fortified positions in the neighbourhood of Ti-pingdom.

Till noon we carried the breeze, but the day becoming hot the wind fell, and so we were obliged to run close to the bank, land our crew with a mast-head rope, and slowly track up stream. Just before dusk a light breeze sprang up again, and getting the men on board we made sail to round the "Mud Fort," situated on the extreme point of the elbow formed by the river at Nin-gan-shan. This fort, upon my passage down from Nankin, was held by the Ti-pings; upon this occasion, to my sorrow, I found the Imperialists in possession; its former garrison having betrayed their charge, and sold it to the enemy.

We had barely rounded the point, making almost imperceptible headway, when the wind failed, and the tide, at this point very strong, began to carry us down stream. At this moment, five gunboats put off from the shore and pulled directly towards my vessel. Upon nearing her, they hailed and ordered us to anchor. I now perceived that they were Imperialists, and, from the flags displayed, that they were of the squeezing, or custom-house genus. P—— and myself immediately armed ourselves, and ordered the *lowder* to hold on his course. The tide was fast drifting our vessel in to the bank, right under the guns of the fort, and directly the men in the gunboats perceived this, and saw only two foreigners on board, and that we mounted no guns, they surrounded us and opened fire.

Our position was now decidedly unpleasant. We had drifted to within a few yards of the bank, the guns in the fort were manned, several more boats were putting off, filled with men, and the shore was lined with soldiers, placing their gingalls and matchlocks, and making ready to fire upon us. I well knew the unscrupulous nature of these plundering Imperialists, that our duty-receipts from Sin-ya-meu would not be regarded, and that they would most willingly cut our throats for the value of five dollars. With the force opposed to us, and no chance to make even a running fight, it would have been madness to have

returned the gunboats' fire with our rifles and fowling-pieces; we therefore took it like lambs, and devoutly wished for a sudden puff of wind to waft us from our perilous situation. Not a breath, not the very gentlest zephyr came, excepting the wind caused by the shots that were flying all around, some of which, better aimed than the majority, were smashing into our poor old vessel, quite regardless of the consequences. The men on shore and the guns of the fort now opened fire; while the gunboats, finding we did not seem inclined to fight, appeared to be getting ready to board.

At this critical juncture a fortunate thought came into my head. I had my old uniform on board, and the idea formed was to use it to personate a foreign official, and so endeavour to save our heads by giving the implacable Chinese an impression as to our importance, and a dread of the consequences in case of molestation. Jumping into the cabin, I quickly reappeared with uniform and sword. My friend P—— also had some uniform he had worn in the Indian navy, so following my example, he dived into his chest and then rushed on deck gorgeous in brass-bound array. We were not a moment too soon with our device, for P—— had just got on deck when one of our Chinese sailors was knocked over by a shot, and the rest, taking fright, suddenly let go the anchor, and casting adrift the halyards of the sails, let them go by the run; after which they ran and hid themselves down below. I now hailed the nearest gunboat to come alongside, telling my interpreter to state that we were foreign officers, or mandarins, that we were followed by a man-of-war, and that we were sailing about in the junk for pleasure.

When the *braves* observed our uniform, and were invited to board, their hitherto noisy courage seemed to vanish, and they would not come. However, they ceased blazing their confounded guns at us, much to our satisfaction, for although Chinese shot, with a tremendous whistling by reason of its uneven casting, makes much more

noise than effect, and generally performs parabolas of singular eccentricity, some strike the object, especially when fired at a distance of only a few yards.

Our vessel was anchored within 30 feet of the bank, we were therefore completely in the power of the imps, who mustered at least 600 strong at that place. I again hailed the gunboat containing the man I imagined to be the principal officer, to come alongside, and let me know what they wanted; but the fellows seemed suspicious of some trap, and continued to lay on their oars, all talking and yelling together at the top of their individual voices, each trying to make himself heard above every one else, in approved Chinese style.

At last the mandarin in charge of the fort made his appearance on the bank, and after his attendants had shouted themselves hoarse, trying to make his orders heard above the din, the jabbering in the gunboats ceased, and the one I had hailed proceeded very slowly and cautiously to come alongside. She contained a couple of officers, whom we got on board, showing them our revolvers, and politely informing them, in pure mandarin dialect, that if their men followed them, we should be under the painful necessity of depositing a bullet or two in their yellow carcasses. This had the desired effect, and the fierce-looking *braves* were ordered to remain in their boats, much to their disgust, for their fingers, no doubt, were itching to handle the valuables of the "foreign devils."

When we had seated the two officials in our cabin, an old number of the *Hong-Kong Daily Press* was produced as our commission in the service of His Majesty the Emperor of America, while a Manchester rug, of the stars and stripes pattern, was displayed as our banner. To all this the Chinamen "chin-chin'd" with the greatest respect, but they still referred to the fact that our vessel carried a cargo, and declared their chief's intention to squeeze a certain amount of dollars out of us. The duty-passes we had received at Sin-ya-meu were then produced

and the officers took them ashore to their superior. They soon returned, and requested me to accompany them to an interview with the head mandarin, stating that he was determined to have some money, which he chose to term "duty," for conscience' sake, I suppose, although it was certainly a most unmitigated attempt at robbery.

Before landing, I made my conductors fully understand that, upon the slightest attempt at treachery I should shoot *them*. I took my revolver with me, and proceeded to the mandarin's presence, leaving P——on board, to preserve our effects from the plundering propensities of the villanous mob into whose clutches we had fallen.

My interpreter A-ling, our cook, Ganymede, and the *lowder*, accompanied me on shore as a retinue of state, somewhat suitable for the dignity of representatives of our supposed emperor. The *Daily Press* was carefully carried in an old glove-box by A-ling, while the cook was deputed to carry our cards (in the shape of two labels from bottles of Bass's pale ale) to the mandarin; the boy carried presents, consisting of a couple of empty eau-de-cologne bottles, an *Illustrated London News*, and a box of damaged percussion caps; the *lowder* brought up the rear with our (Manchester) banner streaming from a tall bamboo. Although the soldiers crowded round us they did not offer much annoyance; probably they were awed by our stately bearing and procession. We reached the Yamun (official residence), the pale-ale labels were duly delivered, and then we were ushered into the august presence of the cruel, sensual, dirty-looking mandarin, my followers imposingly taking up their position behind me. The *Daily Press* was displayed by A-ling, who, clever fellow that he was, to show its importance, bent on one knee while presenting it.

The display of the newspaper, the presents, and our uniform, seemed to make a decided impression upon the mandarin, and we should probably have been set free but for a *mal-à-propos* circumstance that now occurred. I



had sent the *lowder* down to the beach, loudly ordering him to look out for the imaginary man-of-war steamer I gave our captors to understand was following me, and to report her approach whenever she came in sight. This had considerably subdued the mandarin's arrogant tone, for he was evidently not well up in foreign affairs, and provincial Chinese have a wonderful idea of the "fiery dragon ships" of the "foreign devils." *He* was just commencing a set apology for the mistake committed by his "ignorant *braves*," when in came our pig-headed *lowder*, or rather, into the apartment he was kicked by a couple of soldiers holding on to his tail, and most unmercifully thumping, kicking, and bumping him along from behind.

It appeared that the wretch had got into conversation with some of the *braves* on the beach; they had asked him where our vessel was bound, and he naïvely told them to Nankin, *the rebel capital*! They instantly seized and dragged him before the mandarin. The long-winded apology came to an abrupt termination, and the orator turned his attention to examining the miserable *lowder* as to our connection with the Ti-pings. The stupid captain of our sailors now declared that he only *thought* we were going to touch at Nankin *en route*, to make some demand upon the rebels with regard to the seizure of some foreign-owned junks. The mandarin at last ordered him to be taken into the fort, and dismissed us with an intimation that we must wait till the next morning to have a duty levied upon our cargo, and to adjust the whole affair.

The *Daily Press* was ceremoniously returned to the glove-box, the stars and stripes were rolled up, and we were escorted back to our vessel by the two officers. Upon getting on board, I found P—— all safe, and promenading the deck like a moving armory, with a rifle over his shoulder, a revolver and brace of horse-pistols in his belt, and a sword by his side; while four gunboats were chained fast alongside, the crews of which, with their

heads poked over our bulwarks, were viciously eyeing the Cerberus who prevented them from indulging their natural propensities.

I found our vessel thoroughly secured by the imps, who had taken every precaution to guard against a *coup-de-main* upon our part. Chains were rove through each ring-bolt on our deck and fastened on board the gunboats, two of them being lashed on each side, full of armed men watchful and on the alert. A long chain was passed from our bows to the shore, and a number of matchlock men were encamped for the night right abreast. Even had it been possible to strike a sudden blow and release ourselves, as it was a dead calm they could have pulled after our vessel and blown her to pieces, if they could not have mustered courage to board us. There was nothing to do but to trust to the chapter of accidents for a way out of the difficulty, and, if necessary, to sell our lives dearly.

It was a matter of considerable surprise to myself and friend that the Imperialists did not behave worse to us, for they neither yelled "Yang-quitzo," threw stones, nor seemed so anxious to attack us as the generality of Manchoo troops would have been. This we afterwards accounted for by the fact that they had formerly been Ti-pings, and had not quite forgotten that they had once been worshippers of Yesu, and had looked upon strangers from the West as "foreign brethren." Their chief had turned traitor to the Ti-ping cause, and betrayed the "Mud Fort" to the Manchoo, in consideration of retaining his own followers, receiving *carte blanche* to squeeze all passing vessels, and being decorated with a mandarin button and feathers. They were a savage-looking set, these "Mud Fort" banditti, yet, bad as they seemed to be, were much better than the usual style of Imperialists; had we fallen into the hands of the latter we should have been treated with much indignity and violence, if not killed.

We were aroused in the middle of the night by a

tremendous hubbub, and, running on deck, found it was the Mud Fort people engaged seizing another unfortunate European vessel. Getting into our boat, I went on board, and found she was a *Ningpo Boat*, from Shanghae to Hankow, and that the only foreigner on board was an Englishman, to whom she belonged. The soldiers hauled his vessel close in to the bank a little below mine, and there made her fast in a similar manner. After talking over our mutual misfortune, we agreed that in the morning I should land, and endeavour to obtain our release; failing which, I was to get on board his craft with P——; we were then to man her guns (she carried two six-pounders), try to force both vessels adrift, and make a fight to escape.

After a not particularly refreshing sleep, I again went on board the *Ningpo Boat*, to settle our plan for the last time, preparatory to putting it into execution. Upon returning to my own vessel, we carefully loaded all our firearms; I then concealed my own revolver and a long bowie knife under my uniform, took A-ling and our cook with me; the one carrying the *Daily Press*, and the other two more pale-ale labels; and proceeded on shore.

The imps had at daylight cast off the chains wherewith they secured our vessel for the night; leaving, however, a couple of thick ropes fastening her to the bank by head and stern; these P—— had prepared an axe to cut in case of emergency. Our cabin was formed by a half-raised deck-house aft, on the top of this a few bags of charcoal were placed, so as to form a sort of fortlet, inside which the arms, with a good supply of ammunition, were hidden; the ropes were laid ready, fore and aft, to make sail, and the *Ningpo Boat* was hauled quite close to the bank, so as to enable me to get on board her in event of hostilities, while P—— could pull to her in our boat.

As I walked away from the bank, and observed P—— ensconce himself among the bags of charcoal, my feelings were not of the most pleasant description. However,