

Government of Japan.

Engineer's Office.

Yokohama 14<sup>th</sup> November 1874  
3.30 p m

Dear Mr. Hirai

I have finished the first  
Volume of Cliphant's account of  
"Lord Elgin's Mission to China & Japan"  
and have made all the extracts that  
I think will be of any use to you.

I will get the second Volume  
this evening and look it over, and  
glan any information from it,  
that I think you may like to  
possess.

If you have any instructions  
for me please inform me either by  
letter or telegram.

I remain

Yours sincerely  
Robert Sage

These additional demands involved the right for all foreign representatives of free access to the authorities and City of Canton. Hitherto the point at issue had been one simply of principle, and turned upon the right of the Chinese Government to seize a Locha under certain conditions.

It is just possible that even this stubborn functionary may have had his doubts upon the subject, and been disposed to purchase peace and quietness at the price of so immaterial concession. But now any momentary weakness, if it ever existed, was passed for ever. A grave question of policy had been raised - an old and much repeated one, in the successful battling of which his predecessors had covered themselves with glory. Moreover this sudden change of issue rouses the whole suspicious nature of the Chinaman, and he draws an inference somewhat discreditable to us, but not to be wondered at, which he thus expresses in a proclamation issued to the Cantonese: -

"Whereas the English barbarians have commenced disturbances on a false pretence, their real object being admission into the



city, the Governor General, referring to the unanimous expression of objection ~~to~~ to this measure on the part of the entire population of Canton in 1849, has flatly refused to concede this, and is determined not to grant their request, let them carry their feats and machinations to what length they will." Whereupon Yeh entrenches himself behind a triple mail of mandarinic pride, and obstinacy, and retreats into the innermost recesses of his official dignity from which we dug him out some fourteen months after. Mean-while he does not condescend to answer the last letter, so at 1 p.m. his residence is bombarded. The first shot was fired from the 10 inch pivot gun of the "Encounter" and, at intervals of from five to ten minutes the fire was kept up from that gun till sunset. The "Barracotta" at the same time, shelled the troops on the hill behind Couch's Fort, in the rear of the City, from a position she had taken up in rear of Sulphur Creek. Under these circumstances, Yeh offered a reward of thirty dollars for the head of every Englishman.

The afternoon of the following day, from noon to sunset, was occupied in firing at slow fire upon the houses opposite Dutch Gully, the inhabitants having been warned to evacuate them.

The garrison of the Imperial Commissioner was distant about 150 yards from the river bank. By the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> a breach had been effected at this spot, which was visited by the Admiral, with a force of marines and blue-jackets. The Chinese offered some resistance, killing three and wounding eleven of our men. For the three following days desultory firing was kept up on the town, and much of the suburb was destroyed by fire, but not intentionally. On the 1<sup>st</sup> November the Admiral again addresses Peh, who answers, defending himself, without receding. He was nevertheless responded to by the Admiral, and rejoined in a letter "recapitulating his former correspondence."

The Admiral accordingly recommences operations, pulls down some Chinese houses to secure the factory position, and bombards the public buildings steadily, but slowly, for several days consecutively during which

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French Gally is taken, and twenty three war junkets are destroyed by the "Barracouta", with a loss of one killed and four wounded. Another communication is also made to the Commissioner, who seems to gain confidence from the frequency of these missions, for he answers curtly, and enters upon a rigorous course of retaliatory measures. Having neither armies nor fleets to cope with ours, he makes war upon us in a desultory, irregular way, eminently harassing. Our ships in the river narrowly escape destruction from fire-rafts: night attacks are made upon them; passenger steamers are fired upon, and foreign vessels indiscriminately. An incidental result is an insult to the American flag, which is fired on from the Barrier Forts, which have been re-armed. As a measure of retaliation, these are taken and destroyed by Commodore Armstrong of the United States Navy. Here the matter ends. Dr. Parker thinks the insult offered to the flag has been sufficiently avenged, and shortly afterwards resumes correspondence with Yeh. The episode is interesting, as furnishing a contrast between

our policy and that of the United States under somewhat similar circumstances.

Meantime we demolish some of the Bogue Forts, and Howqua and other notables address and are answered by Sir John Bowring and Admiral Seymour. On the 17<sup>th</sup> Sir John arrives at Canton and puts himself in communication with the Imperial Commissioner on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The Admiral (24<sup>th</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> 1856) states that he "opened fire on the Dutch Folly, but ceased at noon to allow time for a reply to a note sent in by Sir John Bowring proposing an interview with the High Commissioner in the City, and his Excellency added, that if it was granted he was prepared to request me to cease hostilities. The reply was received the next day declining the interview." The reward for barbarian heads was now raised from thirty to one hundred taels. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> the French flag was struck at Canton.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> December, French Folly having been reoccupied and strengthened by the Chinese, was retaken, with a loss of two killed and several wounded. On the following day a seaman and marine are cut off.

A few shells are still occasionally thrown into the city, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> the Admiral states that he feels a confident hope that the measures that have been taken will prove successful. The next day Chinese incendiaries burn down the whole of the foreign factories. The Admiral writes (29<sup>th</sup> December 1856); - "The great importance of holding our position at Canton being evident, and the Church and Barracks having been preserved, I determined to entrench a portion of the Factory gardens". On the 17<sup>th</sup> the Admiral commences to entrench himself accordingly, and garrisons the fortified position with a force of three hundred men.

Encouraged by this success, Yeh carries on the war, in his own fashion, with greater vigour than ever. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Mr Cooper is kidnapped from Whampoa. On the 30<sup>th</sup> the "Huttle", postal steamer is seized by the Chinese on board; eleven persons murdered and their heads carried off. The Chinese gentry of the district opposite Hong Kong interdict supplies being furnished to the colony. The Magistrate of another district orders the servants to withdraw from foreign employ. Placards are issued interdicting

made and promising rewards for heads. On the 4<sup>th</sup> January the Chinese attack the ships about Macao Fort in force and sink junks in one of the neighbouring passages; also nearly succeed in blowing up one of our ships with explosive machines. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, our position in the Factory Gardens having been threatened, we burn the suburbs right and left of the Factory site. During this operation a party of the 56<sup>th</sup> approaching the City wall, is repulsed with loss. The Admiral (14<sup>th</sup> January 1857) at once decides upon retreating from his position in the Factory Gardens and Dutch Folly, and falling back upon Bird's nest Fort and Macao Fort applies to his Excellency the Governor-General of India for the assistance of 5000 troops. He subsequently finds himself compelled to abandon Bird's nest Fort (30<sup>th</sup> January 1857) which he had intended to hold as his advanced post, and, withdrawing the garrison ~~from~~ he had placed there, retains only Macao Fort. It was even at one time in contemplation of evacuating the river entirely and this was a course strongly



urged upon the Admiral by his advisers. Fortunately, however, bolder counsels prevailed; and although the Chinese kept up a most pertinacious, and harassing, attack upon our garrison in Macho Fort, commanded then by the gallant, but but lamented Captain Bate, we suffered no further reverses at their hands. Meanwhile an attempt had just been made to poison the whole foreign community in Hong Kong.

From this condensed account, some idea may be formed of the stage which war, and diplomacy, had reached in the South of China at the beginning of February 1857. But little change had taken place in either, up to the time of our arrival there, about four months afterwards. The diplomacy remained in abeyance; the war was apparently being kept up upon very much the same principles on which it had begun. The Chinese continued to kidnap, assassinate, seize steamers, and annoy us in sundry cunningly devised methods. We continued to hunt them down in creeks, burn villages, where outrages had been committed, and otherwise to pay them out to the best of our ability; not, it must be confessed, in a manner to increase their terror for our arms, or their respect for our civilization.

With the exception of the affair in the Fatsan Creek, no fighting of any consequence had occurred.

It was too late then to consider whether the "Arrow" had in the first instance been British or Chinese, or whether the claim for redress, made eight months previously, was just or unjust, nor did it seem to avail now to discuss the wisdom of the policy which had added a second, and infinitely more obnoxious, demand just at the period when it seemed most hopeless that we should obtain even the first. It was small consolation to be told that we ought never to have abandoned the Factory position, and that a little sharp cannonading, instead of a shot every ten minutes, would have soon brought Yeh to his senses. There were professional questions, on which it would have been presumptuous to offer an opinion; but there was one conviction arising out of it all, which irresistibly impressed itself upon the mind of every new-comer, and which, was, - that a continuance of this state of matters would not only injure our Colony, impair our prestige, embarrass us with the neutral powers, and imperil

our commerce at all the other ports of the Empire, but enhance materially the difficulties in the way of any negotiations which might be attempted directly with the Court of Peking. It could hardly be expected, or hoped, that <sup>any</sup> ~~any~~ <sup>we</sup> were waging a successful war with us in the Canton River, we could be treating upon favourable terms in the Peiho.

It so happened that other causes combined to give increased weight to these considerations. — These will come to be noticed in their turn. — At present I have thought it better, at outset, to cast this brief retrospective glance over the events of the half year preceding our arrival in China, partly in the hope that it may enable the reader to form some idea of the actual posture of affairs at that juncture, and partly because it may be presumed that the insight, which a review of these proceedings afforded, both as to the character of the people with whom he was about to deal, and the nature of the difficulties against which he would have to contend, was not lost upon Lord Polgin.

In consequence of the unsatisfactory progress of affairs in the South of China, described in the last chapter, that country was favoured with a larger share of public interest, in England, during the spring of 1857, than had been accorded to it at any period during the last fifteen years. An expeditionary force of 5000 men, with a staff equipment calculated for a much larger army, and in every respect thoroughly complete, was on its way to the theatre of war. Generals, and Officers, of high rank, were leaving town by each successive mail. Not only had England determined to send out a Special High Commissioner, accredited as Ambassador to the Court of Peking, but France, Russia, and America, had each declared their intention of improving the occasion, and despatching Plenipotentiaries Extraordinary to China. Thus everything conspired to induce the belief that the attention of the world was about to be concentrated on the Celestial Empire; and it was not to be wondered at, that, though not present in London drawing rooms (yet did in fact monopolize the honours of the earlier part of the season, or that the prospect of accompanying a special mission to the scene of

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his exploits, and possibly to the throne of his Imperial master, possessed attractions of a novel & striking character.

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On the 21<sup>st</sup> being the day before the expiry of the delay accorded in the ultimatum, a conference was held at Whampoa by the Plenipotentiaries and naval, and military Commanders-in-Chief, relative to the place of attack and the preliminary arrangements.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> it was intimated to Hsin Hieh by the allied Plenipotentiaries that, the delay having expired, they had called upon the naval, and military Commanders, to act, and Lord Elgin stated that, he reserved to himself to make on behalf of the British Government such additional demands as the altered condition of affairs, produced by the Imperial Commissioner's refusal to accede to terms of accommodation, may seem in his eyes to justify. At the same time Hieh also received a summons, from the allied Commanders-in-Chief, stating that it was their intention to attack the town at the expiration of forty-eight hours if it was not surrendered within that time. In a communication addressed in reply to Lord Elgin's

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despatch, the Imperial Commissioner  
referred to the "Arrow" case, and  
adverted at length to the points  
discussed in his former letter,  
without manifesting the slightest  
alteration in his tone; or in the  
sense of his sentiments generally.  
Meanwhile for many days past,  
Mr Parkes had been occupied in  
posting up proclamations, both at  
Dowry, and along the river face  
of the City, at considerable personal  
risk, advising the inhabitants to  
leave the City, during the approaching  
bombardment; but the very indif-  
ference with which they collected  
round the placards, and the  
contempt for them, they occasionally  
manifested, by tearing them down,  
only proved how insensible they  
were to the coming danger, and  
how hopeless it was to expect  
that these warnings would  
produce any effect