

EMPEROR TAO-KWANG AND THE OPIUM WAR.¹

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TAO-KWANG, the second son of emperor Kia-king, was born in 1780. His youth was passed in comparative obscurity, and he was thirty years of age when an event which nearly overthrew his dynasty suddenly brought out some of the eminent qualities with which he was endowed.

The Emperor Kia-king was a weak incapable man, completely governed by those around him. An unworthy favorite reigned in his name. This person, who was named Lin-king, was the chief eunuch of the place. Instances of this kind are not rare in the annals of the court of China. The chief of the eunuchs has always great influence in the intrigues of the palace, and according to the strange ideas of the country, his personal defect is no obstacle to his ambition. The authority of Lin-king was boundless. He disposed of every office. The highest functionaries, the ministers, and even the imperial family, bowed before him. Nor did this lofty position satisfy him. The indirect exercise of power emboldened him to desire the sovereign authority for himself, and he began to open a path to the throne by gaining over the greater part of the military mandarins. This conspiracy was conducted with so much secrecy, that no one at the Court of Peking suspected it in the least.

One day, when the Emperor was hunting with his sons, Lin-king introduced into the capital those troops whose chiefs he knew were entirely devoted to him, and the soldiers were disposed about the environs of the palace. The plan of the first eunuch was to kill the Emperor and the princes of the imperial family, and to have himself immediately proclaimed by the army, whose chiefs he had secured. Towards the evening the Emperor returned to the

¹From the French by John Oxenford.

palace without mistrust, accompanied by his eldest son, and followed by his usual *cortège* of civil and military mandarins. Scarcely was the great portal closed behind him than Lin-king gave the signal to his cohorts, who at once surrounded the palace, and guarded every outlet.

In the hurry of this critical moment, the first eunuch had not observed that the second son of Kia-king was not returned from the chase with his father. When the conspiracy had already broken out, the prince returned to Peking alone. He was in a hunting dress, and wore none of the insignia of royalty; he could therefore traverse the city without being recognised. The greatest agitation already prevailed in the principal quarter, and he only required a moment's reflexion to perceive the cause of the tumult, and to divine the purpose for which the troops had surrounded the palace. By the aid of his plain costume, he passed through the people, who were in an excited and disorderly state, and reached the very focus of rebellion. The first eunuch had left the palace to harangue his partisans, and the prince could now see that the favorite, whose insolence had so often angered him, was at the head of the rebellion. He approached still nearer, unobserved among the throng of troopers, and although he was quite alone among so many enemies he did not for an instant lose his courage or his presence of mind. Tearing off the round buttons which adorned his dress, to use them as bullets, he loaded the fowling-piece which he carried in his belt, and taking a short aim at the chief eunuch, shot him dead on the spot.

The troops were thrown into disorder. The soldiers threw down their arms and fled, and all the partisans of Lin-king dispersed, to escape the chastisement they had deserved. The prince returned triumphant into the imperial residence, the threshold of which had not been profaned by the rebels, and old Kia-king learned his danger and his deliverance at the same time.

Tao-kwang ascended the throne in 1820. According to the usages of the princes of his dynasty, he had married a Tartar woman—a woman with large feet. She did not give birth to any children; but he had a numerous family by his concubines. In China, neither law nor custom makes any difference between the children of a lawful wife and those of a concubine: they have all the same rights; the sterility of the Empress therefore did not at all affect the succession to the throne.

During the earlier part of his reign, Tao-kwang called to the administration of public affairs, those statesmen who, in the eyes

of the people, were faithful guardians of Chinese traditions. Every nation whose history dates from a remote past, has its conservative party; and during tranquil times it is to the representatives of the old national guarantees that the government is naturally entrusted. But when the moment for modifying ancient institutions has inevitably arrived, the exclusive attachment of this party to things of the past becomes really dangerous. This political truth may be perceived as well in the history of Chinese revolution, as in the history of France. The agents of Tao-kwang, thoroughly Chinese in their ideas, and filled with a proud disdain for barbarian nations, involved their country in a disastrous war, because they did not see that the moment was come when they should descend from that diplomatic elevation where their presumption and the endurance of the Europeans had so long maintained them. At a later period, the same spirit of resistance to the exigencies of the time caused the insurrectional movement of which we are about to treat. In fact, the two most important events that were chronicled in the annals of China during the second quarter of the last century—namely, the war with England, and the revolt in the Kwang-si—both proceeded from the same cause.

By virtue of its original charter, the East India Company enjoyed till 1834 the monopoly of the British trade with China. Those merchants who founded, beyond the limits of their own country, the most opulent and extensive empire of modern times, had the sole right of trading in the produce of the Chinese empire. It will easily be understood that when difficulties arose between the Chinese functionaries and the Company's agents, the latter, being exclusively occupied with commercial interests, made but feeble protestations against pretensions which were often exorbitant. The representatives of the Company were, for the most part, clever merchants, and nothing more; and the one among them, who acquired the most celebrity—namely, Sir John Davis—was more distinguished for his literary attainments than for his national susceptibility.

When the Company's charter expired in 1834, the English Government refused to renew their exclusive privileges; and all British merchants had now a right to trade with China. Some years afterwards, the Emperor Tao-kwang resolved to check in his dominions the progress of a custom, which was about a century old—in other words, to prohibit the sale of opium through the whole extent of the Celestial Empire. For this purpose he sent to Canton a man whose services he had already learned to appreciate.

A mandarin of acknowledged integrity and inflexible will, whose severity was somewhat barbarous, came to the capital of the two Kwangs to replace a faithless official, who, in consideration of enormous advantages, had closed his eyes to the illicit traffic of the British merchants and the smugglers.

Every one trembled at the arrival of the new governor, who wore the insignia of the highest dignities, and whose appearance was very imposing. Lin was then about fifty years of age; he wore the red ball, and the peacock's feather with two eyes.¹

Lin's only error was that he did not understand the altered spirit of the time, and consequently did not reckon on the change which had taken place in the character of the foreigners with whom he had to settle such difficult and delicate questions. So long as the mandarins had to deal directly with agents of the East India Company, they could without danger assume a disdainful tone; for such a tone inflicted no deep wound on men devoted solely to their commercial interests. But when Lin came suddenly into contact with the representatives of a government jealous of its dignity, he struck against a rock which he little expected.

As a man of tact, he should have confined himself to the efficacious measures he had already adopted. Thanks to his activity, zeal, and above all to the fear which he inspired, he had given new sinews to the Chinese Government, and the smugglers, constantly chased by the custom-house officers of the Celestial Empire, had nearly abandoned their dangerous trade. But not content with this first success, he wished, by a vigorous act, to strike a blow at the British merchants, and to put out of their heads all thoughts of again introducing the narcotic drug into the Chinese empire.

One night the "hongs," or factories in which the foreigners resided, were surrounded by Chinese troops: and the English, American, and Parsee merchants learned, when they awoke, that they were Lin's prisoners, and that the viceroy of the two Kwangs allowed them three days to give up all the opium they had on board the "receiving ships"; in default whereof, they were to be treated according to the utmost rigor of the new law,—in other words, were to lose their heads.

When Lin struck his decisive blow, there were vessels off the island of Lin-tin loaded with more than 20,000 chests of opium,

¹ The color of the ball worn at the apex of the conical cap serves, in some measure, to mark the rank of the wearer. Red indicates the highest degree of official dignity. The introduction of peacock's feathers, of one, two, or three eyes, and of different colors, to hang from the top of the cap down the back as a sign of various degrees of merit, was an invention of the Tartar dynasty.—J. O.

and representing a value of more than \$10,000,000 (2,000,000*l.*). This glut arose from the efficacious measures which had been pursued by the hoppo (the director-general of the Canton customs), at the instigation of and under the authority of Lin.

In this extremity, the prisoners wrote at once to Captain Elliot, commander of the naval forces of England in the Chinese waters, who then happened to be at Macao. They informed him of the dangers which threatened their lives and fortunes, at the same time soliciting his intervention and assistance. Captain Elliot hastened to his countrymen at once, and after urging them not to yield to the demands of the mandarins, he announced that he purchased the 20,000 chests of opium in the name of her Britannic Majesty; and declared that he would make a political question of what had hitherto been a commercial difficulty. He then ordered Lin to withdraw his troops, and release the Queen's subjects. The viceroy took no heed of this demand. He simply replied, that the severest measures would be taken against the English, unless the whole of the opium on board of their ships was given up.

As Captain Elliot had not sufficient force to resist the Chinese troops, he gave up the prohibited article. Lin caused large pits to be dug, and the opium, covered with quick-lime, was buried in the island of Lin-tin, in the presence of witnesses; after which operation, the foreign merchants detained at Canton were set at liberty.

However, the day of retribution was at hand. In a short time a British fleet sailed up the river of Canton, dismantling the forts, and threatening the banks on each side, and took a strong position on the northern coasts of China, by occupying Chusan. When news of these events was received at Peking, Lin was immediately recalled, and Ki-shan, a member of the imperial family, was appointed by the Emperor to succeed him. Ki-shan was an intelligent and resolute man. He saw at once with what sort of enemies he had to deal, and the danger to which the Government had been exposed by the imprudence of his predecessor. As a skilful diplomatist he did not hesitate to accept the *ultimatum* laid down by the "barbarians"; that is to say, he avoided a disastrous war by accepting hard conditions, such as a heavy indemnity paid to the English, the cession of Hong-kong, and so forth. However, when the treaty was submitted to the Emperor for sanction, the "Son of Heaven" rejected it with indignation. Ki-shan was ignominiously recalled, and underwent the greatest indignity that had ever been inflicted on any high functionary under the reign of Tao-kwang. He was publicly degraded, his property was confiscated,

his concubines were sold, his house was razed to the ground, and, to complete his misfortune, he was exiled to the remotest part of Tartary.

These sudden reverses of fortune are spectacles which the Celestial Emperor often presents to the Chinese people. The lower orders always applaud such catastrophes, which appeal to their gross instincts: and they think that a strong blow is necessarily a just one. Those of our readers who wish to form a better acquaintance with the great mandarin Ki-shan, have only to read the delightful *Travels in Tartary, Thibet, and China* of MM. Huc and Gabet; they will find him at Lassa, on intimate terms with the intrepid travellers.¹

A mandarin named Y-shan succeeded Ki-shan in the government of Canton, and brought back with him the treaty which his predecessor had concluded, torn. Hostilities were renewed at once. Every one knows the result of the English expedition. Ning-po, Shang-hai, Chu-san, Ting-hai, fell successively into the hands of the English, who at last compelled the Chinese to sign at Nankin a treaty, by which they ceded Hong-Kong to the "barbarians"; opened to them four new ports on the northern coast of the empire, granted them the occupation of Chu-san for five years; and, moreover, bound themselves to pay a heavy indemnity.

This treaty was concluded by Ki-in, another member of the royal family. He was the political friend of Mu-chang-ha, the prime minister, and member of the council. These two persons were unquestionably the greatest statesmen during the reign of Tao-kwang.

At all events, the treaty of Nankin was signed and ratified, and Ki-in, who was appointed governor of the two Kwangs, came to occupy the difficult post at Canton. He at once impressed his convictions on the mind of the prime minister, Mu-chang-ha, and through his influence with that high dignitary, though difficulties still sometimes arose between the people of the West and the Chinese, a rupture became almost impossible. We should add that this new policy, this attitude of the progressive conservatives, irritated the population of Canton against them. They were accused of temporising with foreigners, and betraying their sovereign for the advantage of the barbarians. Thousands of placards held up the name of Ki-in as an object of popular hatred and vengeance.

We quote one of these placards literally, to show that injus-

¹ New reprint edition published by The Open Court Pub. Co., 2 vols.

tice, violence, and evil passions, belong to all countries and all races.

“Our cannibal mandarins have hitherto been the accomplices of the English robbers in all the acts that the latter have committed against order and justice. For five years to come our nation will mourn the humiliation it has been forced to undergo.

“In the fifth moon of the present year, many Chinese have been slain by foreigners; their bodies have been flung into the river, and buried in the bellies of fishes; but our high authorities have treated these affairs as though they had never heard of them; they have looked upon these foreign devils as though they were gods; they have despised the Chinese as though they had the flesh of dogs; and have not valued the life of men more than the hair which is shorn from the head. They persist in keeping the throne in ignorance of what is passing, and in neglecting to treat this affair with the importance which it deserves. Thousands of people are filled with grief and anger; sorrow has penetrated the marrow of their bones, and their sole consolation is to express their woes in the public assemblies, etc., etc.”

These absurd accusations had no influence on the political fortunes of Ki-in. The Emperor, satisfied with his services, recalled him to Peking to confer new dignities upon him and to raise him to the highest offices. He became the colleague of Mu-chang-ha. These two statesmen endeavored to effect several reforms. The first was directed to the military department. Ki-in saw clearly that the Chinese soldiers, armed like the Homeric heroes with bows and arrows, or encumbered with old-fashioned matchlocks, could not cope with the European troops, and he endeavored to change this grotesque mode of equipment.

Thus in the last days of the reign of Tao-kwang the Chinese empire was really in the path of progress. Mu-chang-ha and Ki-in gave a powerful impulse to the movement, while the conciliatory spirit of the two ministers improved the relations with foreigners. The English chased the pirates, to the advantage of both nations; and if a suspicious junk made its appearance in the southern waters they ran it down at once. In fact, all was going on for the best, when an unexpected event changed the aspect of affairs, the great Tai-Ping insurrection.