

POSSESSION OF CANTON BY THE BRITISH.

OFFICIAL DESPATCHES.

(Published in the London Gazette Extraordinary of Saturday.)
Admiralty, Oct. 8, 1841.

Duplicates of Despatches, addressed to Commodore Sir J. J. Gordon Bremer, from the late Captain Sir H. Fleming Senhouse, were this day received at this office, of which the following are copies of extracts:—

Heights above Canton, May 29, 1841, continued on board her Majesty's ship *Blenheim*, French River, June 2, 1841.

Sir,—I closed my former with the detail of our proceedings up to the moment the expedition was about to leave Hong Kong for Canton. I have now the gratification to enter upon the details of a succession of operations highly honourable, I trust, to her Majesty's arms, and by which the large and populous city of Canton has been laid in complete submission at the feet of the Queen's forces.

As soon as it was decided that the whole combined force should move up to the attack of Canton, the Major-General and myself were decidedly of opinion that no minor attempts should be made until all was ready for a combined operation, when the whole force should be brought into play, and, having once commenced our measures, to follow them up with vigour and energy until Canton was our own.

I, therefore, instructed Captain Herbert, who had charge of the advanced squadron, that he was to abstain from all hostile movements, until the arrival of the force under the command of the Major-General and myself, excepting such as might be merely defensive.

The surveying vessels, under the command of that able and intelligent officer, Commander Belcher, were sent on, on the 18th, to take up a position about the Sanku flats, to aid in getting the large vessels over the shoals once more, where the *Blenheim* had already four times passed with great good fortune without injury.

It was my intention to take the *Blenheim* within sight, and in as close neighbourhood of the very walls of Canton as possible, to form a good depot for stores, quarters for the sick or wounded, and to form the basis of our defensive operations. I pushed forward there, with every exertion, to prevent any delay of the Conway from the difficulties we might experience.

At twenty minutes past three in the afternoon, the *Blenheim* anchored off Ligen Island, near the Sulphur, and the *Atalanta* was sent back to tow up the Major-General's head-quarter ship. All the Chinese pilots had fled, and we failed in getting one; but on the morning of the 21st, the light breeze being fair, and the tide answering, Captain Belcher felt no hesitation in taking charge of the *Blenheim*; and, although it had been agreed to collect our forces at Wangtong, as another stage on our route, I thought it best to proceed with my own ship, and weighed at half-past seven, some of the transports collecting round me.

At half-past ten we were up to the second bar, where I expected to have found the Chinese bar boats to have buoyed off the channel, but they had all gone. The tide was not more than half expended; Captain Belcher felt confident he could take the ship over the bar after sounding and placing boats, which he did in the most rapid manner, against a tide of great velocity. It was done in a masterly manner, and the *Blenheim* passed the second bar at noon. At two we were up to the first bar. Leaving it on the right, we entered the passage between Danes Island and the main land, continuing our route past French Island, until the fortified heights and walls of Canton were in sight, about eight miles distant; and the ships of the advanced squadron at the Macao Fort were in a direct line about five miles from us. At this position the *Blenheim* was anchored and moored in five fathoms at low water spring tides, where no line of battle ship of any nation had ever been before, and ready to be the rallying point to our coming force.

By the indefatigable attention of Commander Rogers, of the Honourable East India Company's steam vessel *Atalanta*, who for three days was in almost constant motion, under the superintendence of Commander Belcher, on whom no fatigue or trouble seemed to have any other effect than to increase his zeal, all the transports and ships of war were assembled, excepting two of the former; and these having grounded, without hope of getting off immediately, the troops were taken out and distributed in other vessels.

No overt act of hostility had taken place to this moment, except remounting the guns in the Shamien battery; but the Chinese appear to have been perfectly ready for the attack.

All remained quiet in the river until about ten o'clock, p. m., when an attempt was made with fire-rafts to burn the advanced vessels.

This attack not only totally failed, but was followed up by a gallant attack on the Shamien battery, and the silencing of it by the vessels of the squadron under the immediate superintendence of Captain Herbert, of the *Calliope*; and the destruction of a large flotilla of fire-vessels, which the Chinese had been preparing and brought out of the branch of the river which leads north of the town. For the details of this gallant defence and attack, I beg to refer to Captain Herbert's own letter, of which I have the honour to annex a copy. About the same time, though later in the night, the *Alligator* was attacked off Howqua's fort; and to show how necessary it was to have been always on our guard, the fire junks came up with the flood tide in a direction with the merchant vessels at Wampoa, where all seemed to sleep in security.

Captain Kuper's account of his prompt and decisive conduct in repelling the attack, I have also the honour to forward.

To form some idea of the difficulties attending the contemplated attack, I must state that the extensive city of Canton, with a population said to be 1,200,000, defended by a strong inclosing wall of great thickness, extending sometimes to the height of thirty feet, with a body of troops assembled within and without it, amounting, at a medium calculation, to 30 or 40,000 men, rests on low ground, except on the north side, where high conical hills extend up to, and rise also within, the walls commanding the whole city. Its front towards the river has extensive suburbs with narrow irregular streets, rendering it easily defensible and difficult to attack. Being also surrounded by rice cultivation, which is at this time flooded, and only passable by footpaths about one to two feet broad, it is exceedingly difficult of approach and the use of guns, except of the lightest calibre, is impossible. The great object was to gain possession of the heights to the northward of the town wall; and a branch of the river, which ran along the west side of the town to the northward, seemed to offer the means of approaching sufficiently near the line of connecting heights to make them accessible.

Opinions were uncertain as to the feasibility of entering this river and of floating at low water. To determine this I availed myself once more of the zeal and great ability of Commander Belcher, who most handsomely volunteered to explore it with his own boats, assisted with three others from the *Pylades* and *Modeste*, and Algerine, all placed under the command of that gallant and judicious officer, Lieutenant Goldsmith, of the *Druid*, who was attached to the *Blenheim*, in that ship's launch, and who had orders to protect Commander Belcher in his surveying operations.

The Major-General and myself went to Canton to make a reconnaissance and personal inspection on the same day, the 23d. In our progress, we observed a firing and explosion in the direction of Commander Belcher's party; and Commander Belcher's letter, a copy of which I enclose, gives a detail of a gallant and spirited affair which took place in the creek. At eleven o'clock at night Commander Belcher returned with the gratifying intelligence that he had discovered an excellent landing-place on a pier, with water enough for the *Sulphur*, close to it, at low water. The ground directly around it rose in low hills, and a line of hills appeared to continue to the heights near the city, although there might be swampy grounds in the small vallies dividing them.

About the same time other boats returned, with a collection of Chinese craft, sufficient to transport the whole force. I, therefore, at midnight, wrote a note to Sir Hugh, informing him of these favourable circumstances, and asking his opinion as to an immediate landing. The gallant General entered into the suggestion instantly, "to land as soon as possible," for the purpose of preventing any opposition by new defences.

Our united force consisted of the ships and vessels named in the margin,* comprising, in their crews, officers, seamen and marines, inclusive, about 3,200 men; out of which about 1,000 officers, seamen and marines were landed, to serve with the army. The military force under that gallant, distinguished, and experienced officer, Major-General Sir Hugh Gough, consisted of about 2,223, besides the staff of the army and the camp-followers; and the whole force, taken collectively, excepting the transports' crews, including every individual in the fleet, could not have been more than 6,000 persons, of all ages and of all classes.

On the morning of the 24th, orders were given to be ready to land about noon, in two columns, with two days' dressed provisions.

The Major-General commanded the right column. I had intended to have taken the command of my naval brigade in this column, but the Major-General begged I would remain at his side, and feeling it to be only a sacrifice of my own gratification and desire once more to lead my brave fellows, and sensible that nothing could be lost to the public service by transferring the command on this occasion, I resigned it to my gallant and intelligent friend, Captain Bourchier, and joined the General's staff with my own immediate assistants, Commander Belcher, Lieutenant Pitman, and Mr. Norman, mate of the *Royal Navy*.

I left to the judgment of Captain Herbert, of the *Calliope*, to act according to circumstances, in endeavouring to drive the enemy from the French fort, and to endeavour to open the communication with the ships of war to the westward, and with the commanding officer of the left column, stationed at the factories. I beg to inclose a letter I have received from Captain Herbert, detailing the part he took in the affair that followed, when the usual gallantry and zeal were displayed by her Majesty's seamen and Royal Marines.

So effectually and vigorously did Commander Warren execute his instructions, that when the right column passed his station everything had been completed, and all was still. The detail of this gallant affair is annexed, in a copy of his letter, where I regret to observe the loss of men was more than had been ordinary.

The day chosen for the landing happened to be the 24th, the anniversary of our Gracious Queen's birthday. I issued a general order that the salute should be fired, though in the midst of the preparation, and it was done even under the muzzles of the enemy's guns.

The right column, piloted up the creek by Commander Belcher, profiting by the local knowledge he had gained the previous day, arrived safely at its destination as the day closed in.

The General immediately landed with a wing of the 49th, and proceeded to throw out reconnoitering picquets. About nine o'clock, some detached parties of Chinese soldiers came around us with shouts, burning false fires, but they never came to the attack, and contented themselves with cutting off a poor camp-follower, who struggled a little, taking off his hand, and leaving both head and body on the ground. All remained quiet until daylight.

On the morning of the 25th, the troops marched on in extended lines, and a demonstration was made to the right, where the enemy appeared nearest and numerous in the adjoining villages. But they felt no inclination to approach, and the low grounds appearing more swampy and extensive in that direction than to the left, the General drew off to that quarter, and we went most cautiously forward, to allow of the guns keeping up, the dragging being very laborious, the weather sultry, and the swamp between the hills precluding the possibility of getting any but small guns forward.

As we approached the city, four distinct forts were observed outside of the walls, on steep heights, all either square or round in their forms, and entirely enclosed. The city walls were armed with guns and jingals, and the three nearest forts were completely under their fire. The enemy's troops were numerous within and without, but they kept at a distance, and unwilling to close with the troops, although their distant fire was sufficiently exact. After occupying several heights successively on the advance, by many connected movements, the 49th were ordered, with the 37th Native infantry, to occupy a height on the left nearest the outer fort; the 18th and the Royal Marines on the heights opposite the square tower; and the naval brigade to take and occupy a height on the right, in front of the two oblong forts near the north gate. From these the different divisions advanced ultimately to the storming. The Chinese came down in great numbers, crowding the ridges near the forts, but the 49th being a little in advance, pushed on and succeeded in entering both of the forts on the left with the native troops, but the 18th were united with them; the Chinese fled towards the city, and the forts were immediately secured.

At this moment our situation was not the most secure in face of a force which, by all accounts, must have amounted to 40,000 men. We had gained the exterior

* *Blenheim*, *Blonde*, *Sulphur*, *Hyacinth*, *Nimrod*, *Modeste*, *Pylades*, *Cruizer*, *Colombine*, *Algerine*, *Starling*, *Atalanta* and *Nomesis* steamers, forming the Macao fort division.—*Calliope*, *Conway*, *Herald*, *Alligator*; forming the Whampoa division.—*Wellesley* at Wangton, in the *Bocca Tigris*, sent up her marines, and 160 seamen.

forts gallantly, but a warm fire soon came from the town walls, and numerous bodies advanced, drew out, and came under the ridges within pistol shot of our gates. A camp of about four thousand men appeared below; a smaller camp further off. A large body of men approached the villages, commanding our communication with the beach. The skirmishers were, however, soon driven back, and in their retreat drawing our troops after them, they gradually approached their large camp, and circumstances accomplished that, which prudence would hardly at first have undertaken. Our men were warmly fired at from the heights, divided from them by a rice field; two narrow paths only led to it, but the Royal Irish led in the most gallant manner by Captains Grattan and Sergeant on one pathway, the former of whom encouraged his grenadiers amidst a heavy fire, preceding them at some distance; and by Colonel Adams on another pathway to the left. A company of Royal Marines, under Lieutenant Maxwell of the *Druid*, joining the 18th, the Chinese abandoned the height, and began to leave their camp; the troops followed on, a general run took place, and the whole of that Chinese body dispersed, and never assembled again. To the great regret of every one Captain Sergeant was severely wounded, and obeyed orders to lead on to the camp, without acknowledging his wound.

A partial exchange of guns and rockets took place during the afternoon, our guns cannonading the town and burning some houses, but during the night their firing ceased; at daylight no banner was to be seen on the walls, and a very few persons about them.

About ten o'clock a white flag was shown on the walls; an interpreter was sent to inquire what was wanted; to whom the Chinese officer stated, "they would fight no more," and begged to see the General commanding the troops. He was told that when the Chinese General made his appearance, the British commander by land and sea would treat with him, but they would meet no person of inferior rank; and it was arranged that the Chinese general should be under the walls by half-past three, p. m., failing which the fire would recommence. The evening turned out squally, with rain, and no one appeared, but the firing was not renewed, and preparations for an assault were continued during the evening. It would have been easy to have burned the town, and the *Blenheim*'s men brought up 200 carcass rockets that evening. But the general and myself were equally of opinion that such a measure should only be resorted to as a last resource, and that the storming of the walls, and the possession of the heights within, would be a sufficient and unquestionable proof of the city being at our mercy, and a complete security to the positions we had in our actual occupation.

On the morning of the 27th, the preparations were completed for the escalade, the guns in position, and the walls and heights within the city would have been in our possession in two hours, when a dispatch arrived from Captain Elliot, proposing terms of agreement between the Chinese authorities and himself, and proposing a suspension of hostilities until noon of that day.

The terms were in opposition to the opinions of the Major-General and myself, as they left the troops in a precarious position for some days, when the conduct of the Chinese hitherto was considered; with whom delay had always been used to strengthen their defences, the result of which had always been a breach of faith. It gave another fair opening for Chinese treachery to work, and it took away the apparent symbol of capture, which would have been prevented by seeing the British banner floating within the city walls, and those walls lying crumbled before it. The fortified heights in the city once gained, the Chinese troops may have marched out and laid down their arms, and not a British soldier had any occasion to enter the populous part of the town.

That one of the first cities in the Chinese empire, whose population is 1,200,000, defended by 40,000 soldiers, in and without the walls, whose defences had been now a whole year in preparation; strong in its natural position, and approachable only by an intricate and uncertain navigation, near 100 miles inland, should have in three days fallen before a force of not more than 3,500 effective men, soldiers, Royal Marines, and seamen, I trust will be considered a circumstance gratifying and creditable to the national feeling, and to her Majesty's arms.

As soon as I had made my arrangements, I found that a strong demonstration of irregular troops had shown themselves to the northward of our camp; on the 30th, a detachment was sent to drive them off, but the rain pouring down in a deluge in the evening, the Chinese, knowing that our flint muskets would not be available under such a torrent of water, closed in on the troops with their lances, and came to close quarters with them boldly and bravely, which only served to show that such qualities cannot contend against discipline and united strength.

A company of Sepoys of the 37th native infantry separated in the thick heavy rain, under the command of their gallant officer, Captain Hadfield, and as night came on were detained on their way. Being surrounded by a very numerous body of the Chinese lancemen, they with the greatest coolness and devotion of their lives, formed into square and awaited with perfect sang-froid the endeavour to destroy them by the long lance over the charged bayonet. Now and then a musket from the centre was made to discharge its messenger of death with care by two of the officers, but they must have fallen if a company of the *Blenheim*'s Marines, with percussion muskets, and Lieutenant Whiting, of that corps, commanded by Captain Duff, of the 37th native infantry, had not then been sent in quest of them. A musket fired, was happily answered from the square, three cheers were exchanged, the marines coming up, gave their volley—they reloaded and fired once more, and the brave sepoy were liberated. To show the superiority of the percussion muskets, these had been loaded since the 24th, a period of six days, yet only two missed fire; on the contrary, all the flint muskets were rendered useless by the torrent of rain that fell.

At noon, on the 1st of June, the troops left the forts that had been occupied, and proceeded to the village of Tsipoo, in the most admirable order. I attended the General with the rearguard; no armed enemy appeared; the unarmed people were friendly and useful; hundreds of them assisting in dragging the guns through the difficult grounds, and carrying the materials and baggage. A sufficient number of Chinese boats had been procured to embark the whole body, and about five o'clock we left the landing place, not leaving a musket cartridge behind: at half-past eight the whole force, soldiers and seamen, were safely on board their respective ships, without a single casualty occurring to disturb the successful termination of an expedition, promptly undertaken, I trustably executed, and happily terminated, with the exception of a few brave spirits who had fallen, and a few more who must still suffer some time from their wounds. A return of the killed and wounded is here added, and

although it may appear strange to see the wounded of the Army and Navy in the report, yet the two corps had been so entirely mingled together, their services so blended, and such intimate harmony has existed that it would be difficult to make any separation between the acts of either, or the circumstances that concerned them.

Commanders Belcher and Warren have only continued on that path of able and judicious service on which they have so long travelled. Their own services will always attract attention. Of the Lieutenants, Lieut. Joseph Pearce, Lieut. Goldsmith, Lieut. Watson, Sir Frederick Nicholson, Lieut. Morshead, first of their respective vessels, may perhaps be named without injury to all others who well played their parts. To Lieut. Kellet of the *Starling*, I am much obliged, and Lieut. Mason, of the *Algerine*, has won his promotion by a long series of gallant and brave services. I beg to acknowledge the zeal and assistance I have had from every captain and officer of the squadron, whom I have had the happiness to command. To my friend captain Bouechier, united in feeling by a long course of service, and of personal knowledge, it has been a delight to me to have been associated with him in this last turning over of the page of life. To do duty with such a person is a gratification, and to know how to win the regard of a superior officer when serving as a junior, is a certain proof of undoubted ability to command. When the gallant naval battalion were being led under his guidance, to the storming of the two western forts, which were not more gallantly carried than firmly maintained under the very heavy galling fire, no one who witnessed their conduct will again be inclined to say, that the sailor could not perform the useful duties of the soldier, as well as the less restricted duties of his own profession. The Commander of the Forces having been desirous that an officer should carry his despatches to the Governor-General in India, and conceiving it to be of sufficient importance that our success should be known in England as soon as possible, I have directed Commander Barlow to take charge of copies of my letters to you; and to proceed overland with them, after arriving at Calcutta, without loss of time. I have appointed Lieut. Joseph Pearce, whose services and character I need not repeat to you, to command the *Nimrod* until your pleasure is known, filling the vacancy by —, an old mate of the station, highly spoken of by the Captain of her Majesty's ship —; all of which I trust will meet your approbation. I could not have selected a more intelligent officer, or one more fit to give every information on the local concerns of this country than Commander Barlow.

I have now only to recommend, and to request you will bring before the notice of their Lordships of the Admiralty, my present staff on the day of action; Commander Belcher, of her Majesty's ship *Sulphur*, and Lieut. J. C. Pitman, of her Majesty's ship *Druid*, whom Captain Smith was kind enough to lend me to assist in the arduous duties of Commander-in-Chief, which I have had to perform as senior officer in very extensive operations, without any other aid or assistance of a Commander-in-Chief's staff. I have, &c.

H. LE FLEMING SENHOUSE, Captain.

SHIPS OF THE LINE.—A first-rate man-of-war (such as the *Trafalgar*) requires about 60,000 cubic feet of timber, and uses 180,000 lb. of rough hemp in the cordage and sails for it. The ground on which the timber of a 74 gun ship (little more than half the size of the *Trafalgar*) would require to grow would be 14 acres. It requires 3,000 loads of timber, each load containing 50 cubic feet. 1500 well grown trees, of two loads, will cover 14 acres, at twenty feet asunder; 3,000 loads of rough oak, at 2s. per foot, or £5 per load, will cost £15,000. If all these calculations were doubled, they would be little beyond those that would apply to the splendid ship *Trafalgar*. This will give some little idea of those gigantic and magnificent vessels.

POETRY.

WILKIE.

Another master spirit is at rest;
With the immortal great gone up from strife;
One of the mighty few whom genius blest,
Hallowing in death whom she had crown'd in life!

Wilkie, the poet-painter of the poor,
Is gathered to the grave with honored name;
To dwell in the world's memory evermore,
And shine, beyond the tomb, a star of fame.

His was a simple path—but still in sooth
Most pure and very beautiful to tread;
His mistress nature, and his motto truth,
They twined the laurels that adorned his head.

He did not soar unto those lofty hills
Where wild imagination whirls the brain;
But took his way among life's lonelier hills,
And camped his mind upon an humbler plain.

Like Burns, he took the cottage for his home,
A village was the city of his heart;
From rural scenes he did not seek to roam,
Who to such scenes could so much charm impart.

Yet when the humble took their part in war,
And earned their share of glory with the great,
'Twas Wilkie's pride to spread their fame afar—
What prowess would his pencil then relate?

Who has not seen his Chelsea warriors glow
Over the bright gazette of Waterloo?
Or Saragossa's maid avenge her woe
In war as wild—as in devotion true?

Or turn from these to the domestic cot,
The joys or troubles of more quiet spheres?
When shall those speaking pictures be forgot,
That move to mirth or sympathise to tears?

The Blind Man's Buff—the merry round of fun
That stirred hilarious laughter, frolic fraught;
Or when sad poverty's last sand was run,
The weeping misery that its Rent-day brought!

The Penny Wedding—what a wedding ring!
He gathered round their merriment to make:
Another village droll—the English king,
Burning his fingers with the Neatherd's cake.

Nay, all familiar, fond and household forms,
Grew on his canvas into friends we knew:
The heart was what he painted in its storms,
Calms, hopes, and pleasures, palpable and true.

The heart he shrined as nature's gem of truth,
It sat on all—he drew as on a throne;
And thus do reverend age and smiling youth
Find echoes of his feeling in their own.

They find life's very characters alive,
Glowing before them like the light above,
As in their hearts the painter's name they live,
Identified with truth and human love.

And long as truth and human love shall last,
And glory lend to crown an honoured name,
Shall Wilkie's works shed upward from the past
The light of genius from the shrine of fame.

F. W. N. BAYLEY.

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