

EXPEDITION AGAINST THE CHINESE PIRATES.

(From the Overland China Mail of Nov. 20.)

On the morning of Monday the 8th October, H.M. brig *Columbine*, and steamer *Fury*, with the H. C. steamer *Phlegethon*, left Hongkong in search of the piratical fleet commanded by the notorious Shapng-tsai. That same evening the expedition anchored under Mong-chow, where Mr. Caldwell boarded a large trading junk beating up the coast, from which he ascertained that she had been released from the pirates at a place near Teen-pak, they having stripped her crew of every article of value; the junk was bare of every thing but her cargo of salt. The crew stated that the fleet consisted of upwards of forty large junks armed for fighting. Having procured pilots for the ships, the next day they reached Hoi-how, the principal seaport of the island of Hainan; where Captain Hay and several other officers, with Mr. Caldwell, visited Wong, the mandarin in command, who stated that the pirates had, only a few days previous, attacked the town of Pak-hoi, where they had committed great devastations, and that they had since gone to a place called Chook-shan. He conducted the party to the city of King-chow-foo, where the commander-in-chief resided, and there it was arranged that Wong should accompany the expedition, he being well acquainted with the coast. The behaviour of the mandarins was courteous in the extreme, and they appeared highly delighted at the prospect of the extirpation of the pirate fleet. The visit having ended, the next day Wong was received on board the *Fury*. On the evening of the 15th, the ships were at Wei-chow, where it was ascertained that the fleet had left for Chook-shan five days previous, for the purpose of scrubbing the boats' bottoms. On the 16th, the expedition arrived off the latter place, and were informed that the pirates had proceeded farther down the coast to a place called Oo-nong, in Cochin China. Here were manifest proofs of the outrages committed by these vagabonds, a considerable portion of the town being in ruins from the attack which had been made on it by the pirates, they having likewise killed a number of the inhabitants and carried away many of their women. The people surrounded Wong and Mr. Caldwell, who had gone on shore for information, and on their knees, with tears, begged them to pursue the marauders and release their relations. On the afternoon of the 18th, the vessels arrived at the island of Kow-tow-shan, a favourite resort of Shapng-tsai, near which place one of his scout boats was fallen in with, and burnt. On the afternoon of the 19th, the expedition reached On-nong, where the inhabitants were so much in dread of the pirates, that it was with the utmost difficulty they could be brought within talking distance. At last, however, they stated that the pirate fleet was then blockading a town called Cho-kum, at a few miles distance, and that their intention was the next day to attack Fa-foong, another town in the same vicinity. Early on the morning of the 20th, as Captain Hay was about to proceed in the direction pointed out, a large fleet of junks was observed under the land, and apparently standing out, which they continued to do until their hulls became quite visible, when upwards of 60 sail were counted from the ships' decks. Shortly after, they were observed to alter their course and stand in for the shore. The men-of-war immediately got under weigh; but owing to the want of pilots to take them into the river, at the entrance of which there is a formidable bar, they did not get within range until about half-past four that afternoon, when a number of large junks, anchored at the entrance, opened a fire upon them, which was instantly returned by the ships; the conflict then became general for about half an hour, when a rocket from the *Phlegethon* blew up one of the largest junks, afterwards ascertained to have been Shapng-tsai's own, and which set fire to two or three others near her. Shortly after dark, twenty-seven of the largest junks were in a blaze, the explosions of powder and of the loaded guns, which went off as they became heated, added to the grandeur of the scene. The next day the work of destruction was resumed, and before night 24 more of the fleet were destroyed, the men who escaped on shore being hunted down by the Cochin Chinese, who lined the shore, armed with spears and spikes, and spared none. On the 22nd, six more junks were destroyed, these being the last remaining in the river. Shapng-tsai is said to have escaped through a shallow and narrow passage with six of his

vessels. On the 23rd, the ships put to sea, and arrived at Hoi-how on the night of the 24th, from which place, in consequence of a gale of wind, they did not get under weigh again until the morning of the 26th; and, after having experienced considerable delay and difficulty in crossing the bars, the expedition arrived safely at Hongkong, on Thursday the 1st of November. During the whole of the operations, the H. C. steamer *Phlegethon* was of the greatest service, owing to her exceeding light draught of water.

The prisoners stated that Shapng-tsai made his escape in a pull-away boat, soon after the firing commenced, and before his own vessel blew up. A couple of hours earlier he sent away his women and treasure in two fast boats. The statements as to the amount of specie do not agree. Some of the prisoners mention 30 boxes, each containing 3,000 dollars, others speak of only eight boxes, and again it is reported that it was in value 8,000 dollars. It is quite possible that, although there were 30 boxes, or even more, some of the prisoners only saw a few of them. From the description of the boxes, the quantity of dollars in each, and the fact that they had rope handles, it is probable that they were taken out of the unfortunate *Sylph*. It is known for certain that Shapng-tsai, with nearly the whole of his

fleet, was cruising off the east coast of Hainan in the latter end of June, and in July and August. During that time he visited the Tiger Islands frequently, and twice he went to Tien-pahk to dispose of his plunder and refit and provision his fleet. Tien-pahk was his head-quarters; there he trafficked away his spoil, there he obtained abundant supplies, and the crews had their carousal ashore after every expedition. The mandarins were either bribed to silence or intimidated—or both. When Captain Lockyer visited the port in search of the *Sylph* and requested to see the mandarins, he was told they were absent, from which it may be surmised that Shapng-tsai did not altogether put faith in them, though he must have enriched the town by the infamous trade of which he made it the seat, and the money spent by his people or laid out in the purchase of stores. During the period this miscreant was cruising off the east coast of Hainan, the ship *Greyhound*, from Singapore, with a cargo of Indian produce, disappeared. It is true she may have foundered at sea; but she may have been captured. The betel nut sold at Tien-pahk (or given to the Chinese lady who visited the pirate's haunt with impunity), and afterwards taken to Cumsingmoon, may have been part of the *Greyhound's* cargo. The prisoners assert that no European vessels were captured, though this goes for nothing. Whilst on board an English man-of-war they would not be foolish enough to criminate themselves. They denied being pirates at all. They were all unfortunate fishermen, captured and forced to serve against their will. That a good many women and children were prisoners there appears no doubt; and it is sad to think that not a few of them were lost in the burning junks or killed with the shot. They had no means of escape, and of the numbers carried away from the sacked villages, only eight women and six children were recovered.

The day before the British squadron appeared off the Tonquin river, two fast-boats arrived from Canton, on a mission from the viceroy. They left the provincial city on the 4th of the month, with two small mandarins. Wipoone, the superintendent of police, had instructions from Seu to offer Shapng-tsai the red button if he would give up piracy, and, with his fleet, accept a command in the government service. The appearance of the foreign vessels next morning made it appear to Shapng-tsai that there was some treachery going on. He immediately had Wipoone and his party made prisoners; flogged them, and, it is said, threw overboard the mandarin of the second boat with his hands tied behind him. The crews of both boats were tied, and on board the flag junk when she blew up. Among the prisoners, the general impression is, that Wipoone was killed some way or another; and it is not quite certain that Shapng-tsai escaped himself, though all agree in asserting that he left in a pull-away boat, and that two fast-boats, or mandarin boats, having his household goods on board, were waiting for him outside the bar. If he did escape the grape and other shot which was showering about him in great abundance, he would probably be joined by the six small junks which appear to have got out of the river the same evening; and with that slender force—as he is no longer an object of terror, and has enraged Seu by murdering his envoy—he will most likely fall into the hands of the Chinese, unless he has the sense to avail himself of the monsoon, and run south to Siam, or to some of the Malay settlements on the islands of the Archipelago.