

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY

IN THE INTERIOR OF

CHINA,

AND OF

A VOYAGE TO AND FROM THAT COUNTRY,

IN THE YEARS 1816 AND 1817;

CONTAINING

AN ACCOUNT OF THE MOST INTERESTING TRANSACTIONS

OF

LORD AMHERST'S EMBASSY TO THE COURT OF PEKIN,

AND

OBSERVATIONS ON THE COUNTRIES WHICH IT VISITED.

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ILLUSTRATED BY MAPS AND OTHER ENGRAVINGS.

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1818.

Honourable Mr. Fendal, and Sir William Keir, Bart., commander of the British forces in Java, had not quitted the island, dispatched letters to them, and to the Dutch Governor, Baron Van der Capellan, stating our situation. Mr. Cooke, who carried them on shore, soon returned with intelligence that boats were coming off to take us to Batavia. An aide-de-camp also arrived from the Baron with an invitation to the Ambassador and gentlemen of his suite to his house, and the offer of every supply our necessities might require. The boats arrived at four o'clock, and took the Ambassador and his suite on shore, where carriages waited our arrival to convey us to the house of His Excellency the Dutch Governor, with whom we dined; but through the active kindness of our English friends, did not find it necessary to accept of his proffered services to their full extent.

I have now related all those circumstances of the unfortunate wreck of the *Alceste* of which I was a witness. For the following brief narrative of the occurrences on the island, after the departure of the Ambassador, I am indebted to the Journals kept there by the Hon. Mr. Abbot and Mr. Brown, and to conversations with several other officers of the ship.

After the sailing of the Embassy on the evening of the 19th of February, provisions, baggage, and some water, were landed from the wreck, but the last in such small quantity that the utmost anxiety prevailed respecting the result of efforts then making to form a well at the bottom of the hill. But successive parties having toiled at it all night, Captain Maxwell was, before morning, cheered with the intelligence that water had begun to rise; and on receiving a specimen found it, although slightly brackish, very drinkable.

It becoming generally known at an early hour that water had risen to the height of three feet, a general rush was made to the well, and every thing capable of holding it put into requisition by the thirsty sufferers. They found the supply too small to afford them much relief, but received effectual succour in a heavy fall of rain, the same probably which had reached the barge. Every one being in

consequence much refreshed, set actively to work in carrying the baggage and provisions to the top of the hill, which was three hundred yards from the landing-place, very abrupt in its ascent, and covered with thick and prickly underwood. The party also suffered much from the heat of the sun as the day advanced, and from the bites of musquitoes and of small black flies, which rose in clouds beneath their feet.

Through the example of Captain Maxwell, foremost in every toilsome effort, and the perseverance of his officers and men, every article on shore was removed to the top of the hill during the forenoon. This labour accomplished, the men were mustered in divisions, and addressed by their commander in a few words, pointing out the necessity of subordination, and reminding them, that although a sufficient quantity of provisions had been saved to last them many days, yet as the fate of Lord Amherst and his companions, on whose safety depended their early succour from Batavia, must be uncertain, it was necessary to keep on short allowance; and that, as they were in a situation in which they were liable to the attacks of pirates, their surest defence would be union and discipline. Different parties were then directed to separate duties. Whilst one was employed in tending the landing-place and unlading boats as they arrived from the wreck, another cleared the hill for a regular encampment, freeing its summit from the smaller trees and underwood.

On the morning of the 20th great exhilaration was excited by the discovery that the well would afford a quart of water for each man; but was speedily diminished by the intelligence that the first lieutenant and thirty men had been driven from the wreck by some Malay prows.

It appeared, that whilst all hands on board had been employed in removing stores unto a raft alongside, two Malay boats, full of men, were observed bearing down upon them. The party not being able to muster any other arms than a few handspikes, took to their boats, and making for the shore, were instantly chased by the Malays.

As they approached the island, and were struggling with a baffling current, eight more Malay boats came round a projecting rock, and gave them chase. The Malays were gaining rapidly upon them, when two of the Alceste's boats coming in sight from the landing-place, the pirates relinquished the pursuit and made for the wreck.

On receiving this information Captain Maxwell ordered the drum to beat to arms, and all the weapons which had been saved to be brought together. On examination they were found to consist of a few rusty muskets, some cutlasses, and the officers' swords. A small supply of powder had been procured from the ship, by drawing her guns, but of balls there was scarcely a round. Ingenuity quickly supplied this deficiency in the means of defence. A large number of young, tall, straight and tough trees, which grew around the encampment were immediately felled, and formed into pikes of eight feet in length, having their points hardened by fire; whilst all the pewter and tin vessels were melted into balls. Measures were then taken to guard against surprise. The crown of the hill was surrounded by a strong bulwark formed of the trunks and branches of trees; and picquets were stationed at the well and at the landing-place. The day, consumed on the island in the execution of these necessary measures, was spent by the Malays in plundering the wreck and landing their booty on a rock in its vicinity.

Having lighted fires, the party retired to rest under much anxiety; well knowing the ferocious disposition of the Malays, whose numbers might be readily increased to an overpowering amount.

During the night an alarm was excited through the whole encampment by the challenge of the sentry, who heard something approaching him through the neighbouring thicket. A search being immediately set on foot, the intruder was found to be a large monkey attacking some fowls at the foot of the hill. Other animals more disgusting and noxious than monkeys infested the ground of the encampment: several persons were bitten by scolopendras and scorpions.

Early the next morning two boats, well manned and armed, were

sent off to take possession of the ship, and to obtain if possible more arms and provisions. On approaching they saw two Malay prows leaving, and almost at the same instant observed smoke rising from several parts of her deck, and driving through the ports; and in the next, flames bursting from every quarter. Finding it hopeless to attempt getting on board, the boats returned to the island. The Malays left the wreck as soon as they had set it on fire, and were not again seen during the day.

The day having been spent on shore in strengthening the fence, the party retired within it at night with some confidence; but were again alarmed, and by the same cause, a large monkey. The sentry who guarded one of the approaches to the hill, confident that he saw a Malay, discharged his musket, and roused by its report the little garrison, who turned out under arms. Their confusion was much increased by a shout from the picquet at the landing-place, who, hearing the report of the musket, cheered with the purpose of awing the pirates. These alarms, although absurd when their causes were discovered, kept the party on the alert for the remainder of the night.

Early the next morning a party was again dispatched to the ship, still on fire, and found her copper on the larboard side alone above water, and so hot, that by throwing water upon it they scarcely cooled it sufficiently to permit their getting on board. Here every object declared the skill of the pirates in the business of destruction. The masts were totally consumed, and their iron rings had fallen to the bottom of the wreck. The upper and main decks were destroyed, and the lower deck was covered with charcoal, which yielded to the foot, and probably rested on a half-consumed base. Cases of wine and many other articles in the lower part of the ship had been preserved from the fire by the water which covered them, and had floated up in consequence of the destruction of the decks. After lading the boats with wine, flour, and some arms obtained by diving, the party returned to the shore.

During the absence of the boats, twelve sail of Malay prows



Drawn from sketch by H. Kuper, Esq.

J. Pickering, Sculp.

VIEWS OF THE ILLINOIS RIVER AT PULASKI TREAT.

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came round the south point of the island, and reconnoitred the landing-place; and had not quitted their situation at the close of day. The usual precautions being taken, the party retired early to rest, and passed the night without interruption.

The two following days, during which no prows appeared, were employed in forming another well, and in completing the fortification. The latter had now become a fortress of some security. It consisted of a strong fence six feet broad surrounding the brow of the hill, and was formed of large piles driven into the ground, intertwined with the leafy branches of great trees; and it communicated by two gates commanded by bastions and platforms, with the avenues leading to the wells and landing-place. Thus protected, the party felt themselves a match for a force much more numerous than their own.

Early on the morning of the 26th, two Malay boats having in tow two canoes laden with plunder, being observed off the landing-place, the barge was manned and armed under the command of Lieutenant Hay, and sent after them. They immediately cut away their canoes and made all sail, but were rapidly gained upon by the barge which soon came up with the sternmost. Mr. Hay then made signs for her to shorten sail and come to a parley; and these not being attended to, fired a musket to bring her to, but was instantly answered by a swivel which she mounted in her bows. The barge now endeavouring to run alongside, one of the Malays at each attempt pushed her off with a long pole, whilst his comrades attacked her crew with their spears and swivel. They threw their spears with great deliberation, poising them above their heads and taking a steady aim. A strong side-wind fortunately blowing at the time, drove them in a slanting direction, broke their force, and rendered them untrue to their mark. No person in the barge having a serviceable musket, excepting her commander, he marked the man who managed the swivel, and brought him down by his first shot; and by his next the most active spearman. The sailors not being sufficiently near the pirates to use their cutlasses or boarding-pikes, could only throw

back the spears which fell amongst them. To prevent their escape, they threw the barge's grapnell into the prow, which, to their astonishment, instantly sunk; the grapnell having probably passed through her bottom. Six of her men (of whom there had been ten originally) immediately appeared in the water swimming with great dexterity. Although three of them were severely wounded, they all continued to fight, refusing quarter, and endeavouring to wound the barge's crew with their long spears. At length the three wounded men, being much exhausted, were dragged on board; one of them died in a few minutes, another within an hour, the third survived. Of the others, one swam towards the *Alceste's* gig which was making after the barge, and was taken on board, the remaining two disdaining captivity dived and were seen no more. During the action the other Malay boat although at no great distance from her consort, did not attempt to interfere, but setting every sail made her escape. The barge having returned to the island, the wounded man was immediately dressed and kindly treated. The dead Malay was buried; he had been a very powerful man, and even in death excited admiration by his muscular form and stern countenance. The prisoner was put under the guard of a marine at some distance from the fortification, that in case of his escape he might not be able to carry intelligence of its strength and the numbers of the party to his companions. The sequel proved the propriety of the measure. Having been a few days afterwards employed by his guard to cut wood, he escaped to his companions. None of the barge's crew had been seriously wounded.

Soon after the return of the barge the midshipman at the look-out rock reported that fourteen sail of Malay boats were standing down towards the island from Banca. They soon after anchored between Pulo Leat and a small island, in the very situation which Captain Maxwell had pointed out to Lord Amherst for the anchorage of the prows which, as had been determined upon between them, should be sent for the relief of the party from Batavia. The

hopes of all raised by this circumstance, were further excited by several men leaving their boats and wading towards the shore, the foremost of the party bearing in his hand a small flag. Mr. Sykes, an officer of the *Alceste*, accompanied by two others, having in his hand the English colours, walked out to meet them; and as he advanced laid down his arms and held up his hands, to show that he was offenceless: on seeing this the Malays threw aside their spears. He then made signs that not more than three of them should come forward, which being complied with, the two parties soon met. The Malays immediately payed Mr. Sykes every mark of humility and respect, and were led by him to the Captain, who anxiously waited their arrival at the landing-place. Through the medium of a sailor who spoke a little Malayse, he learnt that they were not from Batavia, and that they had come to Pulo Leat, to gather sea-slugs and sea-weed. Their spokesman, whom they called their rajah, was extremely solicitous that the Captain should visit him on board his prow. This proposition was urgently opposed by Captain Maxwell's officers and men, who felt but too well that their own safety depended upon his. Having continued on the wreck whilst his presence could animate or direct the exertions of his men, he left it but to assume a more painful situation on shore. Amidst a variety of dangers constantly pressing him, from the time that the Embassy left Pulo Leat to his removal from it, he cheered, restrained, armed, and protected his men by his counsel and example, and so convinced them of the value of his existence, that they watched him as the guardian star which alone could lead them to safety. Several officers accepted the invitation, and accompanied by a force sufficient for their security against any perfidious attempt, visited the prow; and having met with hospitable treatment, returned in the evening with a present of fish and Indian corn for the Captain.

Early the next morning these amicably disposed Malays were seen actively plundering the wreck, in which friendly office they were

soon after joined by several of the pirates with whom they had disclaimed all connection.

The pirates probably came from all the different islands in the neighbourhood, as they bore down upon the wreck in every direction. During high water their detachments occasionally anchored as close as possible to the landing-place, with the apparent intention of reconnoitring, and of intercepting any boat that might attempt to leave it. With the first purpose also they communicated with the party under different pretences, and once received a letter which they engaged to send immediately to Minto, an European settlement on Banca. When the tide ebbed they got under sail from the apprehension of grounding, and re-visited the wreck, but re-appeared off the landing-place at the next flood-tide.

The danger of the shipwrecked band became hourly more pressing; their enemies increased in number, and the period allowed for the arrival of intelligence from Batavia had elapsed. The sea could be distinctly seen for several miles from a tall tree on the most commanding part of the hill. How anxiously did one or other watch from its extreme height the approach of any vessel! In vain did his companions enquire what he saw; "Nothing," was the usual answer; or if for a moment he beheld an uncertain point in the distance, it either expanded into cloud or vanished into air.

It being now the 1st of March, Captain Maxwell looking to the possibility of some fatal accident having befallen the Ambassador and his companions, contemplated an escape with his officers and men in the boats which remained. He therefore ordered them to be properly examined, their oars and sails to be repaired, and every thing to be got ready for cutting through the pirates and making a voyage to Batavia.

The boats not being thought sufficiently secure at the old landing-place against any unexpected attack of the Malays, were removed to one more to the southward, where a sandy beach was

covered and commanded by a precipitous rock. The party could only reach the summit of this by crossing from a lower rock by the trunk of a tree, which they used as a draw-bridge, and could throw down at a moment's warning. It was constantly occupied by a picquet, and from its inaccessibility was called the Gibraltar rock. It communicated with the hill by an irregular avenue cut through the wood.

Very early in the morning of the second of March twenty-nine prows anchored between the two landing-places, and immediately began to load their swivels and to erect platforms on their decks. No doubt being entertained that they meditated an immediate attack, every preparation was made to receive them. The party was mustered under arms, and double guards were placed at the landing-places.

In the evening the same rajah, who had before visited the Captain, came on shore. He still insisted on his friendly views, but accused a part of his companions, to whose prows he pointed, with the intention of attacking the party that night, rendering at the same time his own professions suspicious, by requesting that two of his people might sleep on the hill; a request that was of course refused. His probable object in making it was to ascertain the exact force of the party, of which the Malays had been kept in ignorance, and no doubt believed to be greater than it was. To produce this impression, whenever a conference with the pirates took place, Captain Maxwell so disposed his men, that whilst the usual picquets were visible to the prows, their ambassadors saw people moving about them in every direction, some peeping from behind rocks, and others appearing in different parts of the wood, whilst a body of officers surrounded themselves.

Having dismissed the rajah, Captain Maxwell mustered his force, and ascertained accurately the extent of his means of defence. The party, including servants, consisted of one hundred and ninety men, of whom forty-two were armed with muskets, forty with boarding-pikes,

and twenty with cutlasses; the others with poles, having sharpened pieces of iron or knives fastened to their ends, or having points hardened by fire.

The Malays allowing fifteen men to each prow, which was a moderate calculation, were between four and five hundred in number, armed with spears and crisses. Taking into consideration every circumstance, especially his advantage on the score of fire-arms, the defensible nature of the ground, and the strong position on the hill, Captain Maxwell felt no apprehension of the result of an immediate attack. On the other hand, he could not but reflect, that the number of his enemies would hourly increase, and that whatever loss they might suffer in action they could readily compensate; whilst his own, without relief from Batavia, would be irretrievable. The gloomy anticipations this last view of his situation must have excited he locked in his own breast; and having addressed his men, pointing out in a few words his confidence in their valour, his certainty of their success, the probability of their being attacked that night, and the measures he wished to be taken, dismissed them to their several posts. Those who were not on guard retired to sleep on their arms, and the pirates did not interrupt their repose.

By day-light the next morning the number of prows off the landing-place had increased to forty-five, and were soon after joined by ten more. All possible preparation was made to defeat their attack, but their endless supplies created a cruel anxiety, and the hopes of succour became feeble as its want became greater. Their proverbial treachery forbade any attempt at treating with them, and their force was sufficient, if well exerted, to prevent the arrival of boats coming to the relief of the party, whilst the rocky and shallow nature of the coast would not suffer the approach of a ship within several miles of the island. To conquer or to die was no new or fearful alternative to British sailors; but to die by the hands of savages in a remote corner of the world, whence their fate could never reach the knowledge of their friends, and in a conflict from which their

country could derive no good and themselves no glory, was indeed a bitter thought. In a pensive but determined mood they awaited the moment of attack, their desperate courage receiving a keener edge from the known sanguinary and unappeasable temper of their foes. The day was cloudy with a drizzling rain. Those who occupied the hill, and were not engaged in duty, separated into groups and took refuge in their huts, and discussed the various circumstances of their situation. Whilst anxiously weighing every chance of relief, and endeavouring to open new paths to hope, an officer on the look-out tree called out for a telescope. A feverish expectation agitated all who heard him, but all were silent. They had so often been deluded by a similar demand, that at first no one dared to ask what he expected to discover. At length Captain Maxwell having handed up his glass, ventured to enquire, "Do you see any thing, Sir?" "I think I see a sail," was the cautious answer.—"In what direction?" "To the southward."—"What kind of vessel is she?" "I cannot at present determine."—"How is she steering?" "Apparently N.N.E., but I am not certain." Nearly half an hour then elapsed in consequence of the haziness of the atmosphere before more satisfactory answers could be obtained, although "Well what is she?" was the repeated demand of the impatient expectants. At length the welcome affirmation "She is a square-rigged vessel, steering N.N.E.," soon followed by "She is preparing to anchor, but I am losing sight of her under the south point of the island," diffused a general and a cheering hope. In the next instant it was reported from the landing-place, that the whole Malay force, having seen the vessel, were getting under weigh and endeavouring to effect their retreat. Every one immediately hastened to the shore, and beheld the pirates crowding all sail and standing from the island. In their haste to be off, two of their prows grounded, but got clear before they could be reached by a party of the Alceste's officers and men who, armed with pikes, rushed into the water and swam after them.

A party now went round to the south point of the island, and having obtained a view of the ship, returned with the intelligence that she was at anchor about twelve miles from the island, and had hoisted English colours. As it was possible that she might not have arrived for the purpose of relieving the party on the island, it was necessary, if possible, to communicate with her immediately, to prevent the chance of her getting under weigh during the night. To do this was somewhat difficult, as it was nearly dark, and low water, and a boat might be intercepted by some lurking prows; yet notwithstanding these obstacles, the attempt was made, and happily succeeded. The gig was carried for nearly a mile over the shallows on the shoulders of her crew into deep water, and under the command of Mr. Sykes and Mr. Abbot, dispatched for that purpose. These gentlemen having got round a small island off the west point of Pulo Leat before dark, obtained sight of the vessel, and having taken her bearings, made the most of a favourable breeze, and reached her about nine o'clock. On mounting her deck, they encountered in Mr. Ellis a sufficient explanation of the occasion of her arrival. She proved to be the Ternate, who had parted company with the Princess Charlotte soon after leaving Batavia Roads.

Captain Maxwell having seen the gig fairly off, assembled his men, and having expressed to them his entire approbation of their conduct up to that moment, declared his intention to permit no relaxation of discipline as a consequence of the arrival of the ship and of the disappearance of the pirates. The former, he observed, might have arrived without the intention or the means of succour, and the latter might return in a few hours with redoubled force.

It was ten o'clock the next morning before the gig returned to the island. She had left the Ternate at four A.M., but had been prevented by the force of a contrary wind and current from arriving earlier, not being able to contend against them. The Ternate's cutter, which had left the ship at the same time, was compelled to return. In the afternoon, one of the Alceste's boats was sent off to the Ternate for a carronade and a supply

of ammunition, and returned with them early the next morning. The carronade being immediately mounted in the launch and loaded with cannister shot, its range and effect were tried and found so satisfactory, that the return of the Malays was heartily desired: they did not revisit the island till after the departure of the Ternate. Two boats were sent off to the ship during the day with some sick and lame men and a quantity of provisions and baggage, and a large raft was formed to assist in the conveyance of the persons and things that remained.

On the 6th, all but the Captain and eighty men had left the island and were safe on board the Ternate, with the greater part of the removable packages. Early on the following morning, Captain Maxwell and the last of the party, after burning the fence and every article that could not be carried off, took their farewell of Pulo Leat. By ten o'clock, all the party being safely on board the Ternate, she got under weigh for Batavia Roads, and anchored in them on the afternoon of the 10th of March.

The Princess Charlotte did not arrive off the island till several days after the Ternate had left it, and was then obliged by adverse currents to anchor twenty miles from the shore. One of her boats, having on board Mr. Mayne and Mr. Marrige, immediately attempted to reach it; and on approaching the old landing-place, found a fleet of Malay prows at anchor. She immediately put about, but not before she was seen by the pirates, and chased by two heavy prows full of men. The pirates gained rapidly upon her, and but for one of those providential circumstances which had more than once saved the shipwrecked band, would have overtaken and overwhelmed her feeble crew. The winds had been so light, that the boat had been obliged to depend chiefly on her oars for making any way, whilst the large spread of canvass used by the prows, enabled them, even in a very light breeze, to go fast through the water. At the moment that escape seemed most doubtful, a heavy squall filled the sails of the boat, and frightened the Malays back to the island.