

XVII.

THE INVASION OF THE MONGOL TARTARS.

DURING the early centuries of the Christian era, friendly intercourse was regularly kept up between Japan and China. Embassies were dispatched to and fro on various missions, but chiefly with the mutual object of bearing the congratulations to an emperor upon his accession to the throne. It is mentioned in the "Gazetteer of Echizen" (*Echizen Koku Mei Seiki Kō*) that ambassadors from China, with a retinue and crew of one hundred and seventy-eight persons, came to Japan A.D. 776, to bear congratulations to the mikado, Kōnin Tennō. The vessel was wrecked in a typhoon off the coast of Echizen, and but forty-six of the company were saved. They were fed and sheltered in Echizen. In A.D. 779, the Japanese embassy, returning from China, landed at Mikuni, the sea-port of Fukui. In 883, orders were sent from Kiōto to the provinces north of the capital to repair the bridges and roads, bury the dead bodies, and remove all obstacles, because the envoys of China were coming that way. The civil disorders in both countries interrupted these friendly relations in the twelfth century, and communications ceased until they were renewed again in the time of the Hōjō, in the manner now to be described.

In China, the Mongol Tartars had overthrown the Sung dynasty, and had conquered the adjacent countries. Through the Coreans, the Mongol emperor, Kublai Khan, at whose court Marco Polo and his uncles were then residing, sent letters demanding tribute and homage from Japan. Chinese envoys came to Kamakura, but Hōjō Tokimuné, enraged at the insolent demands, dismissed them in disgrace. Six embassies were sent, and six times rejected.

An expedition from China, consisting of ten thousand men, was sent against Japan. They landed at Tsushima and Iki. They were bravely attacked, and their commander slain. All Kiushiu having roused to arms, the expedition returned, having accomplished nothing. The Chinese emperor now sent nine envoys, who announced their purpose to remain until a definite answer was returned to their master. They were called to Kamakura, and the Japanese reply was given by

cutting off their heads at the village of Tatsu no Kuchi (Mouth of the Dragon), near the city. The Japanese now girded themselves for the war they knew was imminent. Troops from the East were sent to guard Kiōto. Munitions of war were prepared, magazines stored, castles repaired, and new armies levied and drilled. Boats and junks were built to meet the enemy on the sea. Once more Chinese envoys came to demand tribute. Again the sword gave the answer, and their heads fell at Daizaifu, in Kiushiu, in 1279.

Meanwhile the armada was preparing. Great China was coming to crush the little strip of land that refused homage to the invincible conqueror. The army numbered one hundred thousand Chinese and Tartars, and seven thousand Coreans, in ships that whitened the sea as the snowy herons whiten the islands of Lake Biwa. They numbered thirty-five hundred in all. In the Seventh month of the year 1281, the tasseled prows and fluted sails of the Chinese junks greeted the straining eyes of watchers on the hills of Daizaifu. The armada sailed gallantly up, and ranged itself off the castled city. Many of the junks were of immense proportions, larger than the natives of Japan had ever seen, and armed with the engines of European warfare, which their Venetian guests had taught the Mongols to construct and work. The Japanese had small chance of success on the water; as, although their boats, being swifter and lighter, were more easily managed, yet many of them were sunk by the darts and huge stones hurled by the catapults mounted on their enemy's decks. In personal prowess the natives of Nippon were superior. Swimming out to the fleet, a party of thirty boarded a junk, and cut off the heads of the crew; but another company attempting to do so, were all killed by the now wary Tartars. One captain, Kusanojiro, with a picked crew, in broad daylight, sculled rapidly out to an outlying junk, and, in spite of a shower of darts, one of which took off his left arm, ran his boat along-side a Chinese junk, and, letting down the masts, boarded the decks. A hand-to-hand fight ensued, and, before the enemy's fleet could assist, the daring assailants set the ship on fire and were off, carrying away twenty-one heads. The fleet now ranged itself in a cordon, linking each vessel to the other with an iron chain. They hoped thus to foil the cutting-out parties. Besides the catapults, immense bow-guns shooting heavy darts were mounted on their decks, so as to sink all attacking boats. By these means many of the latter were destroyed, and more than one company of Japanese who expected victory lost their lives. Still, the enemy could not effect a

landing in force. Their small detachments were cut off or driven into the sea as soon as they reached the shore, and over two thousand heads were among the trophies of the defenders in the skirmishes. A line of fortifications many miles long, consisting of earth-works and heavy palisading of planks, was now erected along-shore. Behind these the defenders watched the invaders, and challenged them to land.

There was a Japanese captain, Michiari, who had long hoped for this invasion. He had prayed often to the gods that he might have opportunity to fight the Mongols. He had written his prayers on paper, and, learning them, had solemnly swallowed the ashes. He was now overjoyed at the prospect of a combat. Sallying out from behind the breastwork, he defied the enemy to fight. Shortly after, he filled two boats with brave fellows and pushed out, apparently unarmed, to the fleet. "He is mad," cried the spectators on shore. "How bold," said the men on the fleet, "for two little boats to attack thousands of great ships! Surely he is coming to surrender himself." Supposing this to be his object, they refrained from shooting. When within a few oars-lengths, the Japanese, flinging out ropes with grappling-hooks, leaped on the Tartar junk. The bows and spears of the latter were no match for the two-handed razor-like swords of the Japanese. The issue, though for a while doubtful, was a swift and complete victory for the men who were fighting for their native land. Burning the junk, the surviving victors left before the surrounding ships could cut them off. Among the captured was one of the highest officers in the Mongol fleet.

The whole nation was now roused. Re-enforcements poured in from all quarters to swell the host of defenders. From the monasteries and temples all over the country went up unceasing prayer to the gods to ruin their enemies and save the land of Japan. The emperor and ex-emperor went in solemn state to the chief priest of Shintō, and, writing out their petitions to the gods, sent him as a messenger to the shrines at Isé. It is recorded, as a miraculous fact, that at the hour of noon, as the sacred envoy arrived at the shrine and offered the prayer—the day being perfectly clear—a streak of cloud appeared in the sky, which soon overspread the heavens, until the dense masses portended a storm of awful violence.

One of those cyclones, called by the Japanese *tai-fu*, or *ōkazé*, of appalling velocity and resistless force, such as whirl along the coasts of Japan and China during late summer and early fall of every year,



The Repulse of the Mongol Tartars. (From a painting by a Japanese who had studied under a Dutch master.)

burst upon the Chinese fleet. Nothing can withstand these maelstroms of the air. We call them typhoons; the Japanese say *tai-fu*, or *ōkazé* (great wind). Iron steamships of thousands of horse-power are almost unmanageable in them. Junks are helpless: the Chinese ships were these only. They were butted together like mad bulls. They were impaled on the rocks, dashed against the cliffs, or tossed on land like corks from the spray. They were blown over till they careened and filled. Heavily freighted with human beings, they sunk by hundreds. The corpses were piled on the shore, or floating on the water so thickly that it seemed almost possible to walk thereon. Those driven out to sea may have reached the main-land, but were probably overwhelmed. The vessels of the survivors, in large numbers, drifted to or were wrecked upon Taka Island, where they established themselves, and, cutting down trees, began building boats to reach Corea. Here they were attacked by the Japanese, and, after a bloody struggle, all the fiercer for the despair on the one side and the exultation on the other, were all slain or driven into the sea to be drowned, except three, who were sent back to tell their emperor how the gods of Japan had destroyed their armada. The Japanese exult in the boast that their gods and their heaven prevailed over the gods and the heaven of the Chinese.

This was the last time that China ever attempted to conquer Japan, whose people boast that their land has never been defiled by an invading army. They have ever ascribed the glory of the destruction of the Tartar fleet to the interposition of the gods at Isé, who thereafter received special and grateful adoration as the guardian of the seas and winds. Great credit and praise were given to the lord of Kamakura, Hōjō Tokimuné, for his energy, ability, and valor. The author of the *Guai Shi* says, "The repulse of the Tartar barbarians by Tokimuné, and his preserving the dominions of our Son of Heaven, were sufficient to atone for the crimes of his ancestors."

Nearly six centuries afterward, when "the barbarian" Perry anchored his fleet in the Bay of Yedo, in the words of the native annalist, "Orders were sent by the imperial court to the Shintō priests at Isé to offer up prayers for the sweeping-away of the barbarians." Millions of earnest hearts put up the same prayers as their fathers had offered, fully expecting the same result.

To this day the Japanese mother in Kiushiu hushes her fretful infant by the question, "Do you think the Mogu (Mongols) are coming?" This is the only serious attempt at invasion ever made by any nation upon the shores of Japan.