

CHAPTER XIV

THE NANKING VICEROYALTY; THE NIEN REBELS

LEAVING the scattered Taipings, some of them in remote places in southeastern China and others across the ocean in the United States,¹ we find Tsêng with much satisfaction taking up the duties of a viceroy in the capital of his late enemies. As noted in the last chapter, he was greatly disappointed to find none of the treasure that rumor had stored in Nanking. Without it, however, he managed to make the necessary repairs to the viceroy's yamen and to set up civil government where for many years martial law had prevailed. Among his first cares was the pleasant task of restoring the examinations which had been so long suspended.² His Hunan soldiers were disbanded in part and the others scattered under independent commands, doubtless with the thought which he had on a number of occasions expressed to his brother, that after the capture of Nanking they must subside a little lest they remain too powerful and become the targets for intrigue and opposition.³

If there was no more trouble to be feared from the Taiping rebellion, the Nien rebels were more powerful than ever. They absorbed the northern and western bands of scattered Taipings and became a serious menace in

¹ Information given me by a grandson of Tsêng Kuo-fan.

² *Record of Chief Events*, III, 16b, 17.

³ *Nienp'u*, X, 7a. Cf. Letters for 1864.

the regions south of the Yellow River and in northern Hupeh and Anhui, from the borders of Shensi to the Grand Canal and beyond into Shantung. For many years they had troubled the imperial government, who feared lest they should join forces with the Taiping rebels. It is not clear just how they arose or what their purpose was. Their methods of fighting incline one to think that they were simply bandits, who, owing to the prevailing disorder, had gained unusual strength. If they cherished any desire to set up a rival government or aimed at anything higher than plunder, the fact is successfully obscured. At this time they were grouped under four chiefs, Chang Tsung-yu, Jen Chu, Niu Hung, and Lai Wenkwang, of whom the last named had come over from the Taiping forces. Their number, though large, was uncertain.

They went about accompanied by their women and beasts of burden; and were entirely devoid of firearms, which made it difficult if not impossible for them to capture walled cities where any resistance was offered. They carried no tents and had no permanent encampments, but if night overtook them they scattered to the near-by villages or as opportunity afforded captured places necessary for their forces. They were able to move with incredible swiftness, more than thirty miles a day for many days in succession. Whenever their enemies, the imperial forces, came too close for comfort, they managed to wear them out by marching in circles and darting about this way and that like swarms of ants. As a rule they avoided battle with the troops sent against them, certainly never attacking first. Yet when driven to bay they fought with surpassing bravery. Each of the four chief bands was accompanied by several thousand horsemen armed with heavy swords and long clubs with which they could do great damage. In times of difficulty these horsemen were

thrown around the others to ward off attacks or to protect the flanks of their own battling footmen. These footmen wielded heavy pikes with deadly effect.⁴

For many years Tsêng and his generals had been in constant fear lest they join the Taipings in Hupeh or Anhui, giving the latter sufficient strength to overcome the imperialists. After the defeat of Senkolintsin by the Allies in 1860 that Mongol prince had been commissioned to disperse these Nien rebels, only to meet his death in an ambush, May 18, 1865. This reverse made them so dangerous⁵ that a hurried mandate summoned Tsêng Kuo-fan to Shantung to direct operations against them.⁶

This command came as a blow to one who, after several years of hard, uncertain warfare, had achieved victory and was settled down to the reward of a peaceful rule in a quiet capital. He well understood what a task was before him. He was without many soldiers, whether Hunanese or Anhui men. The Nien rebels were strong in cavalry where he had none. Months of preparation would be required to strengthen his army and secure cavalry, and when all this was done as many as thirteen bases of operation would have to be occupied, stretching across a thousand *li*. These matters he set forth in his first memorial (of May 29) adding that he was not very well and preferred not to head so great an undertaking.⁷ This memorial was merely the polite refusal etiquette demanded. On the same day he wrote home saying that he intended starting towards the end of the Chinese moon

⁴ *Nienp'u*, X, 11a. *Home Letters*, June 4, 1866, and January 27, 1867.

⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 5b. It is probable that they were now reinforced by many of the defeated Taipings and other malecontents.

⁶ *Ibid.*, X, 6b.

⁷ *Nienp'u*, X, 7, 8. One reason why Anhui men were preferred to those from Hunan was that they were better inured to the cold and could subsist on a wheat ration. *Home Letters*, October 29, 1859.

with eight thousand Hunanese and fourteen thousand Anhui men, but ten days later he had arranged to take nine thousand Hunanese and twenty-two thousand Anhui troops.⁸ Upon receiving the imperial confirmation of his orders, which conferred on him supreme command in the provinces of Shantung, Chihli, and Honan, he set out on June 18, reaching his chief base at Hsuehchow on September 23.

He now divided his forces among four chief centers. Chining became the center for operations in Shantung, under P'an Ting-sing; Hsuehchow for Kiangsu, under Chang Shu-sheng.⁹ For Honan, Chowkiak'ow, and for Anhui, Linghwai, under Liu Min-ch'üan and Liu Sungshan, served as bases. A whole year was consumed in effecting an organisation large enough and sufficiently distributed to draw a net about the elusive rebels. Generals who achieved fame in the Taiping rebellion were recalled to Tsêng's side, among them Pao Ch'ao and Kuo Sung-lin, with their veterans. In 1866 Tsêng Kuo-ch'üan was summoned from his retirement, first with a commission as governor of Shensi, but afterwards designated to Hupeh. Thus the two brothers and Li Hung-chang, governor of Kiangsu and acting viceroy in Tsêng's absence, were able to coöperate once more.¹⁰ In spite of all they could do, however, the rebels continued to elude them, moving as they desired between the Grand Canal and the boundaries of Shensi, now massing in Hupeh under all four leaders, and again separating into two bands to operate in the east and west. Early in 1867 Tsêng wrote to his brother: "We have fifty thousand men in our various armies without counting the men under

⁸ *Home Letters*, May 29 and June 8, 1865.

⁹ *Record of Chief Events*, IV, *passim*; *Nienp'u*, X, 14a; *Dispatches*, July 23, 1865.

¹⁰ Letter of January 25, 1867.

Yu-ch'üan [Li Hung-chang's brother], and cannot make the slightest progress. It is extremely annoying. Can it be that the heart of Heaven perhaps does not wish to destroy these rebels? Else the methods used by our side in dealing with the rebels are not good." In another letter he writes: "The Nienfei suddenly appear and as quickly disappear—a hundred *li* in the flash of an eye! The reports of the spies are very uncertain. Being without definite information, I have not been able to turn and go everywhere. On the contrary there is nothing to do but take the word of each leader, allowing him to be his own spy, have full control, go or stop at will, with plans adapted to the circumstances."¹¹

Tsêng's discouragement was matched by the glee of the censors who were watching these failures to bring reproach and possibly dismissal upon him. Attacks were made on him for incompetence, and some added pride and recklessness to the charges, with the hope that the emperor would depose him. This the government refused to do, but the fact that the attacks could be made against one who but recently had been so highly honored, shows how far Tsêng's star had passed its ascendancy. Tsêng had, prior to this, considered withdrawing from active life, at least for a time, but now, on the advice of Li Hung-chang, he decided to hold his office in the teeth of his enemies, lest after a period of rest he be again summoned to a distasteful military task.¹²

Nevertheless he did offer his resignation from office, but was, instead, granted leave of absence and transferred back to his post at Nanking, leaving Li Hung-chang, who had joined him, to carry on active operations in the field with the imperial commissioner's seal. On his return to Nanking Tsêng was received by the populace

¹¹ Letters of January 23 and 25, 1867.

¹² *Nienp'u*, XI, 14b, 15a; Letters of March 8-10, 1867.

with great enthusiasm. But his return to this civil post served rather to the advancement of Li Hung-chang than of Tsêng, because the former now became the actual commander-in-chief and reaped the benefits of the careful preparations Tsêng had been making for almost two years. Not long after Tsêng's departure for Nanking, Pao Ch'ao, who had been pushing forward against the western group of Nien, won a signal victory near Siangyang, Hupeh, followed shortly by another at Hung Lo Ho. With heavy losses, totalling ten thousand, the rebels were glad to escape into Honan.¹³ Li Hung-chang, who was now the titular viceroy of Hukwang (with his brother acting), moved his headquarters to Chowehiak'ow.

The arrival of Tso Tsung-tang (during May, 1867) in Shensi-Kansu, of which he had been appointed viceroy the previous autumn, brought the chief leaders of the Taiping days once more together against the Nien.¹⁴ The presence of Tsêng Kuo-fan at Nanking, Li Hung-chang in the field, Li Han-chang and Tsêng Kuo-ch'üan at Wuchang, Kwan Wen (former viceroy of Hukwang) in Chihli, and Tso Tsung-tang in Shensi-Kansu, gave assurance of full support and speedy victory; for now eight provinces with their revenues were behind the operations which Li was carrying on, whereas Tsêng the year before had little more than half that number at his back. In the month of June the divisions of Chang and Jen went eastward into Shantung. Li hurled the whole force of four provinces against them. By November Jen and his band were brought to book, and on January 4, 1868, through the beheading of their leader, Lai Wen-kwang, the entire eastern area was pacified, with the exception of the division under Chang Tsung-yu, which entered Chihli early in 1868, to the consternation of the capital. Both Li Hung-chang and Tso Tsung-tang entered the province in pur-

¹³ *Nienp'u*, XI, 16a.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18a.

suit of them.¹⁵ From Chihli they passed, in the fourth moon (April 23-May 19), into Shantung, where the swollen rivers prevented the imperialists from capturing them until the seventh moon. Then their leader, Chang Tsung-yu, was taken and the rebellion quelled. Tsêng's memorial announcing the complete crushing of the Nien-fei was dated September 8, 1867.¹⁶

Neither Tsêng nor his brother was as conspicuous now as they had been four years earlier, although as viceroy of the Two Kiang supporting Li Hung-chang the former shared in the honors and rewards. Tsêng Kuo-ch'üan, however, was no longer in office. He had become discouraged with the difficulties of the governorship of Hu-peh, and his pride would not brook the fire of criticism levelled against him by reason of his lack of success. So he had retired to his native province in October, 1867. In this incident the contrast in character between the two Tsêngs comes out strikingly. The elder brother had many times met with failure and loss of face, only to persevere until he brought victory out of defeat; and in these days of damaged prestige his letters were full of encouragement to the younger man. Thus in April, 1867, when Kuo-ch'üan was at the point of resigning, he tells his brother that the prospect of defeat is something that he himself has endured many times, only to grow the stronger for having passed through the experience. "The two great defeats you have sustained," he writes, "may be Heaven polishing its hero in preparation for a great advance. The proverb says 'By each humiliation you endure, your knowledge is that much enlarged.' My greatest progress has been in the periods when I suffered defeat and shame. Under such circumstances one should grit his teeth, discipline his will, collect his spirit and stretch his wisdom—by no means must he faint and in-

¹⁵ *Nienp'u*, XI, 21b.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, XI, 22-24.

dulge himself."¹⁷ To no purpose did he instance the occasions when he had suffered humiliations and endured them.¹⁸ In vain did he remind his brother that the two had received high honor which caused them to stand out as the most prominent family in China, an honor which called for loyal service and devotion on their side.¹⁹ Neither appeals to prove his mettle nor calls to follow the ideal of *noblesse oblige* could bring the younger Tsêng to face the trial. He went home, and later he reached high position, but never with the honor that today attaches to the fame of the more heroic elder brother.

As civil ruler in Nanking the routine matters of administration need not concern us here. The most permanent contribution made by Tsêng and his associates to the future welfare of China was the establishment of the iron works at Shanghai, whence later was to emerge the great Kiangnan Arsenal. While the Taiping rebellion was still under way, late in 1863, Yung Wing, the first modern Chinese to be educated abroad, came to the viceroy's *yamen* at Anking to urge on him the desirability of establishing works in China for the manufacture of steamers and machinery of various kinds. Tsêng was discovered to be open-minded and sympathetic, and Yung Wing was able to secure financial support from him. In 1866 he returned from abroad with the machinery, "a hundred and several tens of varieties," which late in January, 1867, was in its place.²⁰ During 1868 the new ironworks had set up the first steamer of any size built in China. The accomplishment of this enterprise led Tsêng to believe that such boats as he had hitherto used in his

¹⁷ *Home Letters*, April 3, 1867.

¹⁸ See *Home Letters*, April 6, April 11, April 16, May 15, May 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, June 23. The letters for that year end suddenly early in July.

²⁰ *Nicup'u*, XI, 14a; *Dispatches*, XXV, 43a.

military operations were destined soon to be antiquated and replaced by steam vessels, and that the Chinese navy as a whole, particularly the portion on the sea, should be modernised.²¹ When the steamer was completed it was brought up to Nanking for inspection, and Tsêng gave it the name *T'ienchi*.²² Though it measured but 185 feet in length (probably Chinese measurement), its completion was a milestone in China's progress. The ironworks where it was built then covered about twelve acres of ground and included departments for building engines, constructing machinery, smelting ore, making rifles, doing woodwork, casting brass and iron, and making rockets and other projectiles. There were many storehouses and offices. A dock for the repair of vessels was still lacking, and Tsêng realised also the pressing need for technical books translated from foreign languages.²³

In the same year, 1868, occurred the Yangchow riot. On the twenty-second of August, after ample warnings of trouble and appeals to the prefect by the Rev. J. Hudson Taylor, a mob attacked the China Inland Mission buildings, recently rented and occupied by a number of missionaries, both men and women. They were accused of the usual crimes, kidnapping and putting to death children in order to use certain parts of their bodies for medicine. Since the authorities, despite many appeals, had failed to give protection, at least to property, it was generally believed among the foreign population of China

²¹ *Nienp'u*, XI, 22b; *Dispatches*, XXV, 56 (April 23).

²² This name was chosen by taking two characters from the phrase "The waves on the four seas are quiet, public affairs are tranquil." Prior to this Tsêng had experimented with machinery at Anking (1862) and had built a small steamer, but having only Chinese workmen, it was not a success. *Dispatches*, XXVII, 7 (October 17, 1868).

²³ *Dispatches*, XXVII, 27a. Tsêng does not claim the sole credit for the enterprise, for much of the preparation had been done by Li Hung-chang and his successor, Ting Jih-chang, then intendant of Shanghai.

that the gentry of the city were the real movers of the riot. In the settlement of the case the local officials did not seem disposed to take action, possibly for fear of the consequences to them. Tsêng appointed the provincial treasurer, Li Ts'ung-i, and two lower officers to settle the matter. In Peking the central government promised to make proper reparations, but the progress of the negotiations proving too slow, gunboats were sent up to Nanking and an ultimatum was served on Tsêng Kuo-fan and one of his steamers was seized—possibly the *T'ienchi*—whereupon the viceroy made immediate settlement of the case to the satisfaction of the British representative. But Tsêng's reputation was lowered in foreign eyes. Unfortunately the dispatches sent by Tsêng on the matter of the Yangchow riot are not among those published, and only casual references to the negotiations appear in his letters. We are therefore compelled to rely chiefly on unfriendly or at least *ex parte* foreign sources.²⁴ In view of Tsêng's attitude towards the settlement of the greater T'ientsin massacre two years later, it is probable that he was simply going cautiously and carefully forward with the case when the ultimatum came, and that he would have done justice here because the wrong was so apparent.

²⁴ My account had been taken chiefly from Morse, *International Relations*, II, 228.