

CHAPTER IV

FROM KWANGSI TO THE NORTH

AFTER a fruitless siege of thirty-one days, the rebels left Kweilin and set out for Hunan, pursued by seven thousand men under Ho Chun. They captured Hsingan (May 22), and Ch'üanchow (June 3). Kiang Chung-yuan, believing that the rebels would go from Ch'üanchow straight down the river to Changsha, hastened to Soh-yi Ferry, a point not far from Ch'üanchow, where the river was narrow and the banks well wooded. With trees instead of earthworks he determined to prevent the rebels from passing. As he anticipated, the Taipings descended the river in small boats; but when they reached this point they were compelled to measure their strength with Kiang and his small force of braves. For two days and nights the battle raged, a thousand of the rebels' falling, among them Fêng Yun-shan. Their boats having all been burned by the brave imperial leader, the rebels were compelled to take up the overland march which led them to Yungchow and Taochow, which they captured on June 12.¹

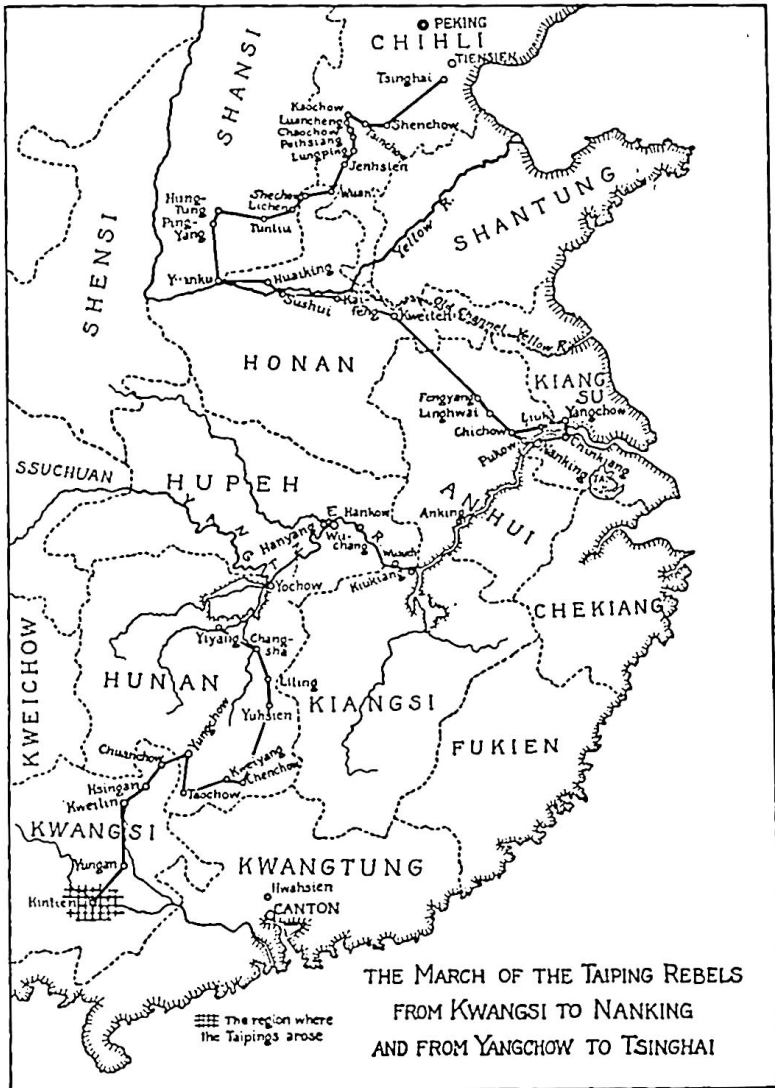
While they lingered at Taochow for more than a month, the rebels received thousand of adherents who brought new life into their enterprise.² But this acces-

¹ *Siang Chun Chi*, I, 9. *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-tuch* states that Fêng was killed at Ch'üanchow, but it probably refers to the district rather than the city itself.

² *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-tuch*, I, 15a.

sion of strength, which carried them successfully on to Nanking, was offset by the far-reaching effects of the battle of Soh-yi Ferry. The death of Fêng Yun-shan had removed the last of the abler and more level-headed leaders of the movement, who might have kept the real goal before Hung and his associates. His loss was scarcely less serious than that of Hung Ta-ch'üan. He had been associated with the latter in the founding of the societies, had probably shared his broader views, and moreover stood in the good graces of Hung. Wei Ch'ang-hui (the Northern king) and possibly Shi Ta-k'ai (the Assistant king) were of the same temperament, we may believe from subsequent happenings, but were not strong enough to cope with Yang and Hsiao for the control. Thus the deflection in the direction of religious fanaticism was made complete in the loss of Fêng; and this emphasis on a religion that was strange and distasteful to the nation at large in the end reacted on the movement and brought about its defeat.

The second great effect of the battle was to open the eyes of the government to a new and better way to overcome the rebellion. Twice the high officers with large armies had surrounded the small insurgent forces, only to let them escape again. In this battle a vastly inferior company of militia had stood its ground and turned aside the whole rebel army in the height of its victorious progress, thus giving time to prepare for the defence of Hunan's capital. It was the development of this type of army under Tsêng Kuo-fan which eventually brought success to the government. Only triumphant advance, or the appearance of capable leaders in place of T'ienteh and Fêng, could save the Taiping cause from inevitable disaster. The government was now in possession of the formula which would overcome their fatal weakness under the established system.



Meanwhile the imperialists gathered at Taochow and compelled the Taipings to remove to Ch'enchow, an important town on the highway between Canton and the north, which they took on August 16, Kweiyang having capitulated the day before.³ The T'ienwang and most of the force remained there, while Hsiao Ch'ac-kwei, the Western king, pressed on with a small force, the "battalion of death," to capture Changsha which he believed to be unprepared and easily assaulted.⁴

Here eighty-one days were fruitlessly spent. The early death of Hsiao, the Western king, who was killed by a cannon shot fired from the city walls, made it necessary for Hung and Yang to hurry down with their entire force. It is a curious circumstance that the governor who defended the city at the end of the siege, Lo Ping-chang, was also a native of Hwabsien, which produced the T'ienwang. The imperialists gradually moved down the river, and again had the chance to crush the rebellion if they had only possessed soldiers who could fight like those of Kiang Chung-yuan. Three times during November (the tenth, thirteenth, and twenty-ninth) the rebels sprung mines, twice breaking down the city wall, only to be repulsed when they tried to enter through the breach.

Their supplies of salt and oil now being exhausted, with the enemy encamped all about, no alternative was left but to abandon the siege and move on. Before leaving, the T'ienwang "at the south gate inaugurated his government seal, and was styled 'wan-sui';⁵ his wife was styled 'niang-niang.'⁶ He appointed kings of the East,

³ *Siang Chun Chi*, I, 10a; *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-lueh*, I, 19b.

⁴ It is said that the authorities were so poorly informed of their movements that only the rebels' mistaking the high tower on the southeast corner of the wall for one of the city gates saved Changsha from capture before the gates could be shut.

⁵ "Ten thousand years," a term applied only to emperors.

⁶ "Lady of Ladies," or "Imperial Consort."

West, South, and North and the Assistant king. Their appointment was earlier than his own assumption of imperial honors. When he had finished inaugurating his seal, he again attacked the city but failed to take it. He planned therefore to move his camp, intending to go through Yiyang, along the shore of the Tungting Lake to Changteh, being desirous of making Hunan his home.”

A small force was dispatched towards the city of Siangtan with instructions to circle around the hills and join the main body, which, on the night of November 30, crossed the river on a pontoon bridge and marched westward to Yiyang. Their simple ruse had sent the imperialists scurrying along the east bank to Siangtan, thus permitting the rebels to escape without molestation. They had beleaguered Changsha since the tenth of September.

At Yiyang they found thousands of boats in the river in which they proceeded, past Lintzuk'ow and across the Tungting Lake, to Yochow. In this city had been stored the great magazine of munitions formerly in the possession of Wu San-kwei, leader of the San Fan rebellion under K'anghsi. Four days after their arrival, on December 13, they captured the city, from which most of the defenders had fled before their arrival.⁷ Enriched by the capture of Wu San-Kwei's munitions and five thousand additional boats, they sailed down the Yangtse River to Hanyang, which fell on the nineteenth of December, 1852.⁸ After burning the great commercial city of Hankow, they crossed the river to attack Wuchang. On the pretence of defending Hunan the viceroy was absent. The governor did the best he could, and the soldiers who, under Hsiang Yung, were arriving from Hunan, were

⁷ From the Chinese of the Chungwang's *Autobiography*, preserved in the *Secret History of China*, p. 128. Compare Lay's translation, pp. 5, 6.

⁸ *Siang Chun Chi*, I, 13; *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-tuch*, I, 17b, 18a.

only a mile from the city walls with the rebels between them and the city. Neither the defenders nor the army of Hsiang seemed willing to come to blows with the rebels, and the winter rains afforded them excuses for inactivity. The Taipings were therefore left free to undermine the wall. The explosion took place at dawn on January 13. The governor fought bravely to hold the city, but, together with the other higher officials of the province, he was overpowered and fell.

Saishanga had been cashiered and replaced by Hsü Kwang-tsin; but the latter arrived at Changsha only after the rebels had left, and was at Yochow when they captured Wuchang. He was dismissed in disgrace and Hsiang Yung received appointment as imperial commissioner.

The fall of the great Wuhan cities, practically without a struggle, aroused the Peking government anew. Kishen (Ch'ishan), who, it may be recalled, succeeded Lin Tsehsü as imperial commissioner during the crisis in Canton in 1840, was now brought out of retirement and ordered to the defence of Honan with picked forces of cavalry and infantry from Chihli, Shensi, and Heilungkiang, for they expected that a dash would be made for Peking.^o With his new honors Hsiang Yung now displayed an activity that might have saved Wuchang if he had been moved to it earlier. The Taipings did not feel strong enough to hold the city indefinitely, so they seized thousands of boats, on which they launched forth on February 8, 1853, to sail down the Yangtse River. At this time they were said to number half a million souls, men, women, and children. They must have presented a sight to Hsiang as he allowed them thus to spread their sails—more than

^o *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, II, 1b. Here it states that the rebels contemplated going north through Siangyang, but realised that Honan was too well defended to justify such a move.

ten thousand boats comprising their fleet—and depart to set up the Celestial Kingdom at Nanking.¹⁰

This great multitude¹¹ skirted the two banks of the river, plundering the various towns which they passed. The Nanking viceroy, who had been awaiting them near Wusueh, at the border of his domain, suddenly felt it necessary to fall back on Nanking. This conviction was partly the result of cowardice, and partly due to the small force at his command. He had sent forward a *tsungping* to stop the rebels, but that officer had promptly been defeated, and the viceroy, together with the governor of Kiangsi, took to flight.¹² By their cowardice Kiukiang was left without defence to fall on February 17. At Anking, the governor died suddenly, leaving the provincial treasurer to hold the city, which he failed to do. It fell on the twenty-fourth of February. A week later the treasurer lost the small town to which he had retired on the fall of the capital. Thus town after town succumbed, to the dismay and disgust of the high officials in Peking. Even at Nanking the governor, who, in the absence of the viceroy should have done something for the defence of the city, moved off to Chinkiang, pretending a strategic move. The rebels stood before the outer defences of Nanking on the eighth of March and were in possession of the city on the nineteenth. The imperialists say that the Manchu garrison defended the inner city stubbornly, but the reb-

¹⁰ Had the governor and Hsiang coöperated here they might have crushed the rebels or at least have driven them off. Each was trying to make the other do the work. Hung might have held Wuchang as long as he did Nanking against such generals. These men were simply a little less incompetent, not more able, than the ones who were cashiered. I make no doubt that Hung could have marched straight to Peking at this time.

¹¹ The numbers come from imperialist sources such as *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, II, 16. Sone, *Hatsuzoku Ran Shi*, places the total at 600,000.

¹² See *Peking Gazette*, March 16, 1853, for imperial denunciation of the viceroy and governor of Kiangsu for their cowardly conduct.

els told Mr. Meadows shortly after this that they died like bleating sheep, begging on their knees for mercy.

Forthwith a difference of opinion arose as to whether they should proceed northward or stay where they were. The T'ienwang, and possibly the Tungwang (Yang), were for an immediate march to Honan. By advancing at once they could avoid any danger from General Hsiang Yung, the imperial commissioner, who, after a short delay at Wuchang, where he arranged the affairs of that place, had set out to follow the rebels, only to be held up by a lack of boats at Kiukiang. Could they only secure themselves along the Yellow River, the Taipings would be in a favorable position to attack the capital. From this sound plan they were dissuaded by the opinion of a mere boatman, who set forth the attractions of Nanking as a capital and emphasized the difficulties in Honan, persuading the T'ienwang to establish his "Heavenly Capital" there.¹³

It might then have been possible for the Taipings to secure Peking with great ease. Yet this boatman may well have voiced a natural unwillingness on the part of the rank and file to proceed very far north of the Yangtse River. That stream has long formed the natural boundary between the people of North and South China. After travelling a few miles from its banks the atmosphere becomes decidedly different; you are entering the North. The river is more of a boundary than Mason and Dixon's line in the United States. Thus far we have seen the Taipings, in their progress from Kwangsi to Nanking, move like a gala procession, welcomed in spite of their bizarre religious ideas as deliverers from Manchu bondage. The moment they should cross the river and plunge into the northern provinces it would be quite otherwise. They would be strangers in the enemy's country. Few would be

¹³ Chungwang, *Autobiography*, p. 6.

their recruits; more stubborn would be the resistance from government and populace. The old sailor correctly expressed the misgivings of his people.

This is not to defend the final decision of the T'ien-wang, for with a little more daring he could have made a clean sweep of it. The North was almost as unsettled as the South. The Nien rebels, who later became so great a source of annoyance and anxiety to the authorities, were already commencing their raids; the turbulent Moslems of the northwest frontier were not far from revolt. A little resolution and daring, a wise set of adjustments with these restless groups, and the objective would have been reached, the Manchus hurled from power. One cannot help reflecting that the whole course of history might have been altered if either T'ientch or Fêng had been alive at this hour.

The resourcefulness of the Taipings was not too greatly occupied with the establishment of the Celestial Capital¹⁴ to prevent reaching out for the vital strategic centers of Chinkiang and Yangchow, the former a commanding site at the intersection of the Grand Canal with the Yangtse River, the latter on the canal about twenty-five or thirty miles away, both together controlling that vital artery through which flowed the supplies of tribute grain to the capital. Lin Hung-ch'iang was put in command of the expedition that set forth for this purpose. Taking Chinkiang on March 30, he left Lo Ta-kang there, while he pressed on to the capture of Yangchow, which fell on April 1, 1853. Some time was given to strengthening their hold on these two places by securing P'ukow, a town opposite Nanking, and the stretch of country between there and Yangchow.

Meanwhile Hsiang Yung had been delayed five weeks

¹⁴ The Taipings changed the name Nanking, which means "southern capital," to T'ienking, the "celestial" or "heavenly capital."

at Kiukiang and arrived before Nanking on March 30. By that time the rebels were strongly intrenched and had possession of Chinkiang. So he had to settle down to the slow siege of the place. We cannot stop to recite the details of that eleven years' siege with the countless minor engagements that gave trifling advantages now to this side and now to that. The presence of a hostile encampment outside their capital did not greatly alarm the insurgents but it altered their entire outlook on life, for they were under necessity of regarding Nanking as a camp, which throughout the long siege was constantly under martial law. Armies were apparently free to go and come at will; people with good credentials might easily pass through the city gates; foreign vessels, at least after 1860, plied up and down the Yangtse. But Nanking was no longer open to trade. Its gates were closed and guarded; its population lived on rations from the state, while husbands, fathers, and sons fought in the Taiping armies that came and went. The strictest laws were enforced within the vast camp.

The importance of Chinkiang and Yangchow insured a serious imperialist attempt to effect their recapture. In a remarkably short time Ch'ishan, an imperial commissioner, and two viceroys, Ch'eng of Chihli and Yang of the grain transport service, with four thousand cavalry and at least thirty thousand infantry, were encamped at Yangchow. But they were not able to dislodge the strongly intrenched Taipings.¹⁵ Under their very noses Lin Hung-ch'iang impudently removed the women and children and even the treasure to Nanking, leaving General Tsêng Li-ch'ang to defend the city. He himself then started for the North with twenty-one "armies,"¹⁶ setting out from Yangchow about the twenty-second of May.

¹⁵ Sone, *Hatsuzoku Ran Shi*, p. 14.

¹⁶ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch* and other Chinese books mention twenty-

After disturbing Ch'uchow and Linghwai Kwan, they captured, May 28, Fêngyang, an important prefectural city about ninety miles northwest of Yangchow. Six of the twenty-one "armies" or regiments had been detached to take Liuho and keep the region between that place and Puk'ow for the Taipings. Through the bravery of the volunteers and village braves at Liuho, this small force suffered heavy losses and was forced to return to Nanking.

General Lin's main army, reinforced by large additions from the Eastern king, went on victoriously through northern Anhui. They were followed but never caught by Sheng Pao, who had started from Yangchow after a safe interval. Kweitch-fu, Honan, was stormed on June 13; the capital, Kaifeng, was reached on the nineteenth, but the rebels, failing to capture it, moved on, pursued by all the imperial troops in that region. By the first of July they stood on the bank of the Yellow River at Ssushui.

There was now no place for paltering and excuses. The safety of Peking was believed to depend on keeping the rebels south of the Yellow River. Na-ur-ching-ê, viceroy of Chihli, was given supreme authority; the governors of Honan, Shantung, and Shansi were ordered to coöperate with him, and Mongol forces were summoned in all haste from Chahar. Cavalry was ordered from Heilungkiang and Hsian-fu. With such high officials and large armies converging on them, the rebels perceived how untenable their position would soon be and quietly and speedily moved away, crossing the river on coal barges. On the seventh of July they attacked Hwaik'ing-fu, but were in turn attacked by the governors named above and their

one armies. If the term 'army' is used in the technical sense it would mean twenty-one divisions of 12,500 men each. Some states that there were thirty-six regiments of more than 2,000 men each, which would make a total force of nearly 75,000. I cannot discover his authority.

generals. Ten stubborn assaults on the Taiping army failed to dislodge it, but a great storm came to the aid of the government and the insurgent army fled westward, pursued by the loyalists. In rearguard actions the Taipings lost about three thousand men. Honan was now pacified, but the rebels continued to go forward.

When they had marched westward as far as Yüankü in Shànsi, the rebels turned north and captured Pingyang-fu. Na-ur-ching-ê was promptly cashiered and the discreet Shêng Pao succeeded him as imperial commissioner. The latter had conferred on him the *Sheng-chioh* sword, which gave him power to put to death any of his men of the rank of *fu-ch'iang* or below. But on their side the rebels, whose total effective force had been reduced to 20,000 men, received additional troops from Nanking under the leadership of Chu Hsieh-k'wen and Hsu Ts'ung-yang.

The rebels as thus reinforced moved with incredible speed across Shansi. Town after town fell before them, terrified by reports of their power, and on September 29 they went through the Linming pass into Chihli. In that metropolitan province they repeated their successes. Passing by or capturing Jinhsien (October 1), Lungp'ing (October 2), Peihsiang (October 2), Chaochow (October 4), Kaoching (October 6), Luanching, and Tsinchow (October 8), they came to rest at Shenchow October 9, having marched more than a hundred miles and captured five towns within ten days. Here, however, they were definitely checked by the imperial commissioner, Sheng Pao, who had followed them all the way from Yangchow, and by the various commanders whom they had eluded at Hwaiking. An attempt was made by these imperialists to storm the city (October 21); a sortie was beaten back the same day, but on the next the Taipings moved out and escaped to Fuchow, and thence to Tsinghai-hsien

which they reached on the thirty-first. This place and Tuhliu, near by, became the limit of their advance. They were a scant thirty miles from T'ientsin.¹⁷

In this recital of the progress of the Taiping rebels from their Kwangsi home to Nanking and almost to T'ientsin, we have shocking proof of the utter worthlessness of the regular armies, and the cowardice of many of the civil officials as well. The *Peking Gazettes* of the day are full of frank condemnation for magistrates, prefects, and even governors, generals, and viceroys who abandoned their posts and ran away, pretending to be sick and under necessity, in critical moments, of seeking medical aid, rushing off to recruit forces when the enemy stood at the city gates, or claiming victories when they had caught a few detached rebels and executed them, or had entered some town just abandoned by the rebels. Even Hsiang Yung, with several providential opportunities to destroy the rebellion, had always displayed his energies when it was too late, and was now settling down to a long-protracted but ineffective siege of Nanking; while Sheng Pao, who had just caught up with the rebels at the outskirts of T'ientsin, had kept them at a safe distance in front of his pursuing army, careful not to reach them lest he be defeated and disgraced.

Indeed, at this supreme moment of peril, the emperor had been obliged to overcome his aversion to the terrible Tartar tribesmen, and summon to his aid their prince, Senkolintsin, with his desert warriors. They and the Manchu forces made Tsinghai and Tuhliu the limit of Taiping advance. Even with these dreaded foes opposed to them, the rebels stubbornly held their ground for two or three months during bitter winter weather, only to be dislodged at last and forced back, step by step, to the Yellow River, where their leader received reinforcements

¹⁷ *P'ing-ting Fuch-pei Chi-luch*, II, 22.

which enabled him to fight many battles before he was at last captured and his followers scattered in 1855.¹⁸

While this expedition was moving to the north under Lin Hung-ch'iang, the rebels sent expeditions up the river to recapture the cities abandoned on their way down to Nanking. One expedition in two divisions, led by Lai Han-ying and Shi Ch'iang-chen, attacked Kiukiang and hence up Poyang Lake to Nanchang.

Meanwhile Kiang Chung-yuan, whose prowess both in Kwangsi and Hunan marked him as the most capable commander on the imperial side, received appointment as provincial judge of Hupeh, with instructions to press forward to the great camp at Nanking.¹⁹ He left Wuchang on May 14 with three thousand men. On the way down the river he learned that the rebels had gone to Nanchang. This was a back door to Hunan. Kiang therefore turned aside at Kiukiang and hurried to the relief of Nanchang. On arriving there he attacked the rebels in the attempt to divert them from the siege. But they remained to spring their mine on July 7. The defenders, however, prevented them from entering the breach. Three months were spent in trying to take this place; after the last attempt to storm the walls the besiegers decided to withdraw. Kiang pursued them to Kiukiang, but arrived too late to prevent them from capturing that city. The rebels had no intention of remaining there, but started up the river, defeating the viceroy at T'ienchiachen, passing Hwangchow, and eventually arriving at Hanyang, which had been rebuilt, early in October.²⁰

¹⁸ The material for this chapter has been derived chiefly from the *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*; Sone, *Hatsuzoku Ran Shi*, and to some extent *Yuch-fen Chi Shih*. For the northern expedition translations from the *Peking Gazettes* have been useful.

¹⁹ During the second moon (March 10-April 7, 1853), *Nicnp'u*, II, 3a.

²⁰ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, II, 13-28.

A second rebel expedition captured Anking, marching by land. The Assistant king, Shi Ta-k'ai, and Hu I-kwang then went through the province of Anhui where they captured a large number of cities. Towards the end of the year the first division from Hanyang fell back on Anhui, and the whole province lay at the mercy of the rebels. On the recommendation of Tsêng Kuo-fan and others, Kiang was now appointed governor of Anhui. He proceeded to Lüchow in the attempt to hold it against the insurgents, who under the leadership of Hu I-kwang brought 100,000 men to the attack. Kiang's brother and Liu Chang-yu tried to bring reinforcements to Kiang, but found the way effectually blocked by the enemy. On the night of January 14, 1854, they made their onset. The besieged were too few. Having held the walls as long as they could against overwhelming forces they had to give way, but not before Kiang committed suicide by drowning.

This unhappy occurrence robbed the imperial cause of one of its most brilliant generals; for, although Kiang is not enrolled in China's Hall of Fame because of his premature death, it was he who first demonstrated the value of the militia against the rebels in Kwangsi. At the Soh-yi Ferry he undoubtedly saved Changsha by deflecting the Taiping line of march, thus giving time to secure the defence of Hunan's capital. With the small force at his disposal he had played an important part in the defence of that city during the siege. It was he who gave Tsêng Kuo-fan the ideas of organising an army on the same model and creating a navy for use on the waterways of central China. Had he lived to participate in the later struggles of the war his name would undoubtedly have stood with those of Tsêng, Tso Tsung-tang, and Li Hung-chang, probably at the head of the list. His work

laid the foundation for the later and more conspicuous work of Tsêng Kuo-fan.²¹

At the same time that Anhui was overrun by the rebels, the Eastern king, Yang, in person led a large army up the river to capture Wuchang and thus control the Yangtse above Nanking. The viceroy went to Hwangchow in the hope of intercepting them. During the New Year holiday, supposing that the Taiping vigilance would be relaxed, he launched his attacks on them (February 7, 1854), but failed and was himself defeated and killed. The rebels passed around the imperialists and the latter withdrew under the acting viceroy to Kingk'ow above Wuchang, leaving that city undefended except by the force on the walls. It fell on June 26, 1854, giving the rebels the control of the entire river as far as Nanking.

²¹ In this estimate of Kiang Tsêng Kuo-fan is said to have occurred, according to the writer of the *Hatsuzoku Ran Shi* (p. 23). He states that when Kiang first suggested the building of a fleet Tsêng was disposed to take issue with him. Later, he goes on to say, "Kuo-fan in conversation with some one said, 'I never met a man who had the foresight of Kiang Chung-yuan; if, at some future date universal fame comes to any one, it will certainly be to this person.'" My own conclusion was set down before I discovered this statement, the source of which is not given.