

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST CAMPAIGNS OF THE HUNAN RECRUITS

THE expedition prepared by Tsêng Kuo-fan was ready to start down the river early in 1854. It was first used against the Taiping rebels who had come up the river into Siangyin and Ningsiang. In March minor victories were won,¹ victories which drove the rebels back on Yoehow, whither Tsêng and his entire water force together with about four thousand of his militia hastened. The boats were scattered out to patrol the Tungting Lake near the mouths of the rivers which flow from Hunan.

Urgent appeals came one after another to hasten to the rescue of Hupeh where Wuchang was in danger, the Eastern king having come at the head of his troops in order to capture it and thus command the upper river.² Similar appeals were urging relief for Anhui which was being overrun by the Taiping armies. Tsêng was happy in the thought that now at last he was on the way to fulfill the emperor's desire.

Disappointment, however, awaited him. On the fourth of April twenty-four of the new fleet were sunk and several dozen injured by a severe storm that swept across the lake, causing the loss of many persons through drowning. At the same time Wang Hsin, with whom Tsêng had

¹ Reported in detail in the dispatch of March 24. *Dispatches*, II, 38a.

² *Taiping T'ienkuo Yeh Shi*, XII, 6.

had differences of opinion during the months of preparation, had left Yochow leading some two thousand of the land force in the direction of Wuchang. Not far from Yangloussu in the hills, they were attacked on all sides by a vastly superior force. Inexperienced in battle and bewildered, they threw away their impedimenta, scattered out in all directions, and eventually reached Yochow and its sheltering walls. Here, reinforced by two thousand of the regulars and six hundred of the new army under Chu Sen-i, they resisted the advance guard of the rebel force. But the main army soon appeared with their yellow banners and red coats, and threw such terror into the hearts of the imperialists that they again fled from their chosen battle ground outside the city—all except one *ying* of five hundred men, who valiantly stood their ground, fighting a whole day against several thousand Taipings.³ The imperialists were driven behind the walls of Yochow, but through a lack of rice and salt were unprepared to sustain a siege, and Tsêng had only sixteen hundred fresh men left as reserves. The boats in front of the city did some damage to the Taipings, but his reverse, following on the loss of so many boats through the storm, the lack of provisions at Yochow, and the march of the rebels towards Changsha, led Tsêng to retreat in order that Changsha might have suitable defence. Tsêng's dispatch, dated April 17, ended as it had begun by asking the emperor to hand him over to the Board of Punishments for his failure.⁴

The other divisions of the land army had gone by other roads and had made better progress in the direction of

³ In a letter to his father Tsêng explains this disaster as due to the separation of his men into sections, and the fact that about thirty thousand rebels were thus opposed to only a little over two thousand of his men.

⁴ *Dispatches*, II, 42-44.

Ts'ung-yang and T'ungeh'eng, but their commanders, T'a Chi-pu and Hu Lin-yi, were also recalled to Changsha.⁵ Thus the entire force that had set out a short four weeks before was now back in Changsha.

On their part the insurgents divided their forces at Tsingkong, about twenty miles below Changsha. A portion of them went by land to Siangtan, which they took on April 24. There they erected supplementary defences outside the walls and, seizing several hundred boats, prepared to hold this place against their enemies. Up to that time Siangtan had been a city of great importance, at the head of overland trade with Canton, through which much of the tea—oonams and oopacks—and other exports reached the coast. T'a Chi-pu was sent there April 25 to attempt the recapture of the city; the following day five *ying* of the water force advanced to take part in the attempt. Four days of hard fighting followed in which several thousand of the rebels were killed. On the twenty-seventh a combined attack from the land and river forces resulted in the destruction of the major part of the insurgent fleet and the utter demolition of the land fortifications. The fighting spirit of the new army may be said to have been first aroused in these battles.⁶ On the twenty-ninth the rebels were again badly defeated and on May 1 Siangtan was brilliantly recaptured.

These sweeping victories were almost neutralised when, on April 28, Tsêng in person led a force of forty boats and eight hundred soldiers to Tsingkong, only to meet with defeat. A strong south wind was blowing at the time and a swift current running, which combined to make the boats unmanageable. The rebels captured or burned most of them. So mortified was Tsêng at this second failure so soon after his enforced retreat from

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 48.

⁶ *Nicpu'u*, III, 7b, 8a.

Yochow that he twice attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself into the water, but he was each time rescued by his friends.⁷ This was providential in view of the great successes at Siangtan three days later—successes that proved to be more than a gleam of hope, for they were the dawn of another day, because at last the Taipings had met their match and suffered a signal defeat without the intervention of Tartar tribesmen.⁸

In spite of this victory Tsêng now passed through some of the bitterest days of his life, openly flouted by the officials in Changsha.⁹ He found dishonesty and crookedness on all sides, and was troubled by some of his own generals. We have already recorded the dishonesty of Wang Hsin, who with the aid of Tso Tsung-tang,⁶ had magnified a slight skirmish into a great victory. But he was also embarrassed by the action of members of his own family. His second brother, Kuo-hwang, came to the city and quarrelled with Tsêng. In a letter home he writes: "Of late because my own temper has been too violent, causing me to be inharmonious with men, much has not been accomplished in managing affairs. But the temper of my brother Têng has recently been still more violent and he is unable to lighten any burden for me, but on the contrary multiplies for me many shameful words and causes of quarrel. If there is an extra man in the army we cannot perceive his value; if the house is short a single individual we can feel his loss. Henceforth Têng-huo and the rest of [my] younger brothers are not to come to the camp, but remain at home teaching the growing generation, giving themselves in part to cultivating the fields and in part to study, rising before day,

⁷ *Nienp'u*, III, 8a.

⁸ We recall that Kiang Chung-yuan had deflected their whole line near Ch'üanchow.

⁹ *Home Letters*, May 16, 1854.

working hard and not yielding to pride—in this way guarding the home and preventing much suffering.”¹⁰

He also confided to his family his state of mind on the general situation, reporting that there was crookedness everywhere, that he had had to take to task some of his own officers, and adding: “Among the officials many have no regard for me. In future it is possible that nothing can be accomplished; it is simply to bring contempt on the one who bears office for the Emperor and leave only loss of self-respect and hatred. How can you hate men? If you do hate them how can there be any advantage? In general, confusion in the world must first arise through not clearly discriminating between truth and falsehood, not distinguishing white from black. My brothers must have an ardent desire to be firm in distinguishing. But the more they do distinguish, the more will it tend to reveal chaos, and they will have to quiet their spirits to the limit. I hope that my brothers will learn to be peaceful, and learn that Pu-shan’s affair is folly. This affair is henceforth not to be mentioned nor kept in mind.”¹¹

But in these days of extreme mental agitation and trial, which in later years he looked back upon as a period of great moral discipline to him, there was no thought of going home. On the contrary, he set about with stout heart to repair his boats and make changes in his regulations. His defeat at Siangyin was more or less accidental and inevitable, but at Yoehow he considered that he had made four prime errors. (1) His army did not rise early enough. Henceforth they were to be up and through with breakfast before dawn. (2) His camps were too vulnerable and must in future be built more strongly, with high,

¹⁰ *Home Letters*, May 12, 1854. On the basis of this letter and similar injunctions none of his brothers entered service through his recommendation.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, May 16, 1854. Pu-shan is another name for Wang Hsin.

thick walls, surrounded by a moat eight feet wide and six feet deep and by a shallower ditch having sharpened bamboo stakes at the bottom. (3) The entire force had not been kept together. He had at Yochow less than a half of his five thousand, the rest being scattered. A total army of ten thousand in one place would have enabled him to withstand the siege. (4) He should have arrested and dealt strictly with persons whose acts were suspicious, and not have been indulgent.¹²

The victories at Siangtan partly disarmed his critics, and even mitigated the severity of the emperor, who remitted the punishment due for failure at Yochow and Tsingkong, rejoiced at the news from Siangtan, and indulged the hope that repairs would soon be effected and the expedition once more go forward to the threatened regions of Hupeh, Kiangsi, and Anhui.¹³

In these defeats and the subsequent experiences at Changsha, we discover some of the limitations of Tsêng as well as his points of excellence. With no experience or training as a soldier, he showed complete lack of skill in the technique of carrying out military operations. In fact, he did not attempt again actually to lead his troops into action, save where, through some unforeseen peril, he was compelled to fight his way out of difficult situations. He did not lack character and displayed a certain element of genius; first, in the patience and perseverance with which he endured what to many a man would be an unbearable loss of prestige and opposition; second, in his ability to select able commanders, for we shall see that his little army brought forth men who in later years rose through their merit to high position in military and civil government; and third, in his clear thinking and power to grasp the far-reaching implications of any situation, thus

¹² *Home Letters*, April 22, 1854.

¹³ *Nienp'u*, III, 7b, 8, 10 f.

helping him to arrange his campaigns in a well-considered manner.

Among these men of worth who were made leaders of divisions of the little force, we find T'a Chi-pu, the hero in the victory at Siangtan. Earlier, he had proved his mettle in fights with bandits and had been sent forward from Yoehow to the borders of Hupeh, from which strategic position the danger in Changsha and Siangtan had hastened his recall. A second great leader, who to the hour of his death proved a tower of strength to Tsêng, was Hu Lin-yi. His rise was rapid and he became governor of Hupeh in 1856. Others, some of whom failed to attain high honor because of death, or who only after years of struggle came to prominence, were Lo Tse-nan, who was killed at Wuchang in 1856; Chu Yu-hang, commander of the first flotilla; Yang Tsai-fu and P'eng Yu-ling, both of whom eventually reached high official place; Chow Hungshan and Kiang Chung-tsi, brother of Kiang Chung-yuan.¹⁴ Tso Tsung-tang was present at the siege of Changsha, but was now employed in some secretarial capacity in the *yamen*, and was eventually brought out through Tsêng several years later to lead armies in Kiangsi and eventually in Chekiang and Fukien. Li Hung-chang, though well known to Tsêng Kuo-fan in his days at Peking, was not yet prominent in the cause.

T'a Chi-pu, indeed, had already earned special mention and now received the appointment as *t'ituh* of Hunan, but on the earnest representations of Tsêng Kuo-fan, who found him too valuable to spare, permission was granted that he remain in the Hunan army.¹⁵ Preparations were

¹⁴ See *Nienp'u*, III, 9b; also dispatches announcing victory at Siangtan, defeat at Tsingkong, and recommendations for promotion. The merits of these various officers are set forth at length. *Dispatches*, III, 51-65a.

¹⁵ The request is in a dispatch dated June 3. *Dispatches*, III, 71. The favorable reply is noted in the *Nienp'u*, III, 12a.

meanwhile pushed with all speed, extra yards having been set up, and in a short time they were ready to proceed again. During this interval, however, the rebels had scattered out through the districts lying along the western end of the Tungting Lake, capturing Lungyang on the eighth of June, and Changteh on the eleventh. While operations against those who were on the Hupoh shore fell largely to the direction of Kwan Wen, Tartar general of Kingchow, Tsêng managed those in Hunan. T'a Chi-pu was dispatched to Yochow, while Hu Lin-yi and others were sent through Yiyang to Changteh. The rebels attacked the division commanded by Chow Hungshan at Lungyang and defeated it; thereupon Hu Lin-yi was forced to retire to Yiyang and proceed by another route to Changteh.¹⁶

Additional sailors were trained to man the new boats which were built. By June 10, 1854, all was in readiness to start once more down the river.¹⁷ Strategic considerations demanded that Hunan be cleared of rebels before proceeding to Hupoh, especially the need of preventing interruptions to the line of communications. Consequently the land and water forces were sent forward in three divisions. The western division under Hu Lin-yi was already at Changteh, entrusted with the task of driving back the rebels and clearing the inlets of the Tungting Lake in that region. The central division of combined land and water forces, under T'a Chi-pu and Chu Yu-hang, went down the Siang River and eventually reached Yochow (which was recaptured on July 25), where it was reinforced by Hu Lin-yi's division after the lake was swept clear of the enemy. The eastern division was sent

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Nienp'u*, III, 13b; *Dispatches*, III, 1-5 (dated August 4) and 10-15a (dated August 9).

overland to the northeast, through P'ingkiang to Ts'ungyang, at the Hupeh border about halfway to Wuchang.

The two divisions that had concentrated at Yoehow fought and defeated a fleet of several hundred Taipin^g vessels on July 27. Tsêng Kuo-fan believed and reported that Hunan was now free of rebels, but he proved to be mistaken, for scarcely had he sent his dispatch¹⁷ when they again swarmed up the river to Yoehow and kept Tsêng Kuo-fan and his lieutenants busy for nearly two months—but with this encouraging change, that the latter were winning victories, being successful in twelve out of the thirteen engagements fought.¹⁸

On the twenty-fourth of September the expedition was ready to move forward to Hupeh along the river. But the force at Ts'ungyang was held in check by a large Taiping army, and there were a few scattered nests of rebels to be destroyed along the lake shore.¹⁹ T'a Chi-pu, who had been sent from Yoehow to reinforce that Ts'ungyang division, drove the rebels back from Yangloussu (September 18) and aided in the capture of the rebel base at Ts'ungyang on the twenty-fifth. The rebels fled, hotly pursued, to Hsienning, where they were defeated. About the same time Kwan Wen, the Tartar general, sent five thousand men from Kingchow, who aided Tsêng's forces at K'ingkow below Yoehow on the Yangtse River, and Tsêng was able to move his headquarters to that place on the second of October.

The report of victories was most grateful to the Peking authorities. The emperor conferred on Tsêng the blue button of the third official rank.²⁰ With becoming modesty

¹⁸ *Dispatches*, III, 19-39. Various dates.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 40-45. Dated September 25, 1854.

²⁰ There were nine grades of official rank indicated by the insignia worn on caps and official dress. The buttons for the two highest grades were red, and that of the third grade blue.

Tsêng urged that since he was still in mourning it was scarcely suitable for him to accept such distinction, that whatever he had done was simply his bounden duty under the grave circumstances, and that any good results achieved were due solely to the merits of T'a Chi-pu, Lo Tse-nan, Yang Tsai-fu, and others. He would be glad if the emperor did not press the promotion on him.²¹ The emperor's reply to this memorial said that there was no higher form of filial piety than to come to the rescue of the imperilled country, a deed that must satisfy his departed mother's spirit. For his own part he appreciated Tsêng's great merit and no one in the land was ignorant of it.

The initial stages of the enterprise were now past. The experiment was a decided success, and the whole force now set off along the Great River to Hupeh, where the Wuhan cities were in hostile hands. Though comparatively few in numbers, the men who followed Tsêng were well drilled and well officered. Rebuffs, delays, and dark years still lay ahead, but it was only in the multiplication of this new type of soldiers and marines that hope of ultimate victory could be placed. At that moment great armies under veteran *tituhs* and imperial commissioners camped like locusts at Nanking, Yangchow, and Chin-kiang. Sometimes they captured small detachments of rebels who freely came and went, but they never faced large armies, or, if they did, it was almost inevitably to be defeated. A sufficient force of these new Hunan armies could have prevented the spread of the rebellion from Kwangsi, or quickly have put it down at Nanking. Now, however, the rebels were entrenched in the three strongholds and their hordes of followers were carrying on guerrilla warfare, going from district to district, capturing towns and abandoning them after they were looted.

²¹ *Dispatches*, III, 46.

Imperial soldiers were too scattered and too feeble to strike a blow. Timid magistrates and prefects fled from their posts; brave ones died on the walls, tragic but fruitless sacrifices.

The Taiping cause had deteriorated, their armies no longer fighting with the same fervor as that first one from Kwangsi, while the religious illusions of their chiefs became constantly more erratic, their pretensions to divinity more insistent. Yet the opportunity for plunder and adventure continued to make a strong appeal to the classes whence the robber bands came, and their predatory companies, great and small, with yellow-robed or red-robed leaders, went almost unchecked to and fro, like a fire that burns over dry prairies. Tsêng's band of thirteen thousand, which in 1850 or 1851 might have put down the movement with ease, could only point the way now.

Final arrangements having been made, it sailed down the river to deliver Wuchang from the enemy. This city had fallen to the Eastern king in June, 1854, while Tsêng was repairing the damage caused by his earlier defeats. To prevent this catastrophe the central government had sent Tsêng many frantic dispatches while Hupeh was in danger the previous winter and spring, and one of the bitter thoughts during those humiliating days in Changsha had been that his failure had brought about the loss of the capital of Hupeh, for this was a strategic point on a strategic line. The thousand miles of the Yangtse River from the point where it breaks through the gorges above Ichang to the bar at Woosung drains a vast and fertile region, the heart of China. Of this important waterway the most strategic portion is that which stretches from Yoehow to Hukow at the mouth of the Poyang Lake, a distance of about three hundred miles. Yoehow controls the outlet of the Tungting Lake, into which flow the

waters of the Yangtse from Ssueh'uan and those of the Hunan-Kweichow basin. At Hankow it receives the drainage of northern Hupeh and a part of Honan from the Tan River, and, through the Poyang Lake, the outlet by water to all of Kiangsi. For the portion between Hukow and Nanking the city of Anking and Kingchu-kwan are of the greatest importance.

Although Tsêng could not move his armies forward until after the capture of Ts'ungyang and Hsienning on September 25 and 30, the siege of Wuchang had already been started by a portion of his force under Lo Tse-nan and T'a Chi-pu, who gave help to Kwan Wen (September 22). As soon as the main force arrived the siege began in earnest. In a general assault on October 12 and 13 the outer defences were shattered and a thousand boats burned. After several hours of fierce fighting on the fourteenth, Hanyang and Wuchang fell simultaneously. This was a fearful blow to the Taipings, who had placed great stress on holding these cities and believed them to be impregnable, particularly Wuchang. Their capture was therefore a cheering victory for the imperialists,²² particularly since the rebels had abandoned Hwangchow, a strategic town near the Anhui border north of the Yangtse, and Wuchang-hsien opposite, thus practically clearing Hupeh of rebels.²³

In reporting these victories Tsêng not only made the usual recommendations for rewards to his own followers, but urged the restoration to office of former officials relegated to private life for trivial or technical faults. His own share in the honors awarded was the right to wear a single-eyed peacock feather and appointment as acting

²² *Dispatches*, III, 56-62; *Nicnp'u*, III, 18. Here the date is the fourteenth. *Hatsuroku Ran Shi* does not mention the fall of the cities.

²³ Not the provincial capital.

governor of Hupeh.²⁴ He was commanded to divide his army and fleet and hasten down the river to Nanking, taking Kiukiang and Anking as he went, acting in consultation with Yang Pei, viceroy of Hukwang, and T'á Chi-pu.²⁵

For the time being this last order was impossible to follow, because scattered groups of fleeing rebels were taking refuge in the Han River and small tributary streams. These must first be dealt with. Several dozen *sampan* were sent to this region, and on the fifteenth of October they rounded up and burned the vessels of the enemy, more than a thousand in number, which were trying to get back into the Yangtse.²⁶

Military affairs were now progressing favorably, but the maintenance of the troops was a matter of more concern than ever before, as shown by a dispatch of October 21, in which Tsêng complains of very poor provincial support for his armies. Had he accepted the office as acting governor of Hupeh this might have been somewhat remedied, because Tsêng would then have had direct control over provincial funds; but as things were, he was more or less at the mercy of the regular officials of various provinces whom he could reach only indirectly through the emperor. The heavy strain of maintaining his lengthening line of communications and of securing needed reinforcements and supplies might, he feared, re-

²⁴ The peacock feather was like a modern decoration and three grades were recognised, single-eyed, double-eyed, and triple-eyed. Tsêng refused the office of acting governor because, as he wrote home in a letter of November 3, it would offend his mother's memory. To raise troops and help to quell the rebellion are duties not to be avoided by a loyal officer, but to accept office and strive for honors must be scrupulously avoided during the period of mourning. The emperor accepted Tsêng's refusal to take the office but reprimanded him for not using the title pending the acceptance of his petition. *Nienp'u*, III, 22b, 23.

²⁵ Imperial mandate summarised in *Nienp'u*, III, 20a.

²⁶ *Nienp'u*, III, 20; *Home Letters*, November 3, 1854.

sult in a breakdown which would leave him stranded. Moreover, he feared the result of this financial uncertainty on the morale of his men, particularly because the harassed and discontented populace might at any moment swell the rebel ranks. He therefore begged the imperial government to secure grants of money from Kwangtung and Ssueh'uan, together with 80,000 *taels* of silver from Kiangsi.²⁷

This brings out clearly the financial weakness of China. The practices of modern public finance were then far below the horizon in what was still essentially a mediaeval state. Any war that arose must pay its own way in whatever manner was possible. This great rebellion had already impoverished the treasuries of several fruitful and wealthy provinces to such an extent that they were failing to remit their allotted taxes to Peking. The coinage was debased; the large, well-made brass coins of K'anghsi and K'ienlung were giving place to the inferior coinage of Hsienfung and his successors who came into this heritage of poverty. Had the modern system of transferring the burden of war to another generation through the issue of government obligations been known at this time, and had the government been sufficiently centralised, it is fairly certain that the Taiping rebellion might have been crushed within a year after it gained headway. Tsêng Kuo-fan, as can be seen all through his dispatches, year after year, by constantly devising methods for squeezing out new taxes, managed with the utmost difficulty to get enough to maintain the small force that he dared to employ. Had there been a strong government with relatively unimpaired credit behind him, Tsêng could easily have gathered a force ten times as great as the one he did employ, and brought the T'ienwang to terms. For in Nanking the latter was already feeling the

²⁷ *Dispatches*, III, 67-71.

pinch of poverty and was only kept alive by the incessant activity of his scattered armies which continued to send in from Anhui and Kiangsi plunder which was sometimes kept out of Nanking by the besieging armies. That this was not always enough is proved by the necessity he was under, on October 19, 1854, of driving out of Nanking all the women who had been retained as prisoners, those especially strong or beautiful alone excepted, in order to conserve food.²⁸ Furthermore, the soldiers on that side were growing definitely inferior to the imperialists as now organised, and far inferior to the earnest, dashing troops that had broken through the imperialist lines in Kwangsi to the terror of official China.

But there was no way to mobilise the finances of the nation without revolutionising the entire system of checks and balances between provincial and national authorities. The Taiping rebellion of itself was more of a problem than Hsienfung's advisers and administrators could meet; complete administrative readjustment was not practicable, if it ever occurred to their minds. They must "muddle through" as best they could with the cumbrous machinery devised for another purpose, which was, however, the only kind that functioned at all.

This point is worth dwelling on, because the rebellion was as good as crushed if only the strength of the nation could have been brought to bear on the Taiping forces. The latter had not and—except in a few regions in the central provinces where they had control for several years, and possibly not even there—apparently did not establish any sort of permanent civil government, but, to the end of their activities, derived a large portion of their revenues from plunder.²⁹ With the decentralisation

²⁸ *P'ingting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, III, 20b, 21a; *Hatsuzoku Ran Shi*, p. 29.

²⁹ Michio's report to Bruce, British minister in Peking, telling of his observations in Nanking in 1861, in the Blue Book on the Taiping rebellion,

of the imperial government no remedies were possible for the difficulties in which Tsêng found himself; therefore the Taiping rebels were destined to go on winning victories for many years and to do incalculable damage. But now they were being driven back from the north, where Mongol tribesmen had been brought into action, and in Hupeh by country recruits which were winning victories over superior forces in nearly every engagement. Even the regulars, with a small intermixture of 'braves,' were winning some advantages near Nanking. In Anhui, where Li Hung-chang was fighting with forces similar to Tsêng's, some victories had been reported.³⁰ Large sums of money were being spent, but under such conditions as to waste it in the old way upon the old type of forces rather than to spend it profitably for new, effective armies.

Separating his army and navy into three divisions, Tsêng set off, early in November, towards Nanking. One division of Tsêng's land forces, under T'a Chi-pu, marched along the road south of the river through Tayeh (now the center of the great iron mines) and Hsingkuo. Similarly Kwei Ming, leading Hupeh forces, marched north of the river, with orders to take Kichow and Kwangchih. The flotilla under Tsêng himself went down in two divisions. The army under T'a Chi-pu and the water force under Tsêng followed their programmes and reached T'ienchia-chen, about forty miles above Kiu-kiang. But the second division under Kwei Ming was delayed through the inefficiency of that commander, and he was finally relieved of command and his force attached to Tsêng.³¹

1862, states that they were still as late as that living, not on taxes and other regular sources of income, but chiefly on plunder. See MacNair, *Modern Chinese History, Selected Readings*, pp. 348 ff.

³⁰ *P'ing-ting Fuch-fei Chi-luch*, III, 18b, 19a.

³¹ *Nienp'u*, III, 21.

Meanwhile the rebels about T'ienchia-chen had built very strong defences, and had stretched two great chains, fastened to pontoons, across the river, making it necessary for the imperialists to capture P'anpei hill as a preliminary to cutting the chains. The rebel strength was considerable at this point; they were led by Ts'in Jih-kang, the Yenwang.³² After stubborn fighting on three separate days, the hill was eventually captured, November 24, 1854, and ten thousand of its defenders were reported slain.³³ By the last of November all the rebels were concentrated at T'ienchia-chen. A naval battle on December 2 resulted in their total defeat, four thousand of their boats being destroyed and the chains cut. This was by far the greatest contest that had fallen to the Hunan water forces. It was learned from intercepted papers that several thousand of the original rebels, together with "many tens of thousands" of their followers, had been sent there under orders from the Eastern king to hold the place at any cost.³⁴ They were now forced to retire to Kiukiang.

Shi Ta-k'ai, the Assistant king, then hurried from Anhui to Kiukiang to prevent an imperialist victory in the Poyang region.³⁵ By the time Tsêng arrived before the city the Taiping armies held it securely, and moreover they had seen to it that boats were stationed within the Poyang Lake. Try as he would, Tsêng could not make the slightest headway at Kiukiang, and the boats that he sent into the lake to attack Takut'ang were bottled up by the rebels, who now proceeded to attack Tsêng's larger vessels with fire-boats compelling them to retire to Kiukiang. The rebels from Huk'ow then skirted the opposite bank of the river until they got above Kiukiang, whence they attacked the main flotilla with fire-boats and in-

³² *Dispatches*, IV, 34.

³³ *Nienp'u*, III, 24a.

³⁴ *Dispatches*, IV, 42.

³⁵ *Taiping T'ienkuo Yeh Shi*, XII, 18 ff.

condary missiles, thereby destroying several of Tsêng's vessels and even capturing his flagship, on which were many valuable papers and some recently conferred gifts from the emperor. Tsêng himself barely escaped capture in a small boat.³⁶

These reverses robbed the Hunan forces of their fighting spirit. The problem of the commissariat also became serious. Moreover, to add to Tsêng's difficulty, many of his own crews, in a mutinous spirit, withdrew above Wusueh. Only the persuasion of his close friends, Lo Tse-nan and others, prevented Tsêng's ending his life by mounting a horse and riding into the midst of his adversaries.³⁷ In a dispatch of February 16 he begged the emperor to punish him for his defeats, but in view of his previous victories he was excused.³⁸ The end of his misfortunes had not yet come, for a storm now wrecked twenty-two of his *ch'ang-lung* and *sampan* vessels and badly damaged twenty-four more; those that were able to move sailed up to Kingkow above Hankow and the plan for an advance to Nanking was indefinitely postponed.³⁹

Tsêng recommended setting up a boat-yard at Sint'i, not far from Yoehow, under supervision of Li Mung-ch'un and P'eng Yu-ling, supported financially by the Hukwang viceroy and the governor of Hunan.⁴⁰ What remained of the fleet was to coöperate with Hu Lin-yi in opposing the rebels who were advancing towards Wuchang, whilst Tsêng himself, with a view to fostering the fighting spirit of his men, was to remain at Kiukiang and keep in touch with the fleet imprisoned within the lake. To proceed with all his army to Nanchang, whither a portion of the rebels had gone, was unthinkable as long as his line of communication was in so precarious a condi-

³⁶ *Nienp'u*, III, 29b, 30a; *Dispatches*, V, 3-6; *Home Letters*, V, 1.

³⁷ *Nienp'u*, III, 30a.

³⁸ *Dispatches*, V, 3-6.

³⁹ *Nienp'u*, IV, 1.

⁴⁰ *Dispatches*, V, 12-14 (February 24).

tion. Should Kiukiang be taken, he would consider moving on to one of the interior cities of Kiangsi and hold his fleet and army together until the main fleet was repaired and in commission once more. He now perceived, when it was too late, the blunder he had committed in not having more thoroughly provided for the defence of the Wuhan cities.

Following this plan, T'a Chi-pu was left to besiege Kiukiang, but Tsêng himself went to Nanchang, the capital of Kiangsi, which he reached on March 5, 1855. Lo Tse-nan, with a portion of the army, was detached from the siege of Kiukiang and sent to join the lake flotilla. Hu Lin-yi received appointment as provincial treasurer of Hupeh and was entrusted with the defence of that province. Officers were dispatched to Human to recruit additional marines. Several more large vessels were ordered in Kiangsi.⁴¹

Nevertheless the storm clouds were growing blacker for the imperialists. Proceeding up the Yangtse along both banks and taking town after town as they went, the insurgents arrived at Hankow on February 23, 1855.⁴² The Eastern king, Yang Siu-ch'ing, came in person to direct these forces and they proved more than a match for the imperialists. For the third time Wuchang fell to the Taiping armies on April 3, the loyal troops retreating to Kingkow where the larger vessels of the fleet were.⁴³ In Kiangsi also Tsêng's affairs had been going from bad to worse. The rebels from Huk'ow, traversing the east shores of the Poyang Lake, captured a large number of towns in the prefectures of Kwanghsin and

⁴¹ *Nienp'u*, IV, 2b, 3a; *Dispatches*, V, 17-19.

⁴² *Dispatches*, V, 25.

⁴³ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, IV, 4b, 5; *Hatsuzoku Ran Shi*, p. 33. Some authorities date the fall April 20, but Tsêng in a letter home (V, 2a) says that the news of the fall reached him on April 15.

Jaochow. On March 16 the flotilla was ordered to attack the rebels at K'angshan while Lo Tse-nan led seven thousand men from Nanchang to the east of the lake in the hope of recovering some of the fallen cities, T'a Chi-pu still remaining in charge of the siege at Kiukiang.⁴⁴ The support of these forces, which were now completely detached from Hunan, Tsêng asked the emperor to lay as a charge upon the governor of Kiangsi, aided by the provinces of Fukien and Chekiang. A new force of five thousand was also requested to be recruited by Yuan Chia-san. By this time the Taiping control of the roads was so complete that Tsêng's memorials had to be sent north-west through Hunan to Kingchow in Hupeh.⁴⁵ Tsêng realised his own danger, and likewise the possibility that the rebels might advance from their base in Wuchang to the attack of his home province, Hunan. In that contingency it might be necessary for T'a Chi-pu and himself to go back to defend their own homes.⁴⁶

Again we are brought face to face with Tsêng's great difficulty, money, or its lack, and practically nothing else.⁴⁷ His thirteen thousand soldiers were as good as any of the Taipings and could easily encounter and defeat superior numbers; they were scarcely equal, however, to the hordes that came in waves up the Yangtse. His disaster at Kiukiang had been due in the last analysis to lack of funds, and at that moment he was unable to advance because through poverty he could not get enough men to carry on warfare on a suitable scale, with forces for attack, with reserves enough in the camps, and with large garrisons to hold the captured cities. With men

⁴⁴ *Nienp'u*, IV, 4a.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5a; *Dispatches*, V, 25-33.

⁴⁶ We must remember that all Tsêng's men as well as their commander were Hunanese, and that it is difficult to exaggerate the local and provincial sentiment in China at that period.

⁴⁷ *Home Letters*, V, 2a.

and money Tsêng felt that the war could be won; without them all was lost. The limitations placed on him were irksome indeed. He was eager to retire to his quiet countryside; nothing but an abiding sense of loyalty held him true to a task that seemed well-nigh hopeless.⁴⁸

By the end of April Tsêng had secured, by great efforts, a fleet of two hundred boats with three thousand well-drilled men, to join Lo Tse-nan in the Jaochow and Kwanghsin region. Li T'su-ch'ing had been sent to Nank'ang-fu.⁴⁹ These regions were on opposite sides of the lake, and the flotilla found its chief usefulness in keeping the rebels apart and communications open between Tsêng's divided army. But these small imperialist forces were entirely inadequate to face the Taipings then in central China. The Eastern king was at Wuchang, Shi Ta-k'ai, one of their ablest generals, at Kiukiang, and Lo Ta-kang at Hankow. Taiping armies were overrunning the eastern portion of Kiangsi, including Kingtechen, the site of the imperial potteries. There is some evidence that they contemplated an invasion of Chekiang along the road through Kwanghsin. This Tsêng hoped to be able to frustrate by a scheme for unified control of the whole military area, and the emperor appointed him commander-in-chief to carry out his proposed plans. But the plan was quite too elaborate and ambitious for immediate enforcement owing to the scarcity of men, the small number of boats in their lake flotilla, and the need for holding a large detachment at Kiukiang.⁵⁰

During the month of May a few victories were reported by Lo Tse-nan, and the rebels in that region retired into Chekiang. But these encouraging episodes were offset by the quarrel that arose between Tsêng and the governor

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Dispatches*, V, 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, V, 25, also 32-36. The plan implied four military districts embracing the provinces of Hupeh, Anhui, and Kiangsi.

over the enrollment and management of recruits, and particularly over the funds necessary for their support. The quarrel became so bitter that Tsêng decided to move his headquarters from Nanchang to Wuch'en-chen, and later to Nank'ang-fu, both on the east shore of the lake. Eventually he succeeded in having the governor removed.⁵¹

Appeals from Chekiang now reached Lo Tse-nan to come into that province to defeat the rebels whom he had driven out of Kiangsi, but when he was ready to start in that direction word came that a band of the enemy from Hupeh had entered Kiangsi from the west and were now at Ining, where they were severely oppressing the people and threatening Nanchang itself. This news was sufficient to recall Lo from the direction of Chekiang, not only because of the danger to Kiangsi but because this city communicated directly with P'ingkiang and Liuyang and was a back-door entrance to Hunan. But his withdrawal left the entire eastern half of Kiangsi open to the rebels. Tsêng himself was still at Nank'ang-fu and found it difficult to keep in communication either with T'a Chi-pu at Kiukiang or with the force at Nanchang, which was now threatened from the west. This threat was removed late in August by the victory of Lo Tse-nan after a three days' fight.⁵²

In order to prepare for future victories Tsêng suggested the remodelling of the Hupeh armies, for the regulars, many of whom were then at Teian, were useless. He also secured the consent of the emperor for Yang Tsai-fu to enroll more men in Hunan, which was agreed to. Eventually Yang appeared at Kingkow with a large number of new vessels to coöperate with Hu Lin-yi in the

⁵¹ *Nienp'u*, IV, 7. For the dispatch on the governor's stubbornness (July 25, 1855), see *Dispatches*, V, 61 ff.

⁵² *Nienp'u*, IV, 10-12; *Dispatches*, VI, 6-13.

attempt to recapture the Wuhan cities.⁵³ While things were slowly progressing, Teian, where the whole Hupeh army had concentrated, was lost, thus proving Tsêng's contention regarding that force. The viceroy was now replaced by the Tartar general, Kwan Wen. In Kiangsi a more serious loss was the death of T'a Chi-pu, who was laying siege to Kiukiang. Chow Hung-shan, a trustworthy but not particularly able man, was appointed to his command.⁵⁴

The regular army during August went up the river from Nanking and captured the city of Wuhu in the rice district about fifty miles above Nanking.⁵⁵ In the same month Tsêng's lake flotilla succeeded in overthrowing the fortifications at Hukow, thus affording free communication with the Yangtse once more.⁵⁶

But panic now seized on the provincial authorities of Hunan; on three sides their security was menaced. Out of Kwangtung and Kwangsi new rebels surged forth,—not Taipings, but possible recruits to their cause,—whose presence in southeastern Hunan menaced that province and Kiangsi. Into the western districts Nien rebels had penetrated, and to the northwest the Taipings from Hupeh threatened to enter the province again. The governor therefore memorialised the emperor, asking that Lo Tse-nan be sent from Ining to the defence of Hunan. Against this Tsêng entered a vigorous protest, because he considered Lo's army to be one of the most necessary units in his plan of operations, and its withdrawal a source of danger to the whole campaign. The governor of Hunan, he thought, should meet the menace of local bandits with his own men. Through his representations

⁵³ *Nienp'u*, IV, 11.

⁵⁴ *Dispatches*, VI, 1-3.

⁵⁵ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, IV, 15b.

⁵⁶ *Dispatches*, VI, 14-18; *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, IV, 16a.

the emperor was persuaded rather to permit Lo Tse-nan to press on towards Wuchang, with the hope that he might help drive the rebels from Hupeh and open the river to Hukow as soon as possible.⁵⁷

The work of clearing the lake region had progressed well during the summer and early fall. But no sooner was that accomplished than the rebels from Kwangtung, who had so frightened the governor of Hunan a few weeks before, left Hunan and entered Kian-fu, south of Nanchang. They were reinforced by the Assistant king, Shi Ta-k'ai, who gathered the rebels from the regions of Hupeh which were being made untenable for them by Lo Tse-nan, and took city after city in western Kiangsi, until by Christmas, 1855, practically all the towns in the four prefectures of Shuichow, Lingkiang, Yuanchow, and Kian had fallen.⁵⁸ The Assistant king was supposed to be leading an army of 100,000 men, and the forces of the governor were far from able to cope with so powerful and skillful an adversary. Tsêng, on his part, saw but one course open to him, namely, to gather all his forces from the regions of Kiukiang, Hukow, and the Lake districts to Nanchang, there to stand on the defensive with Lo Tse-nan to hold the road to Hupeh and prevent the rebels from attacking in the rear. His messages could now go only through Chekiang. He was practically cut off.

The year 1855 thus ended in gloom. Tsêng was in effect a prisoner at Nanchang; Wuchang and Kiukiang were in rebel hands, and the control of the river from Nanking to Kingkow was theirs also. On the other hand, the Hunan reinforcements at Kingkow, while not yet strong enough to take the offensive, were able to prevent the insurgents from passing them and entering Hunan. Shi Ta-k'ai was in western Kiangsi to be sure, but he was not

⁵⁷ *Dispatches*, VI, 23-25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 61-64a.

on the river. A few minor successes had been won in Anhui. Yet on the whole the picture was a dark one. Had the Taipings been wisely guided and more ably led, the emperor might well have trembled on his throne.