

## *The Hand of God in the Siege of Peking.\**

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**F**REDERICK the Great is said to have inquired of his chaplain what he considered to be the proof of the authenticity of the Bible. The chaplain replied, "The Jews, Your Majesty." Should any one ask what is the evidence of a Providence which watches over the affairs of men, the compendious answer might well be, "The Siege in Peking." Instead of submitting the case to argument, it is better to confine our attention to a few outline facts.

I. The preservation of the lives of the foreigners in Peking before the Legation guards arrived.—There is probable, but not certain evidence that the Grand Council held a meeting at which the question of exterminating all Occidentals in Peking was discussed, and nothing but the vacillation of Prince Ch'ing seems to have delayed the act.

II. The arrival of the Legation guards by the very last opportunity.—Had they come two days later, the utter and irreparable ruin of the railway, and the general blaze throughout the country, would have prevented them from coming, as it prevented Admiral Seymour a few days later. This would have insured the massacre of every foreigner at once.

III. The immunity from attack while foreigners were unaware of their serious peril.—Many were scattered in distant parts of Peking, and some even at the Western Hills, as if nothing were wrong. They were gathered in by the 8th of June; the largest party of all, about twenty-five in number, travelling without escort thirteen miles from T'ung-chou through a region seething with animosity to foreigners, not only without attack, but with no threatening symptoms of any sort.

IV. These Americans just mentioned with others to the number of seventy, took refuge in the large premises of the Methodist Mission, where for a period of twelve days they were in a state of semi-siege, a time which was a most important rehearsal of the coming period of far greater trial. An elaborate organization was at once effected, committees of many kinds chosen, fortifications and defences begun, sentries mounted, the Chinese Christians drilled and armed, so that when the whole body of foreigners assembled at the British Legation, and the British Minister desired the active co-operation of the Americans, the whole machinery was in order

\* An address delivered at a union thanksgiving service, held in the British Legation, Peking, Sunday morning, August 19th, after the arrival of the relieving army. (Note.—The manuscript of this address was sent to Shanghai within a few weeks of the time of its delivery, but seems to have been lost in the mails, a fact which was not discovered until long afterward.)

and it was only necessary to slip the belt on the wheel and it began to work.

V. The safety of the native Christians.—When the sudden murder of the German Minister led to the order that all foreigners should repair to their Legations, nothing was said in regard to the native Christians. They were regarded as outside the sphere of influence of the Ministers, who took no action in regard to them at all. To many they were an unconsidered and a negligible quantity. Largely through the agency of the lamented Prof. James, who was killed at the very time of the entrance of the Christians to the palace which he had helped to secure for them, they were graciously and marvellously provided for at a time of dire extremity, in the Su-wang-fu. Little as most of us realized it at the time, this palace and its grounds were absolutely essential to our salvation. Without it the British, Spanish, Japanese, French, and German Legations could not have been held. Without the services of the Chinese Christians, the work of defence could not have been prosecuted. "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."

VI. In round numbers there were probably three thousand persons to be fed during the siege, exclusive of the many hundred marines. Many foreigners came into the Legation, as did nearly all the Chinese, without any provisions whatever. It was inherently improbable that any considerable food-supply could be obtained within our lines for a siege of unknown duration. Yet in a grain-shop on Legation street was discovered between fifty and a hundred tons of wheat of this year's crop, recently arrived from Honan. Besides this there were mountains of rice, white and yellow, Indian corn, pulse, and much else. All the shops in Peking dealing in foreign goods were within our lines, and their stores were immediately available, and during the whole siege were absolutely essential. There was a large supply of ponies for the races, as well as mules, most of which were consumed for food, and nearly all the remainder were needed for hauling, grinding grain, etc. The food for all these animals was supplied as remarkably as that for men and women. Considerable sorghum and beans were discovered, and a huge pile of millet-straw, close to two dwelling-houses which had been burned, one on each side of the straw, which was not disturbed. Many old residents of Peking were surprised to find that the water of the eight wells in the British Legation was of great excellence, and it was abundantly proved that it could be safely drunk without being filtered or boiled. While there were heavy drafts on these wells during the great fires, they never once failed us. The fuel supply was absolutely unlimited, though had it been absent, nothing could have taken its place. We were surrounded by hundreds of

thousands of pounds of coal, which had only to be brought a short distance. Wrecked buildings afforded all the kindling needed and abundant timbers for fortifications.

VII. Miscellaneous supplies were got at the foreign store, and clothing for many foreigners, who had not even a change of garments, at tailor shops near by. One of the greatest and most imperative and constant needs was material for sand-bags, of which perhaps 50,000 may have been made. At first Legation curtains, damask table-cloths, and any and every fabric obtainable was used. Later the supply from the foreign stores and from Chinese sources seemed literally inexhaustible, and to the end never gave out. From Chinese dwellings within the lines, or taken in, were procured enormous quantities of clothing most useful for the destitute Chinese Christians, until their wants in all directions were amply supplied, and much was sold at auction for their benefit. Materials for the defence were discovered in many places, notably in a blacksmith's shop, where was obtained an anvil, bellows, smelting-pots, and, best of all, an old Chinese cannon, which proved invaluable. It was mounted on an Italian carriage, loaded with Russian shell, refilled by the British armourer, charged with Chinese powder, and fired by an American gunner—justly termed the "International Gun." In many shops and houses were found brittania ware to the extent of several cartloads, much of which was used in making balls for the cannon and shot for an Italian one pound gun, besides many bullets. Of all the miscellaneous stuff which came to hand, very little proved amiss in the end.

VIII. The restraining hand of God upon the Chinese.—When foreigners came into the Legations, and everything was in a chaotic state, the Chinese might readily have annihilated the whole body at a blow. While the Chinese held the city wall, they could easily have made every Legation uninhabitable if they had used the right means. Rifle shots alone would have been sufficient. Then they adopted well-chosen plans to burn the British Legation by the spread of fires set on the outside. Of these attacks three were fierce, persistent, and dangerous in the extreme. Yet in the end they not only all failed, but we were in every case left in a stronger position than before. More than once the wind suddenly veered about, saving us from what appeared to be imminent destruction. Buildings which sheltered the enemy and which might spread fires in our Legation limits, being removed, we were better protected. The destruction of the Han-lin-yuan was the greatest blow to Confucianism ever delivered, and was the means of extending our line of defence a considerable distance, the position being later made almost impregnable. More terrible than all else was the threat of mining. This

we know to have been actually begun in two places, and perhaps elsewhere, one in a building in the Carriage Park, one on the wall near our most advanced post to the west. Why were these mines never finished?

The Chinese might at many different times have made a sudden and violent attack at a weak point, from which it would have been difficult to defend ourselves, the lines being very long and the defenders few. Had we been attacked by European or Japanese troops, they would certainly have crept down the edge of the Canal in the dark, where our rifles could not command them, and have rushed the front gate. Only two days before the siege was raised, was a platform completed for the planting of a gun to prevent this, but owing to the greater peril elsewhere that gun was never mounted there. A few hundred Chinese, willing to throw away their lives to ensure the capture of the Legations, would have taken them at any moment during the first month of the siege. Why was it never done, or even attempted? The Chinese were in some way kept from following up the principal advantages which they gained. At the very beginning of the siege nearly all the Legations were abandoned in a panic, but the Chinese did not enter, and the positions were reoccupied. At another time the Americans abandoned the city wall, but the Chinese did find it out until too late, and it was at once retaken. When the new battery had begun to play on the house in the south stable-court, a few shots threatened to bring the house tumbling down. Rifles attacked the battery, and it was withdrawn and never replanted there.

At a later date shells were thrown into the house of the Chinese secretary in a way to threaten the whole Legation, as well as that one dwelling. Again the rifles assailed the gunners, and after five shots the battery was withdrawn permanently. Time after time when the gunners appeared to have got the exact range, the shelling ceased. The very last night of the siege the shells were most destructive, but only ten shots were fired, and the next day the gun was gone. The most terrible engines of destruction were rendered comparatively harmless. It has been estimated that between a million and a half and two million bullets must have been discharged at us. In some of the earlier attacks, when we appeared to be surrounded by several thousand foes, there seemed to be 134 shots a minute, or more than two a second. Yet excluding men at the loop-holes, only three or four persons are known to have been injured by these bullets in the crowded British Legation, where there were probably never less than 800 persons on an average, and sometimes over 1,000. One marine was killed in this way and two or three others wounded, and the last day of the siege two civilians were

scratched. After the relieving force had entered the Legation, the only injury received by any lady took place. No child was hit, though the yards swarmed with them. Careful count shows the number of shells and shot fired at all the Legations during the siege to be about 2,900. In the British Legation it is believed that no one not on duty at the loop-holes was ever really injured by any one of these, although a few Chinese were hurt by bricks knocked down by cannon balls. Hundreds of solid shots fell in the Han Lin courts, in the Ministers' houses, and in other crowded places. Why were these innumerable missiles so harmless? For a long time there appeared to be from twelve to fifteen guns playing at once. Thirteen bomb-proofs were laboriously dug out, but so far as is known not one of them was ever entered to escape from a shell.

IX. The restraining hand of God in warding off disease.—The overcrowding was excessive, the conditions most unwholesome. Orientals are impatient of sanitary restraints. Whooping-cough, measles, typhoid and scarlet fevers, as well as small-pox have all been experienced during the siege by both foreigners and Chinese, but there was no contagion to speak of and no epidemic. What an opportunity for the development of Asiatic cholera! Bad and insufficient food has caused considerable mortality among Chinese children and the aged, but in general the vital statistics have been extraordinary. There was no known case of heat-stroke, and for this latitude the weather throughout was phenomenal. The physicians available for service were exceedingly numerous and skillful. One of the most intelligent patients declared that in no hospital in the civilized world would better care and more tender nursing be secured. Many lady doctors laid aside all professional etiquette, and were content to act simply as nurses. Under the circumstances, the percentage of losses in the hospital cannot be considered large, especially among so many serious cases.

X. The Lord sent a spirit of confusion among our enemies, who feared us far more than we feared them. Their most savage attacks seemed designed to prevent us from making sorties, which they exceedingly dreaded, and tried in every way to prevent. On our part there was a spirit of unity rare to see. Greek, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Christians fraternized as never before. We represented every country in Europe, except Turkey and Greece, besides three in Asia, and the United States. What a Noah's ark! Yet the thought of Plato and the hint of Cicero concerning 'the common bond' which links the whole human race was seldom more strongly felt, realizing the idea of Paul that we are all members one of another. Amid political and military jealousies this fact will remain a precious memory. The harmony of the defended was well

