

# The War Between China and Japan.

## NARRATIVE UP TO DATE.

BY COLONEL MAURICE.

(From the United Service Magazine, continued.)

"Such combinations never come off." That would undoubtedly have been the verdict of Napoleon if one of his marshals or one of his reigning brothers had proposed to him such a scheme as that by which Field Marshal Yamagata has destroyed the army at Ping-Yang. For such violation of "all the rules of war," Von Moltke was in the 1866 campaign condemned by all those who think that the experience of war in the past can be reduced to a set of formulæ: and it was, for a long time, difficult to get the attention of many of our own best soldiers sufficiently directed to the changes which have been introduced into war by modern conditions, to see that Von Moltke was right. Nowadays it is, I think, almost only those who do not read and who know nothing of war in the past, who doubt the nature of the change which has taken place, though a few chiefly civilian writers, like Mr. O'Connor Morris, who do read but do not understand, fail to realise that Von Moltke was condemned, precisely as Napoleon was condemned in his own day by the Mack, because both of them, like Mirabeau, had "swallowed formulæ;" because both of them had studied the past not less thoroughly but more thoroughly than their critics, and had adapted its experience to new conditions.

It will be seen from what I have said, that, as I think, the handling of the Japanese troops shows that their leader has profited by all the most recent experiences of modern war, and has used them in a way which would make the reputation of a European leader. The only phrase which I should wish modified in the very admirable report which was furnished by Reuter of a short conversation I had with Mr. Emmet is, that in which I said that Yamagata's tactics "would not have disgraced a Western general." I think, as I have now put it, that they would have "made the reputation" of a Western general. In order, however, to do him justice, it is necessary to take up the story of the campaign from the point at which I left off in my narrative last month. I then carried down the story to Wednesday, August 22nd, not by the way, as the date was unfortunately printed, August 12th.

On August 22nd, news had come in of what was described as "a great Chinese victory," in which the Chinese had driven in the Japanese forces from Ping-Yang to within fifty miles of Soul. Further, it was reported that certain Chinese Cavalry had utterly routed a very large force of Japanese Infantry, who had landed at the mouth of the Ping-Yang inlet. My object then was to point out that

it was impossible that a battle could have by that date taken place between the main Chinese and Japanese "armies." Obviously, it was an affair of outposts. Nevertheless, it is clear that in this, as in many, though not all, of the wild reports that have reached us, there was a substratum of truth.

There never has been a series of reports, the reception of which more forcibly illustrated the saying of the song, that

"Little fools believe too much,  
And great fools not at all."

Some writers have penned enthusiastic leaders upon the wildest rumours started by the panic of Shanghai. Some have aired their wisdom by professing disbelief in most accurately-written information from the spot. For, in fact, we have had many data to go upon, and these, as they have accumulated during the month, and lead up to the final catastrophe both by sea and land, I propose now to summarise. It will be seen that many of even the figures given us correspond very closely with those that are reported as employed in the final engagement.

A report which appeared on September 3rd, recorded, in corroboration of previous information, but evidently with much more complete knowledge, that on August 13th, 5000 Chinese troops had been pushed on to Ping-Yang and had thence driven out what was obviously a mere Japanese outpost. The same message recorded how five days later 17,000 more Chinamen had arrived, arising the total force in and about Ping-Yang to about 22,000 men. It was further reported that on that day a Japanese force had landed at Ping-Yang inlet, and the altogether incredible account of the success of Chinese Cavalry against a large force of Japanese Infantry was recorded. From that point the records were conflicting. Some of them said that the Chinese force fell back when the guns of the fleet at Ping-Yang inlet had opened on them, others that the Chinese general had subsequently advanced upon Hwang-Ju at the mouth of the inlet and captured it, and that the Japanese fleet had drawn off. At all events it is clear that either the Japanese then effected their lodgment at Hwang-Ju, the Chinese Cavalry having withdrawn after merely driving in some advanced parties, or that the Japanese occupied it as soon as the Chinese forces had fallen back from the inlet, because it was impossible for them, with such forces as they had available, to hold the whole distance between Ping-Yang and Hwang-Ju while they were at the same time pushing South.

As regards the column from Chemulpho and Soul, as representative of the general condition of the Japanese forces in Korea, we had in the *Times* of August 28th a most excellent description from a writer on the spot dating from Soul on July 10th. He was evidently by no means friendly to the Japanese, but he recorded how admirably equipped they

were as a modern army. He told us how they possessed accurate maps of the Korea with all the roads excellently described, with the passages of the rivers and their width and varying depths noted; how they possessed pontoon trains adjusted so as to be available for just the width they would require for passing each of the rivers. Though he does not mention it, we know, from earlier sources, that as part of this equipment they possessed an excellent field telegraph service. Now it is not too much to say that on the possibilities of the field telegraph larger combinations such as were carried out against Ping-Yang nowadays depend. It is this and the telegraph generally which have caused those combinations to "come off," which, as Napoleon truly said of his own time, never did then come off. If Field-Marshal Yamagata had undertaken to combine operations from three distant ports such as the Ping-Yang inlet, Chemulpho and Gensan, without the aid of the telegraph it is tolerably certain that they would not have "come off." We may be tolerably sure that he did not do so. One point, the humour of which appears to have been unnoticed, deserves attention. It is recorded in the reports from Soul that *within ten hours* of the victory at Ping-Yang, the telegraph was completed to a considerable distance in rear of the Army and that it was then being rapidly carried into Soul. In other words with an ample telegraph service under his command, the one direction in which Yamagata did not use it was that in which dangerous reports as to his movements might travel. Admirably has he veiled himself in secrecy up to the moment when secrecy was no longer necessary. We may be sure that the telegraph troops had ample occupation in establishing communication with the two columns from Gensan and Hwang-Ju.

On the evening before the news of the battle arrived I was talking over the situation with a brother officer, and I found that I a little startled him by saying: "If the reports from the front, which I take to be exaggerations with a substance of truth, had not indicated Chinese success, I should have thought that Yamagata did not know his business as well as I now think that he does. I should suppose that now that he is reported to be moving forward, his movements will be rapid, which they could not have been had he had at the front such forces as would have prevented the Chinese from driving in his outposts, for that is evidently what they have been doing." As my prediction was fulfilled it may be worth while to make intelligible the apparent paradox. Every nonmilitary man can easily understand the point of it with a short explanation. It depends on a principle on which all our wars in such countries as the Korea have to be conducted. It applied especially to the 1882 campaign in Egypt, and is described in my history of that campaign. It applied on the Nile, and it applied both in Abyssinia and