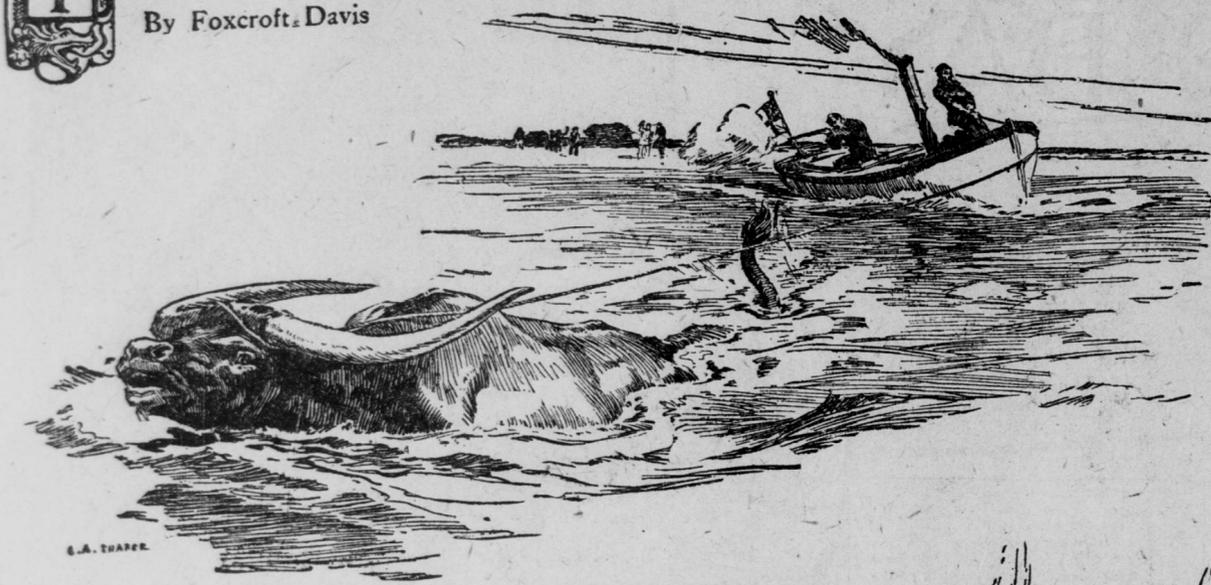


THE SON-OF-FURY-BORN-OF-A-TURTLE'S-EGG

By Foxcroft Davis



G.A. SHAPER

He Turned and Dashed Across the Wide Water, Towing the Launch After Him

In the treaty ports of China there is a song which is sung by certain fellows of the baser sort, and runs thus:—

"The English are at Wei-hai-wei,
The Germans are at Chao-Chau,
Now, will the Germans stay, stay?
And what will the English do, do?"

The raison d'être of the song is that some years ago a couple of German cruisers and a despatch boat or two were loafing in a casual sort of way about the Yellow Sea, in the neighborhood on Chao-Chau Bay.

Now, Chao-Chau is about a hundred miles from Wei-hai-wei, which is a British naval station, with all that that implies. The British, it may be said, are supposed in the east to represent the meek, as typified in the Fourth Beatitude, which says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth." These meek Britishers have made a point for many years of extending their possessions in the east at the rate of a thousand square miles of territory a week. They count that day lost when they don't advance the Union Jack at least a hundred square miles somewhere on this planet. Their methods are simple. There is a disturbance somewhere; the British land, claim ten square miles of territory as indemnity and security and ten square miles more as neutral territory, and there they stick like sticking plaster. The Germans, however, are finding out things all the time, so they have found out this little game of the British and are playing it themselves with great gusto.

One day, while the German cruisers were handy, there was a microscopic rumpus at Chao-Chau. The Germans landed a force, demanded several impossible things, and these not being forthcoming in a lightning flash the Teutons took possession of ten square miles, claimed ten square miles more as neutral territory, and a German naval base was established in about three shakes of a sheep's tail, and there they are to this day, in spite of the disgust of the British.

The monumental cheek of the Germans in doing this was under discussion one night on L'Hirondelle, the little French gunboat commanded by Tourneau, the young lieutenant who had aspirations to become the son-in-law of Vice Admiral Harbord, the British naval commander in those regions. Three young commanders sat around the table in the little cramped cabin of L'Hirondelle. One was Aylwin, the American lieutenant, who had a despatch boat, and the second guest was the Honorable Reginald Frederick Geoffrey Hyde, R. N., who commanded H. M. S. torpedo boat Number Two. He was a lithe, pink checked boy, and his vessel was not much bigger than himself. Hyde had everything against him in the eyes of the Vice Admiral—fortune, rank, and violin playing. He had, however, two transcendent merits. He thought all future wars would be decided by torpedoes, and he was the best rifle shot in the China Sea. Vice Admiral Harbord loved sport as only an Englishman can, and could easily hit a barn door at 20 paces.

Youngsters, like oldsters, when they sit around the cabin table and smoke after dinner, take their grievances to walk, and call attention to the defects of their commanding officers.

"The Germans caught us napping; there can be no doubt of that," said Hyde, disgustedly, knocking the ashes off his cigar. "The Admiralty was to blame in the first place, and everybody else in Wei-hai-wei in the second place. If we had old Harbord there at the time he would have got up a thundering big row two hours in advance of the Germans, and sent them all back, polite and dissatisfied, to their ships. It's the principle of the British navy never to let any row be settled by anybody except itself if it can help it, and it's worked beautifully in the east."

The View of Tourneau
"And it's the policy of the French navy," said Tourneau, sipping his Chateau Yquem daintily, "to take care of the Catholic missionaries of all nations everywhere. You see, the Catholic missionaries are everywhere, and they do not run away; they 'stick' as you say, stick like the devil, and that gives us a chance to stick like the devil too. Whenever the natives get troublesome we send somebody to look after the dear missionaries, and so the natives are reminded that there is such a thing as a French navy."

"We Americans haven't any specific plan of butting in," said Aylwin, "but we manage one way or another to get in the game."

"It's a great game, this East," said Tourneau thoughtfully, "this awakening after two thousand years of slumber. It is no longer fashionable in China to bind the ladies' feet. It is no longer fashionable to kill foreigners. When it is done it is the act of the people not in the Chinese 'smart set,' as you say, and for the empress of China, not the most ardent suffragette, my dear Hyde, could ask for more than she has. When the mandarins enter her presence, they knock their heads nine times on the ground." At this Hyde hummed dolefully:

"The British are at Wei-hai-wei,
The Germans are at Chao-Chau,
Now, will the Germans stay, stay?
And what will the English do, do?"

Then the talk turned upon a proposed expedition the next day and Tourneau was to be left out of it. "You see," said Hyde, "Admiral Harbord hates

me like the devil, but knows I can handle a rifle. As good luck would have it, a water buffalo has gone crazy about ten miles up the river, and is eating up Chinese like grains of rice. Now, the German officers have organized a hunt for that water buffalo, and they claim that it is the neutral zone which he is devastating. We claim it is our duty to kill that water buffalo, and the whole thing has resolved itself into a grave international question which has reached an acute stage. So, as it is well to do things modestly, I am to invite the Admiral to go on a shooting party up the river, after the water buffalo, and just to keep it from looking too British I am taking Aylwin along. He can shoot."

"I was born in the state of Kentucky," briefly responded Aylwin. This allusion was not in the least understood by either Hyde or Tourneau. But Aylwin often said strange things, like all Americans.

"I feel confoundedly sorry for you, old man," Hyde kept on, turning to Tourneau. Everybody knew all about that enterprising young officer and Clarice Harbord. "It seems as if I were playing a dirty game on you in asking Aylwin and leaving you out, but the launch won't hold another man besides the engineer, and Denson, the master at arms, two sailors, Aylwin, myself and Admiral Harbord, whom I count as two men—he is so big and makes such a noise."

"Do not distress yourself, my dear Hyde," replied Tourneau with a grin, and striking his short black beard, "I go down to Wei-hai-wei tomorrow at sunrise. There I shall find Miss Clarice Harbord visiting the family of an officer at Wei-hai-wei and I shall have three days' leave."

Then Tourneau began an adaptation of his own: "The Admiral is at Chao-Chau,
His daughter is at Wei-hai-wei.
Now what will the Admiral do, do?"

For Tourneau means to stay, stay." Aylwin listened to these catiff verses with disgust. "Well," he said presently, with grim philosophy, "something may be gained by being with the Admiral. He can get used to seeing me. That's a great deal."

Hyde smiled indulgently upon Aylwin and Tourneau.

"You fellows are in a tight box. I'll say, however, that the betting in the fleet is about two to one on your getting those charming young ladies. Admiral Harbord hasn't given his consent yet, I believe?" Aylwin and Tourneau wagged their heads dolefully, like two dissenting mandarins.

"But he has not withheld it," said Tourneau.

The Water Buffalo

"We are simply waiting for him to come off the perch," added Aylwin. "Miss Harbord means to stand by me. I don't know whether Miss Clarice means to desert Tourneau or not."

For answer Tourneau leaned back in his chair, smiled and sang softly:

"The Admiral is at Chao-Chau,
His daughter is at Wei-hai-wei.
Now what will the Admiral do, do?"

For Tourneau means to stay, stay." Then the talk fell upon water buffaloes in general—those patient beasts with great branching horns plodding through the overflowed paddy fields, with a Chinaman wading through the water after him. The water buffalo is a remarkably patient beast, but like all other patient creatures when he gets mad he is mad all through.

The one up the river, which had become a burning international issue, had not only got mad but had gone mad. The Chinese are very superstitious about animals that go mad, as Hyde explained.

"The Chinese have been beating tom-toms all over the place and burning paper prayers and letting off firecrackers with a view of soothing the buffalo, but, as you may imagine, it hasn't worked. The buffalo is not soothed."

"But he will be tomorrow," replied Aylwin rising, as a boy appeared at the cabin door and announced that a boat had come from the torpedo boat for her commander.

Tourneau bade his friends a cheerful goodby. "Every one to his taste," he said, "you and Hyde like chasing wild buffaloes through the paddy fields. I prefer the society of my adored one at 5 o'clock in the afternoon in a drawing room at Wei-hai-wei. Good luck to you, poor unfortunates that you are."

The next morning dawned fair and bright as if the British were not at Wei-hai-wei and the Germans were not at Chao-Chau. Out beyond the mouth of the bay lay the Melampus, a light cruiser flying the broad pennant of an Admiral, and toward her steamed the torpedo boat Number Two cutting the blue water sharply and passing the French gunboat, with Tourneau on the bridge. He waved his cap at Number Two and Hyde and Aylwin waved theirs back at him.

As the torpedo boat came handily alongside the Melampus, Admiral Harbord put off in the cruiser's launch and boarded Number Two. With him was, as Hyde had said, Benson, the master at arms, a crack shot; two sailors and the engineer of the launch, which was towed behind the torpedo boat.

The Admiral greeted Aylwin coldly, but knowing his prowess with the rifle and also that the Germans were after the wild buffalo, was glad to have him along. Aylwin, like the Admiral, was in a seedy undress uniform and Hyde was arrayed likewise. Ben-

son had charge of the gun cases. Conversation was slightly awkward on the part of the two young officers with the Admiral and referred solely to the wild buffalo. The natives had named him Wang-pa-tan, the Son of Fury, born of a turtle's egg and devoid of the eight virtues. Aylwin, who had some rudimentary knowledge of Chinese, laboriously explained to the Admiral that to call any creature the son of a turtle's egg was to say he had no ancestors and was without virtues. To this the Admiral responded that he thought the weather would change within 24 hours. Aylwin undaunted, continued, that a Chinaman wishing to offer the last insult to an enemy would draw a turtle on the enemy's gate—which was not only to insult him, but the whole street. The Admiral replied that he once knew a great many of those silly things himself, but had found it useful to forget them. Aylwin subsided and Benson and the two sailors, the engineer, who had heard all about Aylwin's designs on the Admiral's daughter, grinned slyly behind the backs of their betters.

Just outside the alleged neutral zone of Chao-Chau Bay a little river runs up into the back country. Now it seemed from the spring overflow a great inland lake. Everywhere were human beings toiling, for nowhere in China can one escape the sight of men toiling for a pitiful wage. But great overflows make rich paddyfields and cheap rice, so that the gaunt bodies and thin legs of the yellow men and women will not be more gaunt and thin. This gave the toilers the heart to sing at their work and to encourage the water buffaloes with splendid promises of hay and fodder.

The party from Number Two were here transferred to the launch. The natives scarcely noticed the puffing launch more than did the water buffaloes. Nor did they stop one moment when they saw two beautiful, white launches flying the German colors and full of natty dressed German officers followed the British launch.

The rig of the German officers was a source of grim amusement to Admiral Harbord and even made Benson smile faintly, and a master at arms, vulgarly called "Jimmy Legs," is never supposed to smile at anything.

In Number Two's Boat

Number Two's boat went dashing up the river, but soon had to slacken its pace. The stream grew so tortuous that it became difficult to dodge the native craft coming down. Afar off could be heard across the overflowed fields the song of Chinese sailors towing from the shore their long junks, with the Chinese captain enthroned upon the poop and the Chinese pilot at the stern. They alone never leave the junk.

Hyde's engineer—a Scotchman, of course—had managed to avoid half a dozen of smaller junks crawling patiently seaward. But this was a huge

junk, wider than usual, and just when it would meet the launch the river suddenly narrowed and turned. From her port side was the great tow rope, to which was harnessed, in Indian file on the shore, forty Chinese coolies. Barefooted and bare legged, they trudged along in the mud, their heads down and a big "chanty man" leading them and singing a cheerful song, which consisted of a recitative and the responses from the men. In the clear, bright June morning the loud, hoarse voices of the coolies, veiled by the distance, sounded sweet. And this was the song they sang.

The chanty man bawled out, "What will you do when you get to Tien-Tsin?" to which the coolies sang out in chorus as they trotted along, grinning, their shoulders humped up as they tugged at the rope:

"When we get to Tien-Tsin we shall be happy;
We shall see our wives and our children
And the beautiful girls with little feet;
We shall beat the foreign devils and drink their rum;
We shall sit upon the graves of our ancestors."
Then the chanty man would ask melodiously:—"What will you take to Tien-Tsin?"
Then the refrain echoed back from the shore:



G.A. SHAPER

He Called to the Pilot, Holding Up a Silver Piece

"We will take rice from the rich rice fields;
We will take seaweed and yet more seaweed;
We will take bricks to build palaces for the mandarins;
We will take ducks to be given as marriage portions for our daughters;
We will take the little lambs that bleat and are to be served up at the tables of the mandarins."

The chanty man had just inquired what they meant by busting back from Tien-Tsin when the junk came abreast of the launch. The big Chinese captain, with fangs for teeth, was standing on the poop, bellowing and gesticulating, and it looked as if what Stubbs called a collusion was inevitable. Aylwin stood up in the launch in full view of the big Chinaman and rashly shouted:—"Hello! Ah Fong! Lost your job as taito?"

Ah Fong grinned and shook his head. None of the foreign devils would ever get a word of English out of Ah Fong.

As the launch scraped past the junk Aylwin told the Admiral that Captain Ah Fong was the gentleman who had got possession of the Admiral's uniform and had also been promised destruction by Tourneau if he did not give up the Christians in his town, and among those Christians was the Admiral's daughter and the French Lieutenant's sister.

"He ought to have been hanged," was the Admiral's response, in a loud voice, quite audible to Ah Fong. "No doubt he has gone back to pirating."

The German launches now had time to catch up and were so close behind that a general mixup came to pass in the narrow bend of the river. The engineer, who was also acting as pilot, managed to keep clear of both the Chinese and German craft, and those sitting behind him saw with unholy joy one of the German boats deliberately stick her nose in the mud, while the other scraped most of the paint off her sides against the junk. The Chinese coolies swarmed around screaming and chattering, the Germans swore and only the people in Number Two's launch remained cool and unembarrassed. Ah Fong jumped down from the poop and waded in and out, giving orders, while the Chinese pilot was heard to swear in English.

An inspiration came to Aylwin. He called to the pilot, holding up a silver piece:—"Have you seen up the river the mad water buffalo that is driving away the laborers and frightening the women and children?"

The pilot turned to Ah Fong, who was stooping down in the water close to the stern of Number Two's launch, apparently measuring the depth of water with a stick. Some whispered words were exchanged, and then the pilot said:—"The honorable gentlemen who seek the wild buffalo that frightens the miserable laborers and their worthless families can find him up the river where it divides into two legs like a man's legs. There we have just seen the beast, Wang-pa-tan, standing quietly in the mud. But he is possessed of eight virtues, and the worthless people will be glad when he is sent to rejoin his ancestors, of which he has none. He stands in the left fork of the river," continued the pilot, catching the silver piece which Aylwin threw him.

"Whack her!" cried Hyde to the engineer as the little engine began once more to snort. Then he added to the Admiral: "We ought to do for the brute before the Germans arrive."

"Yes," said Aylwin, "provided that Chinese scoundrel was telling the truth."

Ah Fong's pilot, however, appeared to be telling the truth, for when the launch shot up the river and reached the place where it forked, there, in the left fork of the stream, stood knee deep in the water a huge buffalo. The paddyfields about seemed deserted, although there were many houses on the shore. Number Two's people did not know that the feast of lanterns was preparing.

The buffalo took no heed of the launch as it came near. The Admiral, kneeling down with his rifle resting on the gunwale, fired the first shot. It was a long shot, but a good one, and struck the buffalo squarely on the side. He bellowed and dived under water, and it took several more to finish him up. Benson's fingers itched as he fingered his rifle and so did those of Aylwin and Hyde, but shooting parties made up of junior officers and an admiral are not arranged on democratic principles.

The sixth shot was enough for the buffalo. He staggered to the shore and fell to rise no more. The shots had brought out all the people from the neighboring houses, who swarmed around the dead buffalo. Shrieks and cries resounded and women and children threw themselves weeping on the great carcass. Then the people in the boat knew that they had killed, not the Son-of-Fury-Without-the-Eight-Virtues, but the sole fortune of a large family.

The launch was run ashore, and Aylwin and Hyde jumping out, emptied their pockets on the ground. The result was money enough to buy two water buffaloes and the weeping and the wailing ceased. Behind them, though, they saw the two German launches going rapidly up the other fork of the river. A light dawned upon Aylwin.

"That scoundrel Ah Fong gave us false information," he cried. "The mad buffalo is on the other fork of the river."

As they tumbled into the launch Benson leaned over and pointed to the stern. There, rudely scrawled in charcoal, was the picture of a turtle.

"That story will be told all over Tien-Tsin that a Chinaman drew a turtle on the stern of a British launch," said Benson, who knew something of most things, including Chinamen. "It will go down in Ah Fong's family as an honor, and may make him a pirate admiral."

The two sailors were already scouring the turtle's portrait off the boat's stern, but there was no scouring off the fact that the British launch, in the sight of the Germans from Chao-Chau, had made a blunder of gigantic proportions. Admiral Harbord's red face grew redder, and a sulphurous silence prevailed in the launch as she ran across the open water and took her way up the right fork of the river.

The launch was gaining on the Germans every minute, and afar off, above the churning of the engine in the water, could be heard a strange sound of roaring and bellowing. Then the narrow river suddenly widened into another great temporary lake made by the overflow and they saw unmistakably the Son-of-a-Turtle's-Egg and Devoid-of-the-Eight-Virtues. There was no doubt as to the wickedness and fury of the Son-of-a-Turtle's-Egg.

He was a huge beast with enormous branching horns, and plunged about the lake, keeping up a frenzied bellowing. So far from avoiding the launches, he came plunging toward them. The two German launches had the first volley at him, but the result seemed not to incommode the Son-of-a-Turtle's-Egg in the least. He suddenly dived just as the rifles of the British launch cracked out, and the next minute rose directly under them. The launch tipped over, throwing every man into the water except Benson and Admiral Harbord, and incidentally the box containing all the rifle cartridges. The beast's great horns locked somewhere with the machinery, and the engine suddenly stopped pulsating.

As the launch righted itself Benson seized a coil of rope and, making a lasso of it, threw it cleverly over the buffalo's horns and the moose knotted. That seemed to be just what the Son-of-a-Turtle's-Egg wanted. He turned and dashed across the wide water, towing the launch after him, with Benson vainly tugging at the rope. There were no more rifle cartridges, but the Admiral laid his hand promptly on some shot cartridges and in his Berserker madness began to blaze away with bird shot at the water buffalo.

Aylwin and Hyde, the engineer and the two sailors burst into a roar of laughter, which was likely to cost them dearly. But having laughed once they concluded they might as well do it again as the Son-of-a-Turtle's-Egg towed the launch straight toward the German launches. From them came the hoarse guffaws of the Teutons. Not for one moment did Benson cease his desperate tugging at the rope or the Admiral his volleys of bird shot. As they neared the German launches the Admiral, as wild as the buffalo, bawled to Benson: "Look out for those damned Germans. They will fire at the buffalo and very likely pot us both."

His Bitterest Moment

This speech, which was distinctly audible to the Germans, caused them to lower their rifles, and as the buffalo, snorting and bellowing, came within 20 yards of them a German sailor jumped overboard with a revolver in his hand. He dashed through the water, skillfully avoided the buffalo's horns and sent three bullets into the buffalo's head at point blank range. Half a dozen sailors drew the launch, not ashore, which they might have done, but alongside with water, and Admiral Harbord had to step aboard the German launch to keep from going down with his ship.

The buffalo had towed Number Two's boat across the wide water and a German launch had to tow it back to Chao-Chau. On the other German craft lay the great carcass of the Son-of-a-Turtle's-Egg and Devoid-of-the-Eight-Virtues.

The sun shone brightly still, but the fair day was dark to the Admiral and Benson. Nor was it altogether a halcyon time to Hyde, Aylwin, however, sat and chuckled inwardly. A scheme to profit himself was germinating in his mind.

The bitterest moment to the Admiral was when they reached Chao-Chau Bay, and all the ships in the harbor saw the melancholy plight of the British boat and her company. The Germans made straight for the Melampus and transferred the Admiral and his compatriots. Aylwin was taken to his own ship.

That evening Aylwin happened to have an engagement to dine on the Melampus. As he came over the side, Admiral Harbord was standing talking with the officer of the deck. Aylwin went up boldly and greeted him. There was no ignoring the events of the morning.

"Most embarrassing accident we had," said the Admiral, clearing his throat.

"What accident, may I ask?" replied Aylwin.

"The—accident, the most unfortunate accident, I should call it, with regard to the wild buffalo this morning."

"I think," responded Aylwin gently, "we had a most successful expedition. We went up the river, succeeded in killing the wild buffalo, while the Germans unfortunately killed one which was the support of a family of 25 persons."

Admiral Harbord, with a rudimentary grin upon his countenance, looked steadfastly at Aylwin.

"Of course, Admiral," continued Aylwin, obsequiously, "we did not wish to kill the buffalo which was brought down, and you merely peppered him with bird shot, knowing him to be a harmless creature; but in spite of our efforts to save his life, which is worth a fortune to his owners, the Germans slaughtered him in a most ruthless manner. But we paid for him, you will recall."

Admiral Harbord's rudimentary grin expanded into a large, substantial smile that went half around his head.

"Such is the account which I have given to several officers and it is generally believed among the ships here," continued Aylwin. "As for the accident to the launch, I have reported that it was very trifling and was incurred in our efforts to avoid killing the harmless domestic animal which the Germans shot and we paid for."

This domestic animal which Aylwin held in the hand in full view of everybody on the deck of the Melampus. Several officers had overheard what Aylwin was saying and a thrill of admiration went around for his able and intrepid lying.

"We go to Tien-Tsin next week," said Admiral Harbord. "My daughters will be there and will visit me on the ship. Shall be glad to have you dine with me."

The Admiral turned and went below and all the able and intrepid liars on the ship crowded around Aylwin and proclaimed him their king.