

## Chapter 15: Attacked By Tartars

It was the beginning of February, new style, when we set out from Peking. My partner and the old pilot had gone express back to the port where we had first put in, to dispose of some goods which we had left there; and I, with a Chinese merchant whom I had some knowledge of at Nankin, and who came to Peking on his own affairs, went to Nankin, where I bought ninety pieces of fine damasks, with about two hundred pieces of other very fine silk of several sorts, some mixed with gold, and had all these brought to Peking against my partner's return. Besides this, we bought a large quantity of raw silk, and some other goods, our cargo amounting, in these goods only, to about three thousand five hundred pounds sterling; which, together with tea and some fine calicoes, and three camels' loads of nutmegs and cloves, loaded in all eighteen camels for our share, besides those we rode upon; these, with two or three spare horses, and two horses loaded with provisions, made together twenty-six camels and horses in our retinue.

The company was very great, and, as near as I can remember, made between three and four hundred horses, and upwards of one hundred and twenty men, very well armed and provided for all events; for as the Eastern caravans are subject to be attacked by the Arabs, so are these by the Tartars. The company consisted of people of several nations, but there were above sixty of them merchants or inhabitants of Moscow, though of them some were Livonians; and to our particular satisfaction, five of them were

Scots, who appeared also to be men of great experience in business, and of very good substance.

When we had travelled one day's journey, the guides, who were five in number, called all the passengers, except the servants, to a great council, as they called it. At this council every one deposited a certain quantity of money to a common stock, for the necessary expense of buying forage on the way, where it was not otherwise to be had, and for satisfying the guides, getting horses, and the like. Here, too, they constituted the journey, as they call it, viz. they named captains and officers to draw us all up, and give the word of command, in case of an attack, and give every one their turn of command; nor was this forming us into order any more than what we afterwards found needful on the way.

The road all on this side of the country is very populous, and is full of potters and earth-makers - that is to say, people, that temper the earth for the China ware. As I was coming along, our Portuguese pilot, who had always something or other to say to make us merry, told me he would show me the greatest rarity in all the country, and that I should have this to say of China, after all the ill-humoured things that I had said of it, that I had seen one thing which was not to be seen in all the world beside. I was very importunate to know what it was; at last he told me it was a gentleman's house built with China ware.

Well," says I, "are not the materials of their buildings the products of their own country, and so it is all China ware, is it not?"

"No, no," says he, "I mean it is a house all made of China ware, such as you call it in England, or as it is called in our country, porcelain."

"Well," says I, "such a thing may be; how big is it? Can we carry it in a box upon a camel? If we can we will buy it."

"Upon a camel!" says the old pilot, holding up both his hands; "why, there is a family of thirty people lives in it."

I was then curious, indeed, to see it; and when I came to it, it was nothing but this: it was a timber house, or a house built, as we call it in England, with lath and plaster, but all this plastering was really China ware - that is to say, it was plastered with the earth that makes China ware. The outside, which the sun shone hot upon, was glazed, and looked very well, perfectly white, and painted with blue figures, as the large China ware in England is painted, and hard as if it had been burnt. As to the inside, all the walls, instead of wainscot, were lined with hardened and painted tiles, like the little square tiles we call galley-tiles in England, all made of the finest china, and the figures exceeding fine indeed, with extraordinary variety of colours, mixed with gold, many tiles making but one figure, but joined so artificially, the mortar being made of the same earth, that it was very hard to see where

the tiles met. The floors of the rooms were of the same composition, and as hard as the earthen floors we have in use in several parts of England; as hard as stone, and smooth, but not burnt and painted, except some smaller rooms, like closets, which were all, as it were, paved with the same tile; the ceiling and all the plastering work in the whole house were of the same earth; and, after all, the roof was covered with tiles of the same, but of a deep shining black. This was a China warehouse indeed, truly and literally to be called so, and had I not been upon the journey, I could have stayed some days to see and examine the particulars of it. They told me there were fountains and fishponds in the garden, all paved on the bottom and sides with the same; and fine statues set up in rows on the walks, entirely formed of the porcelain earth, burnt whole.

As this is one of the singularities of China, so they may be allowed to excel in it; but I am very sure they excel in their accounts of it; for they told me such incredible things of their performance in crockery-ware, for such it is, that I care not to relate, as knowing it could not be true. They told me, in particular, of one workman that made a ship with all its tackle and masts and sails in earthenware, big enough to carry fifty men. If they had told me he launched it, and made a voyage to Japan in it, I might have said something to it indeed; but as it was, I knew the whole of the story, which was, in short, that the fellow lied: so I smiled, and said nothing to it. This odd sight kept me two hours behind the caravan, for which the leader of it for the day fined me about the value of three shillings; and told me if it had

been three days' journey without the wall, as it was three days' within, he must have fined me four times as much, and made me ask pardon the next council-day. I promised to be more orderly; and, indeed, I found afterwards the orders made for keeping all together were absolutely necessary for our common safety.

In two days more we passed the great China wall, made for a fortification against the Tartars: and a very great work it is, going over hills and mountains in an endless track, where the rocks are impassable, and the precipices such as no enemy could possibly enter, or indeed climb up, or where, if they did, no wall could hinder them. They tell us its length is near a thousand English miles, but that the country is five hundred in a straight measured line, which the wall bounds without measuring the windings and turnings it takes; it is about four fathoms high, and as many thick in some places.

I stood still an hour or thereabouts without trespassing on our orders (for so long the caravan was in passing the gate), to look at it on every side, near and far off; I mean what was within my view: and the guide, who had been extolling it for the wonder of the world, was mighty eager to hear my opinion of it. I told him it was a most excellent thing to keep out the Tartars; which he happened not to understand as I meant it and so took it for a compliment; but the old pilot laughed! "Oh, Seignior Inglese," says he, "you speak in colours."

"In colours!" said I; "what do you mean by that?"

"Why, you speak what looks white this way and black that way - gay one way and dull another. You tell him it is a good wall to keep out Tartars; you tell me by that it is good for nothing but to keep out Tartars. I understand you, Seignior Inglese, I understand you; but Seignior Chinese understood you his own way."

"Well," says I, "do you think it would stand out an army of our country people, with a good train of artillery; or our engineers, with two companies of miners? Would not they batter it down in ten days, that an army might enter in battalia; or blow it up in the air, foundation and all, that there should be no sign of it left?"

"Ay, ay," says he, "I know that." The Chinese wanted mightily to know what I said to the pilot, and I gave him leave to tell him a few days after, for we were then almost out of their country, and he was to leave us a little time after this; but when he knew what I said, he was dumb all the rest of the way, and we heard no more of his fine story of the Chinese power and greatness while he stayed.

After we passed this mighty nothing, called a wall, something like the Picts' walls so famous in Northumberland, built by the Romans, we began to find

the country thinly inhabited, and the people rather confined to live in fortified towns, as being subject to the inroads and depredations of the Tartars, who rob in great armies, and therefore are not to be resisted by the naked inhabitants of an open country. And here I began to find the necessity of keeping together in a caravan as we travelled, for we saw several troops of Tartars roving about; but when I came to see them distinctly, I wondered more that the Chinese empire could be conquered by such contemptible fellows; for they are a mere horde of wild fellows, keeping no order and understanding no discipline or manner of it. Their horses are poor lean creatures, taught nothing, and fit for nothing; and this we found the first day we saw them, which was after we entered the wilder part of the country. Our leader for the day gave leave for about sixteen of us to go a hunting as they call it; and what was this but a hunting of sheep! - however, it may be called hunting too, for these creatures are the wildest and swiftest of foot that ever I saw of their kind! only they will not run a great way, and you are sure of sport when you begin the chase, for they appear generally thirty or forty in a flock, and, like true sheep, always keep together when they fly.

In pursuit of this odd sort of game it was our hap to meet with about forty Tartars: whether they were hunting mutton, as we were, or whether they looked for another kind of prey, we know not; but as soon as they saw us, one of them blew a hideous blast on a kind of horn. This was to call their friends about them, and in less than ten minutes a troop of forty or fifty

more appeared, at about a mile distance; but our work was over first, as it happened.

One of the Scots merchants of Moscow happened to be amongst us; and as soon as he heard the horn, he told us that we had nothing to do but to charge them without loss of time; and drawing us up in a line, he asked if we were resolved. We told him we were ready to follow him; so he rode directly towards them. They stood gazing at us like a mere crowd, drawn up in no sort of order at all; but as soon as they saw us advance, they let fly their arrows, which missed us, very happily. Not that they mistook their aim, but their distance; for their arrows all fell a little short of us, but with so true an aim, that had we been about twenty yards nearer we must have had several men wounded, if not killed.

Immediately we halted, and though it was at a great distance, we fired, and sent them leaden bullets for wooden arrows, following our shot full gallop, to fall in among them sword in hand - for so our bold Scot that led us directed. He was, indeed, but a merchant, but he behaved with such vigour and bravery on this occasion, and yet with such cool courage too, that I never saw any man in action fitter for command. As soon as we came up to them we fired our pistols in their faces and then drew; but they fled in the greatest confusion imaginable. The only stand any of them made was on our right, where three of them stood, and, by signs, called the rest to come back to them, having a kind of scimitar in their hands, and their bows hanging to



their backs. Our brave commander, without asking anybody to follow him, gallops up close to them, and with his fusee knocks one of them off his horse, killed the second with his pistol, and the third ran away. Thus ended our fight; but we had this misfortune attending it, that all our mutton we had in chase got away. We had not a man killed or hurt; as for the Tartars, there were about five of them killed - how many were wounded we knew not; but this we knew, that the other party were so frightened with the noise of our guns that they fled, and never made any attempt upon us.

We were all this while in the Chinese dominions, and therefore the Tartars were not so bold as afterwards; but in about five days we entered a vast wild desert, which held us three days' and nights' march; and we were obliged to carry our water with us in great leathern bottles, and to encamp all night, just as I have heard they do in the desert of Arabia. I asked our guides whose dominion this was in, and they told me this was a kind of border that might be called no man's land, being a part of Great Karakathy, or Grand Tartary: that, however, it was all reckoned as belonging to China, but that there was no care taken here to preserve it from the inroads of thieves, and therefore it was reckoned the worst desert in the whole march, though we were to go over some much larger.

In passing this frightful wilderness we saw, two or three times, little parties of the Tartars, but they seemed to be upon their own affairs, and to have no design upon us; and so, like the man who met the devil, if they had nothing

to say to us, we had nothing to say to them: we let them go. Once, however, a party of them came so near as to stand and gaze at us. Whether it was to consider if they should attack us or not, we knew not; but when we had passed at some distance by them, we made a rear-guard of forty men, and stood ready for them, letting the caravan pass half a mile or thereabouts before us. After a while they marched off, but they saluted us with five arrows at their parting, which wounded a horse so that it disabled him, and we left him the next day, poor creature, in great need of a good farrier. We saw no more arrows or Tartars that time.

We travelled near a month after this, the ways not being so good as at first, though still in the dominions of the Emperor of China, but lay for the most part in the villages, some of which were fortified, because of the incursions of the Tartars. When we were come to one of these towns (about two days and a half's journey before we came to the city of Naum), I wanted to buy a camel, of which there are plenty to be sold all the way upon that road, and horses also, such as they are, because, so many caravans coming that way, they are often wanted. The person that I spoke to to get me a camel would have gone and fetched one for me; but I, like a fool, must be officious, and go myself along with him; the place was about two miles out of the village, where it seems they kept the camels and horses feeding under a guard.

I walked it on foot, with my old pilot and a Chinese, being very desirous of a little variety. When we came to the place it was a low, marshy ground,

walled round with stones, piled up dry, without mortar or earth among them, like a park, with a little guard of Chinese soldiers at the door. Having bought a camel, and agreed for the price, I came away, and the Chinese that went with me led the camel, when on a sudden came up five Tartars on horseback. Two of them seized the fellow and took the camel from him, while the other three stepped up to me and my old pilot, seeing us, as it were, unarmed, for I had no weapon about me but my sword, which could but ill defend me against three horsemen. The first that came up stopped short upon my drawing my sword, for they are arrant cowards; but a second, coming upon my left, gave me a blow on the head, which I never felt till afterwards, and wondered, when I came to myself, what was the matter, and where I was, for he laid me flat on the ground; but my never-failing old pilot, the Portuguese, had a pistol in his pocket, which I knew nothing of, nor the Tartars either: if they had, I suppose they would not have attacked us, for cowards are always boldest when there is no danger. The old man seeing me down, with a bold heart stepped up to the fellow that had struck me, and laying hold of his arm with one hand, and pulling him down by main force a little towards him, with the other shot him into the head, and laid him dead upon the spot. He then immediately stepped up to him who had stopped us, as I said, and before he could come forward again, made a blow at him with a scimitar, which he always wore, but missing the man, struck his horse in the side of his head, cut one of the ears off by the root, and a great slice down by the side of his face. The poor beast, enraged with the wound, was no more to be governed by his rider, though the fellow sat well enough too,

but away he flew, and carried him quite out of the pilot's reach; and at some distance, rising upon his hind legs, threw down the Tartar, and fell upon him.

In this interval the poor Chinese came in who had lost the camel, but he had no weapon; however, seeing the Tartar down, and his horse fallen upon him, away he runs to him, and seizing upon an ugly weapon he had by his side, something like a pole-axe, he wrenched it from him, and made shift to knock his Tartarian brains out with it. But my old man had the third Tartar to deal with still; and seeing he did not fly, as he expected, nor come on to fight him, as he apprehended, but stood stock still, the old man stood still too, and fell to work with his tackle to charge his pistol again: but as soon as the Tartar saw the pistol away he scoured, and left my pilot, my champion I called him afterwards, a complete victory.

By this time I was a little recovered. I thought, when I first began to wake, that I had been in a sweet sleep; but, as I said above, I wondered where I was, how I came upon the ground, and what was the matter. A few moments after, as sense returned, I felt pain, though I did not know where; so I clapped my hand to my head, and took it away bloody; then I felt my head ache: and in a moment memory returned, and everything was present to me again. I jumped upon my feet instantly, and got hold of my sword, but no enemies were in view: I found a Tartar lying dead, and his horse standing very quietly by him; and, looking further, I saw my deliverer, who had been

to see what the Chinese had done, coming back with his hanger in his hand. The old man, seeing me on my feet, came running to me, and joyfully embraced me, being afraid before that I had been killed. Seeing me bloody, he would see how I was hurt; but it was not much, only what we call a broken head; neither did I afterwards find any great inconvenience from the blow, for it was well again in two or three days.

We made no great gain, however, by this victory, for we lost a camel and gained a horse. I paid for the lost camel, and sent for another; but I did not go to fetch it myself: I had had enough of that.

The city of Naum, which we were approaching, is a frontier of the Chinese empire, and is fortified in their fashion. We wanted, as I have said, above two days' journey of this city when messengers were sent express to every part of the road to tell all travellers and caravans to halt till they had a guard sent for them; for that an unusual body of Tartars, making ten thousand in all, had appeared in the way, about thirty miles beyond the city.

This was very bad news to travellers: however, it was carefully done of the governor, and we were very glad to hear we should have a guard.

Accordingly, two days after, we had two hundred soldiers sent us from a garrison of the Chinese on our left, and three hundred more from the city of Naum, and with these we advanced boldly. The three hundred soldiers from

Naum marched in our front, the two hundred in our rear, and our men on each side of our camels, with our baggage and the whole caravan in the centre; in this order, and well prepared for battle, we thought ourselves a match for the whole ten thousand Mogul Tartars, if they had appeared; but the next day, when they did appear, it was quite another thing.