

Bittern, who fell in the last named action while gallantly conducting the ships towards the pirate junks.

I Have, &c.,

J. STIRLING,

Rear-Admiral and Commander-in-Chief.

To the Secretary of the Admiralty.

*Her Majesty's sloop Bittern,
Woosung, 2nd September, 1855.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to report the return this day of Her Majesty's sloop under my command from a successful cruize in search of the pirates referred to in paragraph 5, and enclosures of my letter of proceedings to your Excellency of the 1st August; bad weather and other circumstances detained us until the 7th ultimo, when we started from Woosung in tow of the Confucius steamer, that vessel manned and armed from the American frigate, having been supplied by the Chinese authorities with necessary officials, pilots and informers.

2. At the port of Tsing-hae-wei, near Staunton Island, the Confucius obtained information of the pirates' movements, the fleet numbering by various accounts from, thirty-seven to forty, including, as the Chinese said, two European vessels, with Europeans on board, had proceeded northward; this went to confirm the information I had already received of Englishmen having joined themselves to these villains, rendering them vastly more formidable; so I decided to prosecute the search, and in tow of the Pavushan followed the Confucius round Shangtung promontory, and she having examined Wei-hai-Wei, rejoined us in Che-fou Harbour, which we found rudely stockaded, in preparation for the pirates; they had however passed on, and unfortunately the shortness of coal obliged the Confucius to give up the chase.

3. Passing through Mid-Tao Strait and striking northward for Ross Bay in the Gulf of Leotung, at length on the 18th ultimo, the pirates were observed in the unexplored bight northward of that bay, ending in the sizeable river which leads to the city of Fuchan; the Pavushan having towed us in, we still found ourselves obliged to anchor between two and three miles outside the pirates, in two and a half fathoms; the boats returned with soundings that rendered it doubtful if they could be approached, although over the bar of two fathoms, at about half a mile distant from the pirate fleet, we found a hole of three fathoms which was buoyed after dark.

4. On the following morning the pirates, numbering from thirty to forty, including two lorchas with canvas sails, formed two divisions, and with a leading wind bore down in pretty style and opened a respectable fire on Her Majesty's sloop, which weighed and stood off to lead them out. I tacked and returned their fire, perhaps somewhat too soon, although they had already struck the ship, and continued working their guns with spirit; for they then began a clever manœuvre, joined their two divisions, and running for shoal water and a reef, kept in such a position that it was necessary to yaw up to bring our guns to bear, each time increasing our distance, and improving their chances of escape. Owing to the continued down-pour of rain, and misty weather, it was difficult to count the exact force opposed to us, but that Europeans served the guns of two of the largest seems highly probable; for, having obtained their range, they continued firing until they were dismasted and in a sinking state. As one boat was disabled another would take it in tow, and, although surrounded with wreck, I was glad to

heave aback and work out of a dangerous corner into which they had led us, without taking possession of any of their vessels. Eight of their number, however, were sunk or abandoned.

5. Having communicated with the authorities, on the following morning we proceeded northward to release the merchant fleets. These we found had taken shelter high up various streams; upwards of 100 of them in a river leading to the city New-Chang, off which we anchored in 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms, in lat. 40° 38' N., long. 122° 0' E., eight miles distant from the low entrance to the river. Between two or three miles within the bar is the seaport itself, of respectable size, with large establishments of grain. Here we learnt the pirates had already been, and, disappointed in obtaining their calculated ransom (the junks that had ventured past them having paid 1,200 dollars each, others having been burnt that had not the money), they seized a Chinese of no great rank, and, quartering him, sent his remains on shore in a basket to the authorities, with a threat that unless 100,000 dollars were immediately forthcoming, they would treat the mandarins in the same way. Having obtained their booty, they were loitering on the coast for merchant craft when we fell in with them.

6. Turning to the southward, and searching various corners, we came up with thirteen of the fleet, westward of Mid-Tao Strait, and the day being favourable, secured eleven of them, which I sunk or burnt; one only surrendering herself, was taken in and given over to the authorities at Tang-chow-foo; this, quite one of the smallest, had a crew of forty-one. The prisoners assured our interpreter that a lorcha, which was one of the number, this day captured a white man and two Portuguese, as part crew, and that they escaped to the hills on our leaving her stranded to secure others making off with sweeps. She did not, on this occasion, return our fire; but when on shore, after having suffered severely from its effects, opened with her big gun upon the country people, and clearing a lane, a great part of her crew got away, armed with baggage.

7. Finally, on the 30th ultimo, northward of Staunton Island, we overtook another of the fleet, the crew of which must have been prepared to land, and expecting an attack by boats, would have blown the boarders up; for no sooner did our shot pass through her, than the crew took to the water, and landing with spears, made for the hills; one man remaining aft, threw a fire-ball forward, and sprung overboard immediately, before the explosion took place. This completed twenty, out of a well provided daring fleet that we were enabled to destroy, besides probably having inflicted considerable damage on many that escaped us during the thick weather of the 19th ultimo. On different occasions, when the boats were employed, they were under the command of the Second Lieutenant Mr. Brooker, Master Mr. Turner, and Acting Mate Mr. Todd, whose names I am glad to bring forward for favourable consideration.

8. I have troubled your Excellency somewhat fully, as the strengths of the armaments of these vessels, with their crews averaging not less than fifty men each, and the apparently established fact that Europeans have joined them, proves the extent to which piracy has arisen, and the formidable scale on which it is now conducted. I am convinced a merchant vessel could only have escaped such a fleet by out-sailing it, and the frequent calms of this season would have rendered her fate more certain, for these pirates sweep with ease three and four knots, and with wind free, many of them distanced the