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A Visit to Amoy and the Island of Formosa [pages 37-58 of original]

Now a messenger was officially sent ahead to the residence, to announce to the Mandarins the arrival of H.B.M. consul at 10 o'clock. And punctually at 10 o'clock we moved into Taywanfu through the gate of the high wall, which encloses all Chinese governmental cities.

III.

At the gate of Taywanfu a mandarin of lower degree received us, in order to announce to us that the Tautai, that is the governor of the province, expected us in his audience hall. Here in the house we first arranged our appearance; the Consul and his secretary put on gold-lined caps and swords, likewise the commander of the gunboat. Then we again boarded our palanquins and soon proceeded amidst dense crowds of people through the streets of the suburbs towards the audience hall. The streets of the city proper were apparently avoided by our guide; what little we saw was filled with buildings, populated relatively sparsely and spotted with gardens and crops. After a trip of about half an hour, we turned into a great courtyard and were carried through the mass of people with great effort and then set down in a second courtyard. Here we were received by mandarins with exuberant gestures of politeness and led into the audience hall, on the threshold of which the governor and the highest dignitaries came to greet us. We were led to armchairs that were set up on one side of the hall, while the mandarins took seats in a row opposite us. In contrast to their official apparel, we looked rather shabby in our dusty, wrinkled travel clothes worn without any attention to care or ornament. Sitting across from us, there was first the tautai, whose status would be comparable to a governmental president back in Prussia, but which at times is also elevated to the rank of a premier president. As centralized as the Chinese imperial government might be, the position of this tautai still embodies a much more concentrated power than the corresponding rank in our system. The local administration reaches much farther and is more powerful than at home. In many cases both the premier military mandarin (the

"commanding general" of the province) as well as the premier civil mandarin (the "superior appellate court president") are subordinated to the tautai. This institution, which seems to be in contradiction with the otherwise strongly pronounced centralization principle, is necessary owing to external circumstances in China. The enormous distances of certain provinces from the capital, the slowness of travel, and the lack of trains, steamships, and the telegraph make it truly necessary to lay greater power, namely that of a viceroy, into the hands of the governors. From Paris and Berlin a country is governed with ease; where a few minutes are enough to send an inquiry to the capital and receive an answer in any given case, in China often months would pass.

Thus, the Tautai at this occasion, too, had surrounded himself with dignitaries of the distinct governmental categories, as a sign of his power. He is a tautai of first rank, being the governor of a far-off, great island. He sat across from us, in the middle, with the premier civil mandarin to his left (the Chinese place of honor), and the premier military mandarin to his right. Next to the civil mandarin sat the police (the prefect of Taywanfu); next to the military mandarin were the directors of finance and tax collection.

On the way I had seen our consul fail several times in his attempts to communicate with the country folk and the coolies in Chinese, but here, to my astonishment, I heard him speak fluently in Chinese, conversing easily with the mandarins. The Chinese language has a similar problem as the German one has, only much more pronounced. One might imagine a foreigner who has learnt the German language from books and in dealings with the educated coming to Mecklenburg, into the Silesian mountains, or to Swabia. Although he will be able to communicate with the educated elite everywhere, the language of the people will for the most part remain quite incomprehensible to him. And the 'Platt'-German-speaking Mecklenburgan himself will not be able to communicate with the Swabian or the Lower Silesian without the medium of High German. Likewise there is a language comprehensible all throughout China, which is at the same time the official and scholarly written language, bearing the name "Mandarin language." But the mass of the people speak and write in such diverging dialects in the different provinces that the Mandarin language alone is not sufficient to understand all these dialects, and each district requires its own practical language to permit mutual communication. Therefore it does not pay to hire one permanent servant during one's travels in China, for such an interpreter often ceases to understand the language after 50-60 miles.

All customary greetings and formalities and later some business affairs were negotiated with great dignity while we savored the hot tea presented to us. However, both we and the mandarins were startled out of this decorum by a small event for which I was the innocent cause. Plagued by the heat and bored by debates of which I understood nothing, I sought refuge in a little refreshment, which with incorruptible loyalty rests in my left coat pocket -- a snuffbox. As all of our movements were watched carefully, the experiment of taking a pinch at once

drew the attention of the tautai to it as well. I noticed this, signaled a servant, thoroughly took another pinch in order to graphically illustrate the usage of the substance, and then sent the box to the tautai. After he had examined both the box and the substance carefully, he bravely reached in, and all the high dignitaries on his side followed his example. And then, as the tobacco exercised its full effects on the virgin noses, a hearty sneezing set in among the high mandarins as if a magic spell had just broken in. They doubled up in their armchairs, sprang up and made such strange postures that all the numerous servants standing behind their and our armchairs broke into incessant and indelible laughter, in which we and finally the mandarins, too, joined heartily. The Chinese are extraordinary enthusiasts for jokes. The tautai now seemed of the opinion that the dignity of a diplomatic negotiation was gone for the day. A banquet richly laden with fruit, baked goods and preserves was carried in, and after many compliments we took our seats. It was strange and striking how much my person now became the object of curiosity and attention, an attention which shoved the entire official mission completely into the background. They did not tire of asking the consul my name, what my position was, what nation I belonged to? It was impossible that I were an Englishman, as I had an entirely different face and an entirely different figure -- surely a sign of fine observation and good physiognomy. They were especially interested in finding out my age. What was so striking about myself and distinguished me from my other companions was my somewhat greater body strength, a pair of big blue glasses, and a long, full, but at that time rather unkempt beard. The Chinese, who all have a full head of hair (except for the crown which they shave clean) from which their queues are made, strangely enough have very sparse beards. They have no sideburns, and the mustache is also thin, though still more developed than the beard. The goatees, however, are real caricatures of beards, often consisting only of 10-12 hairs. It is also striking how late the beard develops in them. Before the fortieth year, a hair hardly grows on their chins, and those with goatees are invariably old people.

Already on previous wanderings in China I had taken note that the women didn't show that terrible timidity when I was strolling around alone in the countryside that they displayed when I went in the company of others. (It is sometimes scary to behold, when one unexpectedly walks past the door of a house, behind which the female population sits on the spacious porch doing their work, how they suddenly fly apart in blind haste like a flock of partridges to all sides and run over spinning wheels, reels, hand mills, and all that is in the way.) Later I realized the reason: because of my great beard they decidedly took me for a Methuselah, harmless to the female gender. Thus it also aroused the highest admiration of these mandarins that I was not yet 70 or 80 years old. Their next question then was whether I was married. Indeed. Whether I had a son? No. At this answer there could be seen deep regret and heartfelt sympathies on every face. This too provides us some insight into an aspect of Chinese life. A son is the highest goal in a marriage; a daughter counts for nothing. The Chinese have debased women, and after having debased them, they have proceeded to disdain them. This even goes as far as infanticide, so dreadful to our sentiments, which by the way is only

of any noteworthy importance in cases of great poverty or general calamity in the country. But then it is always the female children who are sacrificed. For the working Chinese, though, the growing son is a highly useful means of support, of which the father disposes arbitrarily. In the truly patriarchal and autonomous family life, the father is responsible to no one for the death or life of his son. Now it is natural that in a country in which all laws speak for the father and no laws for the son, the son knows no more heartfelt desire than to soon be a father himself and have a son, on whom he can exercise patriarchal experiments.

With the small snack they served saki (the Chinese rice wine, a drink between wine and brandy), with which the mandarins toasted us heartily, and we were especially careful in our consumption of the drink, as it must be used by foreigners with great care. The tautai, who by the way -- maybe because he thought himself too high in rank -- hadn't sat down with us at the table, was still attentive to all that happened and probably noticed our reserve concerning the saki. He departed, and soon after reappeared with a round white bottle in his arm, which he set in front of the consul with the comment, that this was the best he could give us. But I had hardly taken a look at the contents, when I clapped my hands and cried out, full of wonder: "Danzig Goldwater!" When I took the bottle in my hands and shook it well, so that the glittering golden flakes moved up and down in a whirl, I saw that the Chinese looked upon it as a great treasure. It was probably sold to the owner as a true-life elixir at a high price, or conveyed to him as a very valuable gift. The interest that they had taken in me had to increase, when I declared the treasure a product of my native land, Prussia.

But it was time to rise from the table, as the Consul had stood up and pronounced the desire for a guide, who would lead him to the accommodations prepared for him. We now took our leave, led by the tautai to the first door, then by the civil and military mandarins as far as the courtyard, and by the remaining officials to the outer gate. We looked forward to the prospect of peace and quiet, which we all needed. When we arrived at the temple that had been assigned to us, we stood astounded, and looked at one another with disappointment. We had not expected grandeur and comfort, but this dwelling fell far short of the most modest expectations that a person used to a certain civilization is justified in holding. The entire space consisted of the actual hall of the temple, on the sides of which they had built bedrooms from old, rotten, riddled, and smudgy planks, and furnished them with the disintegrating frame of a decomposed bed. There wasn't a single window, and therefore the place was gloomy, eerie and smelly. "How can this be?" I called out to the Consul. "You won't accept this dwelling, will you? It is an insult, which the Chinese government is inflicting upon you." "Well, yes," the Consul replied, "I have to tell you that I don't actually have a right to any sort of residence and especially during the first visit we have to beware not to go too far. We actually stand on shaky ground here, because I have received a report that the population is very hostile towards us and is very excited. Only the day before yesterday, as the news of our expected arrival had become known, there was an uproar, and the tautai himself was injured when traveling on public

avenues in his palanquin, when people threw stones at him. Let us be careful. By the way, I am left with an alternative: another temple in one of the suburbs was placed at my disposal, and that might be airier, but I was told at once that the population there was coarse and malevolent. In any case, before we decide, let us be convinced by the appearances."

Thus we set off to the second sanctuary, which we found only slightly better, happier and cleaner, and the consul finally decided to encamp here, if only temporarily. We thus began to make ourselves at home, but much was lacking to really make us feel at home. We only now noticed that our three navy sailors, our servants and all of our luggage were not with us; no one knew where all could have been lost. We thus decided to do the only thing possible -- to wait patiently until (and if) they arrived. But they did not come, and our situation became more and more awkward. The courtyard and the hall gradually filled with a loud and rough rabble; wherever we withdrew to, they followed us at every turn. We fled into one of the closed-off bedrooms, but soon the thin door had begun to cave in, and remaining in the closed room by all means unbearable. We edged our way back through the crowd into the hall, sat down on the old altar of Buddha, and owing to our exasperation, hunger, thirst, and heat, we smoked one cigar after another in the shelter of the colorfully and savagely painted idols. We smoked from all sorts of motivations, for it was the only pleasure that was accessible to us. I dreamed in my forced immobility that I myself slowly became an idol, became Buddha, and sank into nothingness. Hour after hour passed, our situation at last became unbearable, and we now decided to leave the place at all costs. A policeman, who had been sent to accompany us from the tautai's official quarters, but who proved to be quite useless against the crowd, had remained with us. He now suddenly led us through a side-portal onto a side street under the pretense of showing us the environment of the temple. Thus we obtained a head start in placing a distance between us and the rabble, and we sought to increase that gap with a fast pace. But soon the crowd noticed we had left, and we heard the yelling mass rolling in behind us, with new people amassing in front of us at the same time. After we had hardly crossed two or three streets, we were chocked in. Our leader now pulled us quickly into a spacious merchant's store, whose doors stood open to the streets and were at once closed behind us. We had at least won something by this measure, because we now had found someone who after Chinese law was responsible for our security, i.e., the owner of the house. But he did not seem to hold his power in high honor, as he soon demanded that we go up to the second floor. As often as the doors to the street were opened (which had to happen sometimes, as this passage formed the only entry to and exit from the house), and, thus, as often as the rabble set eyes on us, they at once erupted in raucous yelling. We therefore crawled over a side staircase to the upper floor, or to be precise, into the attic, where we sat down directly under the smoldering roof on boxes and bales of goods.

The consul at once sent the police official accompanying us to the tautai, in order to explain to him our situation and to ask for military protection. Our Chinese

guide whom we had brought up with us from Takau, a strong, silent, and level-headed man, every once in a while came and reported the mood of the populace as very threatening.

Now it is time to communicate something about the motives of this excitement. If I had not been given specific motives, I would not in the least have seen anything frightening in it, as I was sufficiently used to the rough expressions with which curiosity and scoff are vented in the rabble. But here things were quite different. The island of Formosa has three harbors that had been opened to foreigners according to the peace treaty of Peking. Taywanfu, the capital of the island, which is also connected to the ocean by a river and flat bays reaching far inland (but through which only ships of less than 7-8 feet draft could enter), was not among these three harbors. However, the domicile of the English consulate (also according to the treaty) was transferred to the capital in order to be nearer to the domicile of the highest officials on the island. The minor importance of Formosa trade did not justify the appointment of a special consul for each of the three harbors. The Chinese merchants of Taywanfu had taken up the opinion that the transfer of the consulate there was only a feint, only serving as a disguise for European merchants, who would be smuggled in at this opportunity and who would steal the trade out of their hands. Therefore, they already had roused the populace against us prior to our arrival. Our relatively big entourage now seemed to affirm their suspicions, and now it appeared that a new version of the uprising that had been going on a few days before would occur again, which had the great advantage over the first of having a certain tangible object in front of them - namely, us.

The policeman returned from the tautai with polite respects, but with the regret of not being able to promise us any effective protection. His military force at the moment was very small, and he had to be very careful with it, if he did not want to risk both his authority and position. Otherwise, he would do what he could, and we should not lose heart. This message was indeed devastating enough, and our mood did not rise when immediately afterwards a man from the entourage of the consul, whom he had taken with him as a special policeman, entered and reported that he had been beaten with stones on his way to find us.

Soon, however, we would find out that there were enlightened and high-hearted men among the merchants of Taywanfu as well. A Chinese man appeared, presenting the calling card of his master, who had him offer us abode and lodging in his house. The host of the house in which we currently found ourselves, whom we asked for advice, confirmed that this merchant was one of the most esteemed and influential merchants of the entire city, and that it would be impossible for us to look for an abode that was safer or better. The merchant's offering therefore was accepted, and a plea added to send us palanquins. Half an hour later we were notified that the chairs had been brought safely into the house. Night now had already begun to fall, and part of the rabble had dispersed. We mounted the palanquins in the sales hall, closed in tightly together, and the

order was given to open the doors. The bearers lifted us up and broke through the unsuspecting crowd at a storming pace, and away we went, as fast as any human can go, the crowd yelling after us. Our bearers were so well instructed that everywhere we went they only took the narrowest streets, in which it was only possible for at most one person to walk next to the palanquin.

After about 15 minutes, they suddenly turned into a wide courtyard. The gates shut behind us, clanking, and we breathed freely for the first time again under God's open sky. Our entrance into the house and into the spacious living quarters showed us at first glance that we were with a rich and comfortably established man, to the extent that the Chinese know and understand our term "comfort" in the first place. Our joy was considerably increased by the fact that we encountered our servants, luggage and mariners already here. The brave man, well informed about all proceedings in the city, also knew of the whereabouts of these people and let the same come into his house right after we accepted his invitation.

However, we were so exhausted from the toil, the heat and the excitement of the day, that even though we had not enjoyed anything all day, apart from those few jams and fruit slices with the tautai, we could do our host's richly decked table only little honor. We were happy when we could withdraw at around 10 o'clock onto our hard pallet behind the mosquito nets.

The following day passed excitingly enough, even though marked by physical rest. Messages came and went. Repeatedly messages arrived that an uprising was being prepared and would certainly break out. Defense plans were designed, drawback-lines detected. In the afternoon the topmost military mandarin paid us a call. He enquired whether the populace really could be assured that there was no merchant among us. In that case, the government would issue a bulletin, but he had to press us to really tell him the truth. I was able to remark that his gaze searchingly rested on me from time to time, and that he quietly suspected me as a merchant in disguise. I was the only one of us who had no golden cord, no golden buttons, saber or anything else resembling an official uniform. About this he now was vigorously appeased, and he took his leave with the pronounced hope that he would be able to keep the peace.

Now a consultation began, in which I tried to induce the consul to withdraw as soon as possible to Takau. I told him that after the government to which he was accredited was not able to give him sufficient security, he was excused from his responsibility towards his government. He was here without protection, without a line of retreat, without any means to insist on his just claims; his position was without any foundation in that kind of land. And the young man answered dryly and coolly: "My foundation is the English nation, I too have a wife and children at home to whom my heart is connected in love. But higher is to me the duty to my fatherland. I am an Englishman and want to live as such and if it need be, die."

I remained silent not without shame; I looked with new reverence to a country which opened ways into the world with such simple means and lack of pomp because it finds sons everywhere that represent its cause so bravely, so selflessly, so full of the feeling of honor for the fatherland. But my objections at least had the success of inducing a consultation between the consul and the commander of the gunboat, as to whether it might not be useful to attempt to bring the gunboat up to Taywanfu from the seaside. That was finally decided upon. Consequently, it was necessary that the commander himself should return to Takau immediately.

What then concerned myself, I long ago had considered, and assembled the following points: 1) I was a suspected person and could easily endanger the position of the Englishmen by my presence. 2) Even though the English consul's honor might command him to persevere here, I could not remotely acknowledge any similar duty for myself to become a useless martyr of English politics. 3) Even if -- as I believe -- everything would go off quietly and matters would end in peace, in any case weeks would pass before one could let oneself be seen on the streets and in the country without fear for one's safety. But my trade and my occupation are outside. 4) My abdominal disease had developed a very menacing character throughout the day, and likewise my foot demanded protection and level terrain for some weeks. When I presented all these considerations in summary to the amiable consul, he could only approve of my decision to return to Takau with the commander of the gunboat -- and so we went.

Early on the morning of the 14th, in the first light of dawn, when the sweet populace still lay in gentle sleep and the gates were just being opened, we left the city, in which we had experienced nothing but toil and deprivation. Away the gunboat went, through the shadowed narrow passes, whose edges were covered with the most luscious vegetation, and I was truly glad that I could admire this vegetation again gaily.