

I. Dynasty 304

Chapter 304: Cannons for Cotton

“Your Highness, the Chu King’s merchant ship has arrived. It’s said that they’ve brought cotton seeds, but...”

“Let me guess. They want the cannons in exchange for the cotton seeds, right?”

“It seems you’ve already figured it out, Your Highness.” Pang Yukun smiled.

Xiao Ming was currently writing a training manual for the musket troops.

The previous day, he had visited the lathe workshop, armaments workshop, machinery department, and gunpowder workshop, delivering all his instructions.

Whether it was the bayonet, cleaning rod, or oil-paper-wrapped ammunition, all of these were simple to produce.

A bayonet was merely a cylindrical base, a cleaning rod was just an iron rod, and oil-paper-wrapped ammunition was even simpler: wrapping the bullet and powder in oil paper.

It wasn’t a question of technical difficulty—it was more about the right idea, or rather, experience.

With the flintlock musket soon to be issued, Xiao Ming had to consider the establishment of a modern military academy. With the advent of firearms, war was entering a more structured phase, no longer relying on the traditional three moves of old.

Because of this, he was writing the manual, preparing to teach Qingzhou's commanders about modern warfare.

Putting down his brush, Xiao Ming walked out of the main hall. He had already shed his heavy winter coat and was now dressed lightly.

As he walked toward the palace gates, Xiao Ming said, "Li Kaiyuan managed to bring in the cotton so smoothly. Do you think it's because the Chu King has suddenly developed a kind heart? No, this is all just an exchange of interests. He wants cannons, and I want cotton."

"That's true, but I'm afraid the Wei King won't be happy. I've heard he's been complaining about Your Highness in Jinling," Pang Yukun replied.

"Don't worry about him. The Wei King has never gotten along with the Chu King. We sell cannons to the Chu King, so of course, the Wei King isn't pleased. But right now, we don't need to get involved in the infighting between the princes. The real strategy is to profit from their rivalry by selling them weapons."

After analyzing the situation in the Great Yu Kingdom, Xiao Ming decided to adopt a policy similar to America's isolationist diplomacy during World War II.

He would not get involved in any of the factions' disputes. Instead, he would focus on making money quietly.

After all, the internal divisions within the Great Yu Kingdom couldn't be reconciled, and the various princes were all suspicious of each other. In such a situation, it was safest to profit by taking advantage of their conflicts.

"Your Highness is right. Since the Wei King is displeased, we should just sell him more cannons. If the quantity increases, won't he be satisfied?" Pang Yukun said.

"Exactly. Selling cannons to the Chu King also serves to stimulate the Wei King to buy more," Xiao Ming replied.

The two discussed the matter as they arrived at the docks, where Xiao Ming had already sent men to the armaments workshop to deliver the thirty cannons to the Chu King's fleet and simultaneously unload the cotton seeds.

When Li Kaiyuan had initially gone to the Chu region, the Chu King had refused to hand over the cotton seeds.

But after the Wei King's cannons arrived, the Wei King, eager to show his strength, fired cannons into the Yangtze River, almost like fireworks. This greatly provoked the Chu King.

In Qingzhou, Xiao Ming had been pressing for the cannons to be delivered to the Chu region, but the cotton seeds could wait. After all, the Chu King couldn't block the sale of cotton. The textile workshops could still operate, but without cannons, the Chu King had no leverage and ultimately had to reluctantly send the cotton seeds.

Upon inspecting the cotton on the merchant ship, the Chu King's envoy said, "Your Highness, the Chu King has ordered that the cotton seeds cannot be handed over unless we receive the cannons first. If Your Highness insists, I will have to burn the cotton seeds."

Xiao Ming and Pang Yukun exchanged glances. The envoy had some courage, and Xiao Ming smiled, "I've always kept my promises. I'm not interested in the three ships of cotton seeds. But the Chu King's choice to send them at this time seems... suspect."

The Chu King's envoy looked embarrassed. He understood Xiao Ming's point. March was the planting season for cotton, and sending the seeds now was clearly meant as a form of pressure. If Xiao Ming didn't fulfill his promise, it would be another year before the cotton could be planted.

After waiting at the docks for an hour, the armaments workshop finally delivered the cannons.

The Chu King's envoy inspected the cannons and ammunition before agreeing to have the workers unload the cotton seeds.

Xiao Ming personally supervised the delivery of the cotton seeds. He valued cotton as a key crop for Qingzhou, since it could be used to produce a wide range of industrial products, with clothing being just one example. There was also a significant demand for cotton in the medical industry.

If the cotton planting was successful in Qingzhou, they would no longer have to rely on the Chu King for cotton, ensuring the steady development of Qingzhou's textile industry.

This batch of cotton seeds was delivered directly to the official farm. With the spring sowing season upon them, Qingzhou's soldiers once again played the role of farmers.

“Your Highness, are we really going to plant cotton?”

On the embankment of the official farm, Niu Ben followed Xiao Ming and asked.

Once the cotton seeds were delivered to the official farm, Niu Ben had brought soldiers along.

Though Xiao Ming had already briefed him, Niu Ben was still hesitant. To him, food crops were far more important.

Although the food production in the six provinces had improved, last year there had been a surplus, but with the ongoing barbarian turmoil, the situation could easily change.

If there wasn't enough military rations, it could be deadly.

“Old General, don't worry. Although Qingzhou's grain supply is limited, the Wei King, Chu King, and Yan King have more than enough food. During the cannon deal, I bought a large reserve of food from them,” Xiao Ming reassured him.

Niu Ben sighed with relief upon hearing this. He had always prioritized agriculture over trade, understanding well the sorrow of a front line cut off from food supplies.

Though Xiao Ming's dual focus on both agriculture and commerce didn't align with Niu Ben's personal beliefs, as a general, his only job was to fight and train the army. He knew better than to interfere with such matters.

Now that Xiao Ming had assured him that food reserves were taken care of, Niu Ben was at ease—Xiao Ming hadn't lost his mind yet.

Bags of cotton seeds were handed out, and the soldiers scattered the seeds across the official farm's fields.

This year, in addition to the official farm under Qingzhou's jurisdiction, Xiao Ming and Pang Yukun had established several slave-run plantations. These plantations wouldn't grow staple crops this year; instead, they would plant cotton, sugarcane, and rapeseed.