

**REVIEW OF THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR
AFFAIRS IN CHINA, SINCE THE OPENING OF
THE TRADE IN 1834; AN ANALYSIS OF THE
GOVERNMENT DESPATCHES FROM THE
ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE BY CAPT. ELLIOT, ON
THE 14TH DECEMBER, 1836, TO THE 22D OF
MARCH, 1839; PP. 1-216**

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TO THE 22^d OF MARCH, 1839.

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REVIEW.

40.

A "LITTLE" war has been described as highly inexpedient for a great nation like ourselves to engage in, and every one must bow to the authority that has pronounced such an opinion. There is not much fear of our internal discords attracting the interference of our powerful neighbours, however alluring at first sight to them, and perhaps pleasant to their feelings, to see their great rival battling with itself; but it is very different with regard to our colonies or foreign dependencies. Our acquisitions of territory cannot be looked upon with entire complacency by other nations, any more than we regard with satisfaction such extensions or encroachments on their part; which renders it the more necessary for us, when employing any force on a distant service, to look well to all our other outposts, and so to strengthen them as to be prepared to meet any sudden and unexpected attack. If, therefore, we commence a war on a small scale, we should always augment our forces, both naval and military, that we may not be taken by surprise, in any quarter, by

the incipency of war in a more formidable shape. A single spark may raise a great fire.

But if ever a *little* war could have been undertaken without any apparent inconvenience or cause for doubt, and that too against a great nation, China, a few years ago, was the locality for it. A vulgar adage was never more applicable than at this moment to express a meaning. The tearing and rending, and botching and patching, that has been going on for some years, bring it to mind. Let the parties whom it concerns ruminare upon the pithy conclusion that "a stitch in time saves nine," and look at the arrears of work that their negligence has left on their shop-board. Our trade with China has been placed in imminent danger of being lost for ever, through the want of timely protection, or laying our minds at *close quarters* with the subject. In fact it is at this moment *clean gone* out of our hands.

We might go back further in search of some occasion for the interference of government, but will stop at the more recent event of the death of Lord Napier, accelerated or caused by the treatment he met with from a people to whom he carried a friendly communication. Although indiscreetly ordered to proceed at once to Canton, and hold no intercourse with the Hong merchants, under a false reliance upon a desire expressed by the Chinese to have some functionary sent there in the room of the East India Company's Chief Supercargo—which any one conversant with them would have pronounced to be a mere commercial substitute, with power to control his fellow subjects—still, as he went peaceably to his destination, and although

without a passport, in a way practised by every resident in the place, there could be no justification for the violent proceedings they instituted against him, and unnecessarily persevered in until they brought him to the last extremity. It is true that he came to them in a "questionable shape," being introduced by two ships of war, and insuring a bad reception by requiring to be allowed a direct communication with the Viceroy, and other high authorities; all which looked very much like a desire to force on them political relations, to which the genius of their government is so decidedly opposed. What they wanted was what we could not send them. They had inflicted many a wound upon us through the sides of the Company, which served as a break-water between our wrath and their insolence. Call the anomaly they required by whatever name, and limit his power of interfering with the Chinese to the utmost extent, still what could such a person be but an officer of our government, upon whom we could suffer neither insult nor injury to alight with impunity? The only way to have met the emergency would have been to have left the whole management of our interests in China to the merchants themselves, who might have chosen a committee and chairman, exercising a certain influence and control by common consent, and to whom all matters of dispute might have been referred. The Chinese would have called the Chairman "Taepan," and would have been satisfied with such an arrangement. The ordinary powers possessed by the commanders of merchantmen must have been relied on in such case for preserving peace with the natives. The articles, however, signed by the seamen, might

have been rendered more stringent, or, if necessary, a short Act have been passed, investing the masters of ships, while in China, with the requisite authority, and no more. Any such arrangement as this is now too late.

Having advanced so far we cannot recede. There are only *two* ways of proceeding with the Chinese—either to submit altogether to their terms, or oblige them to accept ours. They refused Lord Napier with his limited powers; they must now receive another more fully invested. We have planted residents in India, and must now fix one in China. A “tae-pan” will serve *our* turn no longer. Whoever may be sent, and whatever his title—Commissioner, Chargé d’affaires, or Ambassador—the widest discretion should be left him consistent with prudence, and the point of his destination be *Peking*. After the demonstration about to be made on their coast, we may safely reckon upon his being courteously received. Lord Amherst had not so many runners before or followers in his train, and had no fixed line of policy in view. If they will not receive him, let him remain at some eligible station taken possession of for that or other purposes, until our presence on their shores may become inconvenient to them, and induce them to make this primary concession to a foreign power. Every thing has a beginning, and the time appears to have arrived for the first step towards breaking up the exclusive system they have adopted towards the rest of the world. The people themselves are in no way interested in preserving this line of demarcation, for they have no hostile feeling towards foreigners, if left to their own impulses, and no objection to visit other

countries, as is proved by the many thousands that find their way annually, to Borneo, Java, and the British settlements in the Straits of Malacca. They are highly commercial, and require only encouragement to make them enterprising. They may become *too much*'s perhaps for the neighbouring countries, for, looking down the vista of futurity, who knows but that from this first fillip they are getting from us, and the knowledge they may acquire at our hands in science and military tactics, they may some day send out their overgrown masses in quest of settlement and conquests to the extreme west of Asia? That, however, is no consideration for us to pause upon at present. We often talk of Russian influence and extension in Asia, but think little of the Chinese, who, if fairly set agoing, would sweep them before them. They might press on through the broad belt inhabited by the Tartar race, into which the outposts of their empire already extends. Skirting India to the East and North, as she now does, nothing would save our dominion there from her grasp, excepting the density of its population, and its well-disciplined armies. The natural defences found on those sides, in the Himalaya and other ranges of high mountains, though formidable obstacles in themselves, would otherwise present no insuperable hindrance to their march upon the fertile plains of India. Where was there ever such another *officina gentium*, such a manufactory of men? There they are, spread over an almost boundless region, with their teeming numbers resting in calm quiescence—a mighty engine in the hand of Providence to work some future change in the destinies and races of other divisions of the great family of man.