

THE GLEANER.

And Northumberland, Kent, Gloucester, and Restigouche Schediasma.

Volume XIII:

Nec aranearum sane textus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt, nec noster vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes.

Number 26:

Miramichi, Tuesday Morning, March 8, 1842.

THE GELANER.

From the N. Y. New World.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE WAR BETWEEN ENGLAND AND CHINA.

Les disputes entre gens sensés sont les sages-femmes de la vérité.

Some poet has beautifully written, that from the same flowers that furnish to the bee its delicious nectar, the serpent extracts a subtle and deadly poison; whether or not this be true in the natural world we will not stop to inquire, but, as a metaphor, it has as much truth as beauty. The experience of our every day life proves, that, either from a natural perversion of intellect, or from prejudices stronger than principles, many men will, from the same common source, draw conclusions diametrically opposite, and build on one common hypothesis 'wide as the poles asunder.' A striking corroboration of this is to be found in the different views presented of the English war in China, in two recently delivered lectures. In one we find that profound philosopher and statesman, the honorable John Quincy Adams, combating vigorously the opinion almost universally prevalent in this country, that Great Britain is waging in China an unholy and unjust war. The gauntlet thrown down by the Ex-president is taken up by Mr J. W. Edmonds, and through a lecture, delivered before a society in Newburgh and afterwards published in the New World, its readers and the world at large are enlightened on this all important subject, and John Bull is satisfactorily proven to be the veriest scapegrace in Christendom.

With the views of Mr Adams we will not interfere, farther than to say that, in our opinion, the fallacy and unsoundness of his reasons have been triumphantly exposed in a review of his lecture in the New World of January last. Much as we respect the commanding talents and influence of Mr Adams, and, while we tender him our heartfelt thanks for the *animus* displayed in his lecture, in his seeking to shelter, under the broad shield of his eloquence, the conduct of England in this affair,—we reject the justification offered, and deny that England, in this nineteenth century, has no other ground for waging war against a barbarian power than an ingeniously devised theory deduced from the Laws of Nations, as set forth by Vattel and Puffendorf.

Without embarrassing ourselves with finely spun theories or interminable discussions on the Laws of Nations, we will enter into a candid examination of the questions on the great principles of Truth and Justice; and in taking a rapid glance at the more important points in the history of the causes and origin of this war, we think we shall prove satisfactorily to every reader, who will bring to the consideration of the subject an unbiased judgment, that Great Britain, so far from showing the cruel, oppressive and unchristian spirit so often imputed her, has been actuated by pure and just motives; and that, bound as she was by every sacred tie that unites government and people, to stretch forth her long arms in defence of the rights of her citizens and to humble and punish treacherous aggressors, she has assumed a hostile position *grudgingly*, after the failure of numerous attempts at negotiation and long protracted discussions; and also, that in the prosecution of the war, while she has held the sword in the one hand, she has ever offered the olive branch in the other; seeking, even after victory, when she might have dictated the most humiliating terms, nothing but indemnity for the past and security for the future.

This attempt, we are aware, we make at a great disadvantage—for, when poor John Bull gets involved in any controversy—he is here judged by a code of laws having some affinity with the well known Jeddart Justice, or the law of the moss troopers on the Scottish border, by which they hung their prisoners first and tried them afterward. Now, although from the nature of the case, happily for John Bull, this sentence could not be executed on him; yet, less just in one respect than the moss troopers, public opinion here, satisfied with condemning England first never troubles itself with inquiring into the merits of the question afterwards,—and this is especially true of the war with China: throughout this wide spread land the belief is general that England, reckless of consequences, has no other object in the war, than the forcing on the Celestials the purchase of opium, and the extension of her sceptre over new territories. Daily papers and monthly periodicals have alike exhausted the language of vituperation in abusing her, and no voice, with the single exception above referred to, (that of Mr Adams) has been raised in her defence. The lecture of M Edmonds, while professing to give an impartial history of

the causes and origin of the war, is nothing but an ingenious piece of special pleading, and is rife with evidences of the most deep rooted and bitter prejudices, such as are rarely to be met with, even in this land, where every stripling in controversy, like school boys shooting their arrows at the sun—first dips his maiden shaft in gall and then aims it at old England.

We assume then, that the relative positions of a people and their rulers are, allegiance on the one hand, protection on the other; that, while it is the duty of the governed to submit to the laws, and in case of necessity to aid in their execution,—to pay for the support of the government, and in time of war to take up arms in its defence: it is no less obligatory on the government to shelter its citizens at home, and protect their just rights abroad; to avenge insults offered to them in other lands, and to demand satisfaction for any outrages committed on their rights and liberties. The government that, either from weakness or want of spirit, fulfils not these duties, even at the risk of its political existence, can no longer be esteemed an independent nation, as it exists but on sufferance, or from the conflicting jealousies of surrounding nations.

But above and beyond all—nations in all ages have sustained the inviolability and sacred character of the representative of another government, whether he appear in the name of ambassador, envoy, consul, or superintendent of trade, and nations have never hesitated to pour forth their best blood and treasure in its defence. A striking example of this we have seen in our own day. In a moment of passion, the infidel hands of the Dey of Algiers came into familiar contact with the nasal organ of the representative of France, and that chivalric country, convulsed from one end to the other with indignation at the insult, sent its armed legions to take a signal vengeance. The dread thunders of her artillery soon opened a road over the prostrate walls of Algiers; and the once proud governor of a wide province, in spite of the most humiliating apologies, was sent to wander in disgrace over Europe, a pensioned beggar, living on the alms of the nation he had outraged. Years have rolled on, and the white flag of the Bourbons has been supplanted on the walls of Algiers, by the tricolor emblem of the Revolution,—the yaghaman of the wild Arab, and the hot pestilential breath of the desert, have thickly strewn the barren plains of Africa with the whitening bones of thousands of the best soldiers of France; but the great principle in which the war originated has never been surrendered,—the bitterest spirit of party rancour within her own borders has never assailed it, and neighboring nations, in their angry jealousy of conquest, have never questioned its justice. The acknowledgment of the inviolability of the ambassador existed coeval with the birth of nations; long before the era of modern civilization, and will gather strength in time's onward march, till that golden age arrive, when the sword shall be turned into the pruning hook, and nations shall wage war no more.

Believing these two great points established, the one, the basis of all government, the other the foundation of international intercourse, we will, by their light, now pass in review the acts of the two belligerent powers, to ascertain on which shall rest the dread responsibility of the war, and while we attempt to justify the conduct of Great Britain, we would have it expressly understood, that by this we mean the public acts of the government through its representatives, and not the conduct of a few private individuals, who, for the love of gain, may have set at defiance every principle of honor and integrity. The world is full of such men, and those whose Quixotic ardor cannot be repressed, need not travel so far as Canton and the Bocca Tigris to find examples, and to hold them up to the scorn and contempt of all good citizens.

With slight occasional intermissions, the English have been trading with China for the last two hundred years; opium was first introduced about the middle of the last century, and was a legitimate article of trade, at a certain fixed duty, until the year 1800, when it was interdicted by the Chinese imperial government; in spite however of the prohibitory edicts, the importation of the drug has continued steadily to increase, until in 1827 it reached the enormous amount of 30,000 chests. This contraband trade has thus flourished from the corrupt connivance of the provincial authorities, a sort of regularly established duty, or tax, varying from 65 to 75 dollars per chest, being openly levied upon it. Toward the end of the year 1833, it appears however, that even the provincial authorities could no longer resist the earnest and urgent instructions from the imperial government at Peking, to put an end to the traffic; as about this time they adopted more energetic measures with

that object, at the same time imposing additional restrictions on the regular trade. A meeting of the foreign residents, to consider those restrictions, took place on the 17th of December, at which the following remarks were made on the opium traffic by her Britannic Majesty's superintendent, Elliott.

"The present results of that traffic should be shortly stated and considered,—the actual interruption of the legal trade,—the seizure and jeopardy of innocent men * * * * the distressing degradation of the foreign character,—the painful fact that such courses exposed us more and more to the just indignation of this government and people, and diminished the sympathy of our own,—of its futurity, it might be safely predicted that it would fall into the hands of the reckless, the refuse and probably the convicted, of all the countries in our neighbourhood; * * * * he could not however help indulging the hope that the general reprobation of the whole community would have the effect of relieving him from the performance of a duty on many accounts extremely painful to him. * * * To the other foreigners present (those not English) he would use the freedom to observe, that he was the only agent in this country whose pursuits were nominally public,—and, so long as he was advocating the principles of truth and justice in our relations with this government and people, he might take the liberty to say, that he was, in some sense, the representative of their honorable countries as well as his own."

Here then we have an indignant and unequivocal condemnation of the contraband trade in opium from the mouth of the representative of that government charged with making war on China to force on its inhabitants the consumption, *bon gre, mal gre*, of that infamous drug. It is an easy matter for those writers who, scorning the trammels of history and facts, impute unworthy motives to others, to misrepresent acts the most meritorious and honorable, for, as the poet says—

"A word, a look,
Needs nothing but a feul interpretation,
To turn its simple language into shame."

By the above extract, we have pride also in showing, that Captain Elliot, clothed with all the authority of a minister plenipotentiary of Great Britain, was desirous of using the influence of his position for the benefit of other nations than his own,—and this line of conduct we are happy to say, he heartily pursued during the whole course of the difficulties previous to the formal commencement of the war.

On the ensuing day Captain Elliot to give full force and effect to the sentiments above expressed, issued the following public Notice to British Subjects in China.

"I, Charles Elliot, Chief Superintendent of the Trade of British Subjects in China, moved by urgent considerations immediately affecting the lives and properties of all her Majesty's subjects engaged in the trade at Canton, do hereby formally give notice, and require, that all British owned Schooners, Cutters, and otherwise rigged small craft, either habitually or occasionally engaged in the illicit traffic, within the Bocca Tigris, should proceed forthwith out of the same, within the space of three days from the date of these presents, and not return within the said Bocca Tigris, being engaged in the said illicit traffic.

"And I, the said Chief Superintendent, do further give notice and warn all her Majesty's subjects engaged in the aforesaid illicit opium traffic within the Bocca Tigris in such Schooners, &c. &c., that if any native of the Chinese Empire shall come by his or her death by any wound feloniously inflicted by any British subject or subjects, any such British subject or subjects, being duly convicted thereof, are liable to capital punishment as if the crime had been committed within the jurisdiction of her Majesty's Courts at Westminster.

And I, the said Chief Superintendent, do further give notice, and warn all British subjects, being owners of such Schooners, &c., that her Majesty's Government will in no way interpose if the Chinese government shall think fit to seize and confiscate the same.

And I, the said Chief Superintendent, do further give notice and warn all British subjects employed in said Schooners, &c. &c., that the forcible resisting of the officers of the Chinese Government in the duty of searching and seizing is a lawless act, and that they are liable to consequences and penalties, in the same manner as if the aforesaid forcible resistance were opposed to the officers of their own or any other government, in their own or in any foreign country.

"Given under my hand and seal of office at Canton, this 18th December, eighteen hundred and forty one.

(Signed)
CHARLES ELLIOT, &c."

On the 17th we had the views and recommendations of the Superintendent, but on the 18th we find these views and recommendations followed by acts urgent and energetic, as the above official document abundantly proves. Here we learn that the representative of the British Government exercised extraordinary powers, far beyond those invested in any Ambassador or Consul that has come under our notice; for we know no other instance of the English or any other government using its power or influence to put in force the revenue laws of a foreign nation against its own citizens! We find Elliott also threatening British subjects with trial, by the laws of England for offences committed within the jurisdiction of a foreign power! It would appear however, that this address produced a great sensation among the British Residents; not so much on account of the active measures of the Superintendent to suppress all contraband trade, as for the novelty of the doctrine therein contained. For the same jealousy of natural rights that first wrested from King John the great charter of English liberties, and which has constantly watched with Argus eyes over those liberties through several centuries, obliged Mr Elliot to show upon what authority he exercised those extraordinary powers; as we find that a few days afterwards, on 31st December, he issued another notice in which he says 'He takes this occasion to republish that part of the Act of Parliament and the orders in Council upon which his instructions are founded.' In the same notice the Superintendent, as if the intentions of the British Government had not been sufficiently explicit, reiterates them in even stronger terms. We will not, however, try the patience of our readers by further extracts on this point; with the exception of the short closing paragraph of that address, which is important as showing the cordial support which he received from the residents themselves. It is in these words: 'It is a source of great support to him that the general body of the whole community settled at Canton, strongly concur with him in the depreciation of this peculiar mischief, and he has not failed to afford her Majesty's government the satisfaction of knowing that such is the case.'

The numerous public documents that appeared in those exciting times would furnish many additional proofs of the desire of the British government to put an end to this illicit traffic, and of the hearty condemnation of that traffic by the majority of the British residents; but, contenting ourselves with the above extracts, taken almost at random, we will now pass on to the opening act of that grand drama, in which two of the greatest powers on the face of the earth play the principal parts,—with eager and anxious natives as the spectators,—a drama whose *denouement* may have a very important influence on a great portion of the earth's inhabitants.

Early in march 1839, there arrived at Canton a high personage, whose coming had been heralded forth for months before,—we mean High Commissioner Lin. Of a remarkably energetic character, as his after proceedings proved, he had been chosen by the Emperor as the person above all others most eminently qualified to put an effectual stop to the growing evil of the opium trade. Lin received his instructions from the Emperor himself, and, it is said, was invested with powers such as have only been thrice delegated by the monarchs of the present ruling dynasty. He made his public entry into Canton with great pomp and parade on the 10th of March,—and, having passed eight days in making such inquiries and examinations as he considered necessary to understand the position of affairs, he issued on the 18th an edict, addressed to 'Foreigners of all Nations,' requiring them first to deliver up to him, to be destroyed, all the opium in their possession, or on board any ship in the Chinese waters,—next requiring them to give bonds to the effect—'That those vessels which shall hereafter resort hither, will never again dare to bring opium with them,—and that, should any be brought, as soon as discovery shall be made of it, the goods shall be forfeited to government, and the parties shall suffer the extreme penalties of the law, and that such punishment shall be willingly submitted to—threatening them, in case of nonfulfilment of his orders and the conditions imposed on them, with the severe course of punishment prescribed by the new Law. Lin *condescendingly* allowed three days for the foreigners to prepare an answer to his edict and to send it to him.

Simultaneous with this edict Lin issued instructions that no foreigner should be permitted to leave Canton,—a day or two after all commercial business was stopped, and the native servants being first withdrawn, the foreigners, made prisoners in their own factories, were surrounded on all sides by armed