

MEMORIAL OF R.B. FORBES AND OTHERS TO THE CONGRESS OF THE U.S.  
 AMERICAN CITIZENS, MERCHANTS IN CANTON, CHINA, FOR A COMMERCIAL AGENT TO  
 BE SENT OUT TO CHINA TO NEGOTIATE, IF POSSIBLE, A COMMERCIAL TREATY, WITH A  
 NAVAL FORCE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE PERSONS RESIDENT THERE, AND PROPERLY  
 BELONGING TO CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES

The undersigned, native citizens of the United States, resident at the port of Canton, in China, beg leave to present this our memorial:

That, upon the twenty-second day of March last, we were, in common with the resident foreigners of all nations, made prisoners in our factories, and surrounded by armed men and boats; deprived of our servants, and cut off from all communication with our ships at Whampoa, Lintin, and Macao; by which means, together with the threatened forfeiture of life if his arbitrary exactions were not complied with, a commissioner from the Imperial Government at Peking has succeeded in wresting from residents here upwards of twenty thousand chests of British owned opium, which may be valued at more than ten millions of dollars. We have, also, been threatened with severe but undefined penalties for refusing to sign a bond by which all concerned in a vessel that may hereafter be found bringing opium to China are required to be given up to the authorities for punishment by death.

The occasion for these acts of violence and aggression on the part of the Chinese Government is an extensive opium trade, of the rise and progress of which we propose to submit a brief review.

Opium had been for many years imported into China at an established rate of duty, until about the year 1800, at which time the then reigning Emperor prohibited its introduction; it was, however, subsequently openly delivered from vessels stationed at Whampoa, until about the year 1821, when the opium-receiving vessels were expelled from the river and took their stations at Lintin, where the trade has since been carried on with the knowledge and consent of the chief local authorities, and with little interruption, rapidly increasing in amount and value, as shown by the following statement:

|             |         |           |        |             |             |
|-------------|---------|-----------|--------|-------------|-------------|
| In the year | 1816-'7 | were sold | 3,210  | chests, for | \$3,657,000 |
|             | 1822-'3 | "         | 5,822  | "           | 7,988,930   |
|             | 1827-'8 | "         | 9,535  | "           | 10,425,075  |
|             | 1832-'3 | "         | 23,670 | "           | 15,332,759  |

In 1833-'34, the opium trade in foreign vessels (chiefly British) along the whole coast of China, eastward of Canton, began to assume an importance which has greatly increased until the present crisis.

In 1836 it was announced to the foreign residents that the imperial councils at Peking proposed to admit opium at a fixed rate of duty, as was done prior to the year 1800; the high officers of this, as well as of several other provinces, memorialized the Emperor, recommending the adoption of the proposed measure; and so little doubt was entertained,

either by the resident foreigners, or by the best informed of the native merchants, that it would speedily take effect, that arrangements were made for an increased production of the drug in India, to an extent that, had the trade been suffered to continue without interruption, the amount of opium that would have found purchasers in China during the present season of 1839-'40, would not have fallen short of about forty thousand chests.

Edicts and proclamations have from time to time been promulgated, prohibiting the opium trade; but notwithstanding these, the highest officers in the province have not only connived at the smuggling or introduction of the drug by the Chinese, receiving a fee or duty varying from twenty to seventy dollars per chest, but they have been active participators therein; and it is a well-known fact, that a large amount of the opium delivered at Lintin has been delivered to boats belonging to, and bearing the flags of the Governor, the Hoppo, or collector of customs, and other high officers of the province. The increase of this trade since 1817 is of itself sufficient evidence that it has been favored by the fostering care as well as by the connivance of the officers of Government; and the circumstances that during the past six months the sale of opium to the Chinese has almost ceased, shows clearly that whenever it pleases this Government to abolish the trade, they possess ample power over their own people to do it effectually.

We have no wish to see a revival of the opium trade; on the contrary, before the adoption of the violent measures that have given occasion for the present memorial, we had, most of us, signed a voluntary pledge that, believing in the sincerity of this Government in their efforts to destroy the trade, we would in future abstain from dealing in the drug. We are alive to the fact, that during the last five years Great Britain and her Indian possessions have drawn from this empire thirty to thirty-five million dollars in gold and silver, and forty to forty-five millions of dollars in teas, raw silk, etc, in exchange for a drug which has been productive of much evil and of scarcely a single good to the Chinese; a drug, the introduction of which, we have reason to fear, has degraded the foreign character in the estimation of the better portion of the Chinese. And whether we view the subject in a moral and philanthropic light, or merely as a commercial question, we are extremely desirous to see the importation and consumption of opium in China entirely at an end.

We cannot, however, perceive the slightest ground for justification of the robbery committed upon British subjects here, nor for the detention of the persons, ships, and property of those who are entirely disconnected from the obnoxious trade. The measures of the Imperial Government should have been directed first against its own officers, who have been engaged and most active in the trade; but, taking advantage of the unprotected state of the foreign community of Canton, the commissioner has proceeded in his high-handed measures, regardless alike of the respect due to the representatives of foreign powers resident in Canton, and of the laws or customs and usages that have heretofore been observed and considered the chief guaranties for the safety of the foreign trade.

If, as it is confidently believed, the British Government should determine to demand explanation and satisfaction for the outrages committed upon Her Majesty's officers and subjects resident here, her naval force may find it necessary to resort to a blockade of the chief ports and rivers upon the coast, and to interrupt an immense coasting trade in grain, salt, and other merchandise, which is transported from the southern provinces of the empire,

Formosa, etc., to the more northern ports, for the supply of the less productive vicinity of Peking. A perseverance in these measures, it is believed, would, in a very few months, reduce the Chinese Government to a willingness to listen to all the just and reasonable demands of the foreign power; while the consequence of suffering the present attack to pass without remonstrance or redress, we cannot doubt, will be such an aggravation of existing evils as would lead to constant interruptions of the trade, if not eventually to the total expulsion of foreign commerce from the empire.

We would, therefore, with all deference and respect, express our opinions that the United States Government should take immediate measures; and, if deemed advisable, to act in concert with the Governments of Great Britain, France, and Holland, or either of them, in their endeavors to establish commercial relations with this empire upon a safe and honorable footing, such as exists between all friendly powers; and by direct appeal to the Imperial Government at Peking, to obtain a compliance with the following among other important demands:

1st. Permission for foreign envoys to reside near the court at Peking, on the terms and with all the privileges accorded at other courts, through whom appeal may be made to the Imperial Government in cases of difficulty with the local authorities in the prosecution of our commercial pursuits.

2nd. The promulgation of a fixed tariff of duties on articles, both of import and export, from which no deviation shall be allowed under any pretext whatever.

3d. A system of bonding warehouses, or some regulations permitting the transshipment of such goods as it may be desirable to re-export for want of a market in China. (See note a.)

4th. The liberty of trading at other port or ports in China than that of Canton. (See note b.)

5th. Compensation for the losses caused by the stoppage of the whole legal trade of the port, and the consequent detention of vessels and property; with a guaranty against the recurrence of similar arbitrary acts, and security for the free egress from Canton, and other ports, of all persons not guilty of crimes or civil offences, at any and at all times.

6th. That until the Chinese laws are distinctly made known and recognised, the punishment for wrongs committed by foreigners upon the Chinese, or others, shall not be greater than is applicable to the like offence by the laws of the United States or England; nor shall any punishment be inflicted by the Chinese authorities upon any foreigner, until the guilt of the party shall have been fairly and clearly proved.

Should our Government determine to abstain from any interposition in the affairs of its citizens in China, the undersigned beg leave to represent the necessity which will exist for the appointment of an agent or commissioner qualified by his commercial and general information, with a sufficient naval force to protect our commerce (see note c) and our persons from being held responsible for the acts of lawless traders and the hostile operations of a British or other foreign fleet; or at least to prevent any paper blockade from interfering

with our commerce, as well as to secure a participation in any privileges which this Government may hereafter be induced to concede to other powers.

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In conclusion, we have but to express our candid conviction that the appearance of a naval force from the United States, England, and France, upon the coast of China, would, without bloodshed, obtain from this Government such acknowledgments and treaties as would not only place our commerce upon a secure footing, but would be mutually beneficial, and greatly increase the extent and importance of our relations with this empire.

#### NOTES

(a.) The demands urged in the first, second, and third articles, are rendered necessary by the rapacity of the local officers, who farm their offices from the Imperial Government, paying therefore large sums of money in addition to the revenues raised upon the trade and productions of the province; and when it is known that a frequent change of officers is practised, and that each incumbent accumulates great wealth, the extent of fraud and extortion may perhaps be imagined.

(b.) We have but now experienced the unhappy consequences of residing at a distance of near ten miles from the foreign shipping, which is anchored at a distance of thirty miles from the sea, and escape prevented by sufficient fortification at the mouth of the river.

(c.) A comparison of the American trade to China, with that upon the coast of South America, will show the very great importance of the former, and improve its claims upon Government for protection.

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Canton, May 25, 1839.