

THE WAR WITH CHINA.

BY THOMAS MOORE, ESQ.

"Mistress of herself, though China fall."

Pope.

"I can't understand it!" said my uncle, throwing down on the table the pamphlet he had been reading, and looking up over the fire-place at the great picture of Canton, painted by his elder brother when he was mate of an East Indian ship. My aunt was seated beside my uncle, with her cotton-box, playing at working; and cousin Tom was working at playing, in a corner. As for my father and myself, we had dropped in as usual after a walk, to take our tea, which, through an old connection with Cathy, was certain to be first rate at the cottage. "Why on earth," continued my uncle, "why on earth we should go to war about the Opium business quite passes my comprehension."

"And mine too," chimed in my aunt, whose bent was to put in a word and put out an argument, as often as she had an opportunity; "I always thought Opium was a lulling, soothing sort of a thing, more likely to compose people's passions than to stir them up."

My uncle looked at the speaker with much the same expression as that of the girl in Wilkie's picture, who is at once frowning and smiling at the boy's grotesque mockery of the Blind Fiddler—for my aunt's allusion to the sedative qualities of Opium was amusing in itself, but provoking, as interrupting the discourse.

"The Sulphur question," she continued, "is quite a different thing. That's all about brimstone and combustibles; and it would only be of a piece if we were to send our men of war, and frigates, and fire-ships, to bombard Mount Vesuvius."

"I should like to see it!" said my father, in his quietest tone, and with his gravest face, for he was laughing inwardly at the proposed Grand Display of Pyrotechnics!

"To go back," resumed my uncle, "to the very beginning of the business; first, we have Captain Elliot, who wishes to give the Chinese admiral a chop!"

"And a very civil thing of him too," remarked my aunt.

"Eh! what!" exploded my uncle, as snappishly as a Waterloo cracker.

"To be sure," said my aunt, in a deprecating tone, "it might be a Friday and a fast day, as to meet!"

"As to what?"

"As to meat," repeated my aunt, resolutely. "I have always understood that the Catholic priests and the Jesuits were the first to go converting the Chinese."

"Phoo! nonsense!" ejaculated my uncle. A chop is a document."

"Well, it's not my fault," retorted my aunt, "if things abroad are called by their wrong names. What is a chop, then, in Chinese—I mean a pork or a mutton one—is it called a document?"

My uncle gave a look upward, worthy of Job himself. He was sorely tempted, but he translated the rising English oath into a French shrug and grimace. My father tried to mend matters as usual. "After all, brother," he said, "my sister's mistake was natural, and womanly—especially in a mistress of a house, who has to think occasionally of chops and steaks. Besides she has had greater blunders to keep her in countenance—you remember the needless resentment there was about the 'Barbarian Eye.'"

"To be sure he does," said my aunt, "and why should I be expected to know Chinese, any more than Lord Melbourne, or Lord Palmerston, or Lord Knox? Who? especially when it's sure a difficult language beside, and a single letter stands for a whole chapter, like the Egyptian hieroglyphics."

"But what says the pamphlet?" said my father, deliberately putting on his spectacles, and taking up the brochure from the table.

"Why he says," replied my uncle, "that opium is a baneful drug, that it produces the most demoralizing effects on the consumers; and that we have no right to go to war to force a noxious article down the throats of our fellow creatures."

"No, nor a wholesome one either," returned my father, "as the judge said to the woman when she killed her child for not taking its physic. But what have we here—a return of our exports to the Celestial Empire?"

"The author means to imply," said my uncle, "that if the Chinese did not chew and smoke so much opium, they would have more money to lay out on our Birmingham and Manchester manufactures."

"Pretty nonsense, indeed!" exclaimed my aunt. "As if the Chinese could smoke printed cottons and calicoes, and chew Brummage hardware, and cutlery, like the ostriches!"

"For aught we know," said my uncle, "it may be allegory—and I have often fancied that the paintings on their vessels were scenes from their tales or poems. In the mean time we may gather some hints of the character of the people from their porcelain—that they are literary and musical, and from the frequent occurrences of figures of children, that they are of affectionate and domestic habits. And, above all, that they are eminently unwarlike, and inclined only to peaceful and pastoral pursuits. I do not recollect ever seeing an armed figure, weapons, or any allusion to war, and its attributes, in any of their enameled."

"So much the worse for them," said my father; "for they are threatened with something worse than a tempest in a teapot. It will be like the Chinese vessel in the old fable, coming in contact with the brazen one. There will be a fine smash, brother, of your favorite war!"

"A smash! where?" inquired my aunt, who had just entered the room, and imperceptibly overheard the last sentence. "What are you talking of?"

"Of a Bull in a China Shop," said my father, with a hard wink at my uncle.

"Yes! that is a dreadful smash, sure enough," said my aunt. "There was a Mrs. Starkey, who keeps the great Staffordshire warehouse at Southfield Barn—she had an overdriven team run into her shop only last week. At first, she says, he was

quiet enough, for besides racing up and down St. John street, he had been bullock-hunted all over Ilington, and Hoxton fields, and that had taken the wildness out of him. So at first he only stood staring at the jugs, and mugs, and things, as if admiring the patterns."

"And pray, inquired my uncle, "where was Mrs. Starkey in the mean time?"

"Why, the shopman, you see, had crept under the counter for safety, and Mrs. Starkey was in the back parlour, and saw every thing by peeping through a crack of the green curtain, over the glass door. So the mad Bull stood staring at the crockery, quiet enough; when unluckily with a switch of his tail, he brought down on his back a whole row of pipkins that hung over head. I suppose he remembered being pelted about the streets; for the clatter of the earthenware about his ears, seemed to put him up again; for he gave a stump and a bullwhack that made the whole shop shake again, and down rattled a great jug on his hind quarters. Well, round turns the Bull, quite savage with another loud bellow, as much as to say, 'I should like to know who did that?' when what should he see by his back, but a China figure of a Mandarin, as big as our Tom there, a-grinning and nodding at him with his head."

"Commissioner Lin," said my father, with a significant nod to my uncle.

"Mrs. Starkey thinks," continued my aunt, "that the mad Bull took the China figure for a human creature, and particularly as its motions made it look so life-like—however, the more the bull stamped and bellowed, the more the Mandarin grinned and nodded his head, till at length and at last, the Bull got so aggravated, that sticking his tail upright, Mrs. Starkey says, as stiff as the kitchen poker, he made but one rush at the China Mandarin, and smashed him all into shivers!"

"And there you have the whole history," said my father, with another nod to my uncle, "of a War with China."

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