

Personal Narrative of Our First Minister to China.

By John E. Ward.



John E. Ward, our first minister to China and the first accredited foreign envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of any country to enter its capital, Peking, is still living in New York. Born in 1814, he is now 86 years of age, but hale and vigorous, with a vast fund of anecdote and interesting reminiscences. All his great contemporaries have passed away, but his recollection of events that transpired half a century ago is still clear and vivid. There are few living who have assisted as he has in the "opening of China," and whose narrative was so instrumental in shaping the prevailing policy that has prevailed between China and the United States. His courage and discretion at a most critical period of China's history were recognized by the ablest European diplomats, and President Buchanan sold him and his mission in his actual message to Congress in 1859. "On the 15th of December, 1858, John E. Ward, a distinguished citizen of Georgia, was daily commissioned as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to China. . . . The cabinet of our minister in the month he received by express appointment. . . . Mr. Ward was the president of the Democratic national convention which met in Cincinnati in 1860 and nominated James Buchanan for president. Prior to that time Mr. Ward had been mayor of Savannah, president of the Georgia senate and acting lieutenant governor, resigning in 1845 on being appointed United States minister to China."

to be used as recruits for the vessels and as a landing force, should a land attack upon the forts be deemed expedient. These vessels were passed in the execution of my determination not to be stopped except by actual force, and we were within half a mile of the forts when our steamer grounded, which was not surprising, as we had no pilot, and no officer on board had ever before entered the river. At the time we grounded the tide was falling rapidly. The English admiral immediately sent his flag lieutenant in the gunboat Plover to say to Commodore Tattnell that he expected to see us fired on at any moment, and that as the tide fell our boat would certainly keel over

castically, "I thought these were officers of the United States, and not of the state of Georgia." But Tattnell was not to be held back by sarcasm, and we went down with our steamer, the Tooy-wan, and towed the marines in the junks, who were first placed in small boats, up to help Admiral Hope. It took several trips to accomplish this, and we met with some loss ourselves. The coxswain of the commodore's boat was killed, and the same bullet that killed him passed between the legs of Flag Lieutenant Trenchard, who afterward became famous in service. After having towed up the boats the Tooy-wan came to anchor at 7 p. m. between the French gunboat and the Commodore. From our position we had a full view of the forts as they landed the men upon the shore. The forts and the water batteries opened upon them a deadly fire. We could see the men fall in their boats even before they touched the landing, yet they moved steadily on. As they reached the shore they fell in ranks. Of the 600 men composing the landing party at least 100 had fallen before they gained the shore. There a most terrible fate awaited the survivors. Landing at the approach of night upon a shore of which they were entirely ignorant, at low water, with a fast rising tide, they found that they

had been approved by my government, and my duty was plain—to carry out my instructions and have my exchanged negotiations with the governor general informing him that I was there by invitation of the commissioners of Shanghai; that I was charged with an autograph letter from the president of the United States. I asked him to provide me with the means of conveyance in accordance with the provisions of the American treaty. These negotiations resulted in immediate preparations for my departure for Peking. Sir Frederick Bruce, in his official report to his government, saw the different positions which we occupied, and in his communication to the Earl of Malmesbury of July 15, 1859, uses the following language in reference to my departure for Peking: "Mr. Ward's position is one of considerable difficulty. Nor do I see, after our unsuccessful attempt at the Pei-Ho, that any course was open save the one he has pursued. He has acted cordially and frankly in the spirit of his declarations to me at Hongkong, and it is a matter of satisfaction to me that his conduct in our previous proceedings is a strong argument in favor of the line of conduct pursued by De Bourbillon and myself." On Oct. 10, 1859, Lord Lyons, then the British minister to the United States, addressed a letter to the Hon. Lewis Cass, secretary of state of the United States, of which the following is a copy:

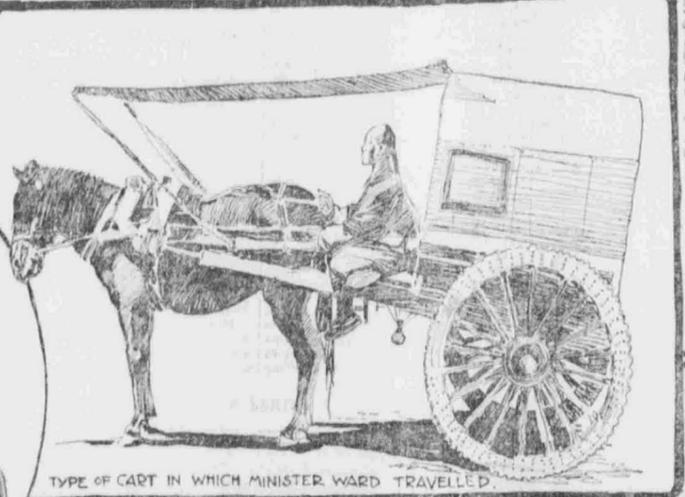
Washington, Oct. 10, 1859. Sir—Her majesty's minister in China has not failed to bear testimony to the friendly feelings of the United States and, frankly, in the spirit of his declarations to me at Hongkong, and it is a matter of satisfaction to me that his conduct in our previous proceedings is a strong argument in favor of the line of conduct pursued by De Bourbillon and myself. On Oct. 10, 1859, Lord Lyons, then the British minister to the United States, addressed a letter to the Hon. Lewis Cass, secretary of state of the United States, of which the following is a copy.

APPOINTED minister of the United States to China by President Buchanan in 1858, my diplomatic duties really began at Shanghai in June, 1859. I met there Quillan and Washana, the two imperial commissioners deputed by the emperor nominally to meet the foreign ambassadors at Shanghai and make arrangements for their visit to Peking. The real object of their mission was, if possible, to dissuade them from going there, and, failing in their efforts to do this, to interpose every obstacle. By the American treaty no place was designated where it should be exchanged. The English and French treaties each contained a clause providing for an exchange at Peking. In my first official interview I discovered that there would be great opposition, not openly, but covertly, to our going to Peking. I therefore proposed, as the time for the exchange of treaties had arrived, that the exchange of the American treaty should be made then at Shanghai. To this the imperial commissioners replied that the Chinese ratification of the treaty being at Peking, no exchange could take place until either it could be received from Peking or we should reach that place. Satisfied that this was a mere evasion, I then required from them a stipulation that I should have the right, without the exchange of treaties, to proceed to Peking with the ambassador of the first nation that visited that place. To this they assented and correspondence with them ceased.

On the arrival of the British and French ministers, both Sir Frederick Bruce and M. de Bourbillon refused to hold any intercourse with the Chinese commissioners at Shanghai, alleging that by the stipulations of their treaties they were to make the exchange at Peking, and that that must be their first business. This, in my judgment, was a grave error and tended in no small degree to produce the disastrous results at Pei-Ho. A meeting and conference with these high commissioners could have produced no possible evil result. Their refusal to do so irritated and mortified them, as their rank was next to the emperor's. I was accordingly officially notified by Quillan and Washana that they would leave for Peking, where arrangements would be made to receive us. On the morning of the 11th of June, 1859, we left Shanghai for the mouth of the Pei-Ho, having in tow a small steamer called the Tooy-

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THE ATTACK ON THE TAKU FORTS IN 1859



NOTABLE SCENES CONNECTED WITH MINISTER WARD'S TRIP TO PEKING.

wan, with which we were to ascend the river to Tien-tsin, the water being so shallow for our frigates, the Powhatan. We arrived at the anchorage at the mouth of the Pei-Ho and found there the French and English fleets—the first under the command of Commodore Tricault, the latter under Sir James Hope, the Chesapeake being his flagship. The English and French ambassadors had both arrived before me. We were anchored about ten miles from the mouth of the Pei-Ho, the coast being so shallow that no nearer approach could be made in large vessels. About three miles from the mouth of the river and at nearly equal distance from the forts there is a bank about a mile wide, across which no vessel of greater draft than ten feet can go, even at high tide. When that bank has been passed, you are in the channel of the river, and distant about three miles in a direct line from its mouth. On our arrival at the anchorage we found that the English gunboats had already crossed that bar and were anchored within two miles of the forts. As soon as it was possible after my arrival Admiral Hope called and informed me that he had been up to the mouth of the river and had found it so obstructed by chains as to render farther progress impossible without their removal, and that he had sent his boats on shore to say that the English and French ministers had arrived on their way to Peking and demanded the removal of the obstructions so as to enable them to proceed. The reply was that these obstructions had been placed not to prevent the ministers from going to Peking, but to keep out the rebels—because the Chinese rebels had no boats. They also said that this was not the Pei-Ho, but that the entrance to the Pei-Ho was 10 or 15 miles farther north, and that the ministers must go there to get to Peking.

The admiral discovered this and gave them notice that as the doors had been closed upon the English and French ministers, he had been instructed to open them, and should proceed to do so on Saturday morning, the 24th inst. An important difference between the position of the American minister and that of the English and French ministers should here be observed. The English and French treaties had been made in time of war between China and those countries. By those treaties the war was terminated. Upon a violation of their stipulations their representatives might regard themselves as thrown back into the war which had been by such treaties suspended. The American treaty, on the contrary, was made with a nation with whom we had never been at war. If its provisions should be violated, the proper remedy for such violation must be determined by the government of the United States. I had been instructed, however, by the president to "go to Peking." I had received the assent, if not the invitation, of the Chinese commissioners at Shanghai to go there to exchange the treaty. I determined, therefore, to proceed on my way until stopped by force which could not be overcome by that under my command. In the execution of that design, and with the naval commander of our small force, I crossed the bar the next day, Friday morning, the 24th, and proceeded toward the forts. I found at anchor about a mile and a half from the mouth of the river all the English and French vessels which could cross the bar. The entire fleet consisted of ten gunboats and three small vessels, carrying about 40 guns and 800 men. Anchored with these vessels were three large Chinese junks, as they are called, which had been taken in possession of by the allies and on which they had placed about 700 men.

and go to pieces, further, to tender to us the use of the Plover and request us to hoist the American ensign at the fore and his own flag at the mizzenmast. This generous offer was declined, but an effort was made by the gunboat to relieve us from our position, which, proving unsuccessful, the Plover left us and returned to the line which the admiral was then beginning to form. The flag lieutenant with interpreters, was then sent on shore by me to inform the Chinese that I was on board the steamer on my way to Peking. They returned with the reply that there was no officer of sufficient rank there to receive any communication from me, and that we could not proceed by that river; that the emperor had ordered the governor general of that province to meet the ministers at what they called the north entrance of the river, which they said was distant about ten miles, and that he would be there on that day or the next. About 8 o'clock in the evening our steamer started with the rising tide. By that time the admiral had formed a line extending from the junks to our position, and our commodore, fearing that the moving of a light about our vessel might be mistaken for some of the admiral's squadron for a signal, ordered the steamer to drop below the line and anchor near the junks. About 12 o'clock an explosion was heard, which was the blowing up of the first barrier across the river. This was followed by two guns from the forts, after which all was quiet the rest of the night. With the morning light it was evident from the position of the vessels that the battle would be commenced some time during the day. The vessels had approached as near the entrance to the river as the obstructions would permit. Three barriers had been

During the night, firing was commenced by the forts, which was at once returned by all the vessels, and the balls soon flew like hailstones. In half an hour we could see from the deck of our vessel that the shots from the forts were cutting up the boats, while the forts were severely injured by the small battery directed against them. At 5 o'clock a young officer came from the admiral's ship, weary and exhausted, with the blood streaming down his face, to tell the commodore that the admiral was lying on his deck severely, if not mortally, wounded. His captain had been killed, and but three men were left capable of doing duty. This officer had been sent to order up the re-enforcements, but the tide had fallen so that the English gunboats were unable to execute this order. The small boats of the vessels were the only means by which the re-enforcements could be sent up the river, but they were fearfully strong in this river, and the wind was so high that it was evidently impossible by this means of conveyance that assistance could reach the admiral in time to be of any use. The young British officer had intimated but had not said in so many words, that assistance from us would relieve the situation. Commodore Tattnell turned to me and said, "I must either help him, or return to the Powhatan. I don't stand here and see them shot to pieces." I agreed that we ought to give them aid, at which one of the officers of our marines who was standing near said loud enough for us to hear, "This is not neutrality."

The retreat was as fatal as the landing, and by their light shot down men who could not return the fire. When the day dawned the squadron was a wreck. Less than one-half of the land force had escaped unhurt. Three hundred of the landing party, besides 8 officers and 22 men of the little squadron, had been killed. The wounded were towed by the Tooy-wan over the bar in three large barges attached to her stern. The Chinese sent up fire rockets, and by their light shot down men who could not return the fire. When the day dawned the squadron was a wreck. Less than one-half of the land force had escaped unhurt. Three hundred of the landing party, besides 8 officers and 22 men of the little squadron, had been killed. The wounded were towed by the Tooy-wan over the bar in three large barges attached to her stern. The Chinese sent up fire rockets, and by their light shot down men who could not return the fire. When the day dawned the squadron was a wreck. 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