

*The Wasp*  
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*The Document in the Case*

The memorial statement to Congress adopted by the anti-Chinese convention is in many respects an excellent document, and in at least one it is not. One would think it obvious to the blindest intelligence that in such a paper, framed for such a purpose at such a time, coarse and insulting words are “matter out of place.” The paper, if it has a purpose, has for that purpose the conciliation of a strong Eastern sentiment, both legislative and popular, that is opposed to Chinese restriction and expulsion. It was, or should have been, intended, by a fair, temperate and logical presentment of our views, to persuade those differing with us to agree with us. What madness, then, to antagonize them in feeling as well as in opinion by the use of such language as this:

“For let men cant as much as they please about the ‘inherent and unalienable right of expatriation and emigration,’ about America being the home of the oppressed of all nations, at the bottom of it all will be found ‘old Mammon,’ anxious to sell a nation’s birthright for money profit in some form.”

There is neither civility nor sense in that kind of talk. The statement it contains is irritating in form and in substance untrue. Great bodies of people may be in error, and commonly are, but they are never actuated by considerations of commercial selfishness; their nonsense is not “cant.” Not one in a thousand of those Eastern people who hold pro-Chinese views has, or supposes himself to have, any private interest to be served at the expense of the general welfare. Since when, Mr. Swift, has derision been a useful handmaiden to persuasion?

Unfortunately, the memorial is full of this folly, and wherever it appears it is dressed in the language of the “stump.” It is the utterance of a strong, coarse mind, unused to the courtesies of discussion, knowing nothing of the strength of restraint, the value of candor, the advantage of respect. It everywhere “bears on hard.” It was hardly worthwhile. If the ends of persuasion and conviction were best served by strong language a fish-woman would be the best ambassador, and Dr. O’Donnell would long since have converted the whole world to leprosy.

I have not commonly been pointed out as an awful example of too much charity for mankind. Nobody, as a rule, accuses me of entertaining too good an opinion of my fellow men’s motives. One ingenious scoundrel has, indeed, gone so far as to describe me by a word specially coined to pay off my deserts—he called me a “philophobe.” But my cynicism compares with that of this memorial as a sinuous rill of ink, working its way civilly over a greased table, exempting islands and peninsulas, compares with a broad, pitiless and unsparing flow of nitric acid, consuming with corrosive tooth everything in the sweep of its encroachment. Observe this:

“The growth and development of the sham sentimentality about the right of free immigration to this country has always had lucre as its chief underlying motive. The money-seeking sentimentalist has easily recognized the very obvious fact that the increase of population has increased the value of property and made business lively and there he has seen his profit.”

That the men who hold such views of “the right of asylum” in America are dunces I have always labored and belabored to show. But with the exception of some of their leaders, they are not dunces for money; their sentimentality has no thought of thrift. Hobbies are to ride; they seldom turn a mill.

To the rising young cynic I would give this counsel: Sir, your art is essentially discriminative: you must see and know the good in order to apprehend the bad. How can you know that A is a fault if you know not that B is a merit? Don’t throw vitriol as a priest throws holy water with his aspergillus—impartially upon the heads of all; that performance will not interest even those aspersed. Select some conspicuous malefactor—conspicuity is malefaction—and upon his pow discharge the entire contents of your basin. Universal dispraise is too cheap and easy to be effective; it is the method of the beginner and the bungler. Lines of political and religious opinion do not divide the wicked from the good. For example, few advocates of the double standard wish to make a market for their silver, or to cheat their creditors; few friends of the single are concerned for the national banks, or bent on defrauding the debtor class.

From universal censure hold your pen—  
Who strikes at Man will never injure men.

Despite its faults—partly because of them—the memorial fairly represents the dominant opinion of the State on the Chinese question. But it has a better, because wider and more enduring, value. It is difficult to see how, in the limits allowed, its exposition of the mischiefs of heterogeneity—the weakness and failure of mixed races—could have been more clear and sound. As a whole, the document is an important entry in our intellectual account. Such utterances are useful to the student of mental and moral development; they enable him to compare one period with another. The result is sometimes startling. In 1868, when California was in a frenzy of enthusiasm over the Burlingame treaty, which gave America to China, who could have predicted such a change in public sentiment as this? Has it all come from better knowledge, and is this memorial certainly the last word? Who in 1850 could have predicted that in thirty years the doctrines of the “mischievous” and “selfish” Abolitionists would command general assent, north and south? Has the last word certainly been spoken on slavery? Who shall say when the intellectual pendulum has reached the end of its arc? In another generation the nation may be knocking the Negro’s manacles on again, and California may be demanding her share of the annual appropriation for importing Chinese labor—to be expended by the venerable Commissioner, John F. Swift, aided by his intelligent young Deputy, Frank M. Pixley, Jr.

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