

NO. 4.—LETTER from CHINESE RESIDENTS in VICTORIA to the REPRESENTATIVES of the AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS in Conference assembled.

HONOURABLE SIRS,—

The Chinese residents of Victoria, through this Committee, beg respectfully to approach your honourable Conference in the hope that, under the deep sense of responsibility attaching to your present deliberations, you may see clearly that there are two sides to this important question. Locally, we have had scant courtesy shown to us as subjects of a great and friendly power, and this is probably the experience of our brethren at many other Australian ports, but of this we do not speak at present.

We consider the “cry” of a great influx of Chinese as one of those poor hollow things that time and reflection will cause the generous British mind to feel heartily ashamed of, but at the same time the cruel injustice inflicted under it may be far-reaching. “Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth.” Our own land has no equal on earth for fertility and resources, which by-and-by will cause her to weigh heavy in the scale of nations; and therefore we assure you, honourable Sirs, that the question whether a few stragglers should emigrate from such a stupendous empire as China is one of perfect indifference to her Government or her people. But the evil treatment of the few that are here, or who have been recently turned away from these shores, is a different matter altogether. We hope it may not be, but fear it may, that a deep wound has been inflicted that will rankle and bear evil fruit in the near future. Our late Ambassador in London spoke wise words when he said before a British audience, “We look to you and the representatives of your colonial possessions now in London to see that these returning Chinese bring nothing home with them but what will promote peace and good-will between the two countries—no memories of suffering, injustice, or exceptional treatment.” And we commend these words to the thoughtful consideration of the Conference.

In a vivid epoch in the history of your own great country it was not so much the severance of the political tie which bound the American Colonies to the Mother-country as the cruel heritage of strife that was left to rankle, causing sore grief to the wise men of both lands. But for this heritage it is possible that to-day they might have been so united by common feeling as to stand out to view as the arbitrators of the world. Notwithstanding the impassioned protests of a few splendid men, the strife was entered on with a light heart by the ruling statesmen of the day, and though as yet we have had no colonial statesmen to protest against the injustice we have been subjected to, yet in this connection we are glad to admit that in our intercourse with the best class of colonists we have found amongst them a feeling of repugnance at, and an utter detestation of, the treatment which our countrymen have received at the hands of the various colonial Governments. We draw the moral from the American incident just referred to that it is much easier to plant a thorn in the national feeling than to withdraw it or heal the wound.

We affirm that the Chinese are a peaceable, industrious, and a law-abiding people, and that they are not insensible of, nor ungrateful for, the protection of wise laws justly administered. What they do complain of is—(1) That the laws have been strained and tortured to oppress them; (2) that the laws have even been broken to inflict harsh treatment and injustice; and (3) that by the hasty and violent conduct of various colonial Governments, which should have held the scales of justice evenly balanced, the more ignorant portion of the population have been incited and encouraged to outrage the feelings and show contempt and hatred to our countrymen.

We think all this is bad and foolish for these reasons: That a time may come, nay, probably will come sooner than is supposed, when the presence and power of China as a great nation will be felt in these seas, and it lies with you to say, as wise men or otherwise, if this is to be for good or for evil; that injustice, inhumanity, and violence afford a poor foundation to build up the life of a young nation, and however popular in the meantime it may be with the unthinking multitude, yet we are most sure such weapons mean disaster in the future to the users. The stringency of the laws at present regulating immigration from China effectually preclude many being added to the population even if it were much desired. We, however, do not hesitate to confidently affirm that were the ports open and free the Chinese population of Australia would always remain an insignificant portion of the whole. Finally, it is our belief that the matter your honourable Conference has in hand is weighty—no mere family quarrel, but one that touches most intimately international rights and obligations—dealing, as it does, with the stranger within your gates. It cannot be decided by a wave of the hand, nor by heated public orations.

The Supreme Court of one colony has declared “It is not aware that such a course of conduct as has been pursued in reference to the Chinese has ever been adopted at any period of our history.” Imperial statesmen have counselled you that friendship with China was well worth purchasing at the cost of a little sacrifice. We trust, therefore, that for the sake of the two great countries whose interests are involved that the dictates of humanity and justice may rule your deliberations, and that you will be guided to remember that it is righteousness alone which exalteth a nation, but that sin is the reproach of any people.

We have the honour to remain your most obedient servants, for and on behalf of the Committee of Chinese residents, Melbourne.

CHEOK KONG CHEONG, Chairman.

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