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PAPER UPON THE ORIGIN

OF THE

Japan Expedition.

Indication of the character of American Subjects

Read the 7th of May, 1857,

BEFORE THE

Maryland Historical Society,

By GEO. LYNN-LACHLAN DAVIS,

OF BALTIMORE.

*Now published, by permission of the President of the Society,
with only a few slight alterations.*



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The desire to do justice to an adopted son of Maryland, (now a distinguished officer of the Federal Navy,) and the interest so strongly manifested by all classes of Americans in every thing relating to one of the old and great Empires of Asia, will be some excuse, it is hoped, for the publication, at this time, of the following Paper.

Baltimore, June 20, 1860.

ORIGIN
OF THE
JAPAN EXPEDITION.

To the MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY I owe an apology for the character of the topic I have selected. That doubts should exist respecting subjects connected with the twilight of our earliest history—that the exploits of King Arthur, or the piratical deeds of Captain Ingle, should still involve a variety of open questions—is surely a matter of no surprise. But it saddens us to think, a discussion could arise upon a point which may be easily traced, with the aid of documents, to so recent a period; and which cannot, as an excuse for misapprehension, plead even the simple fact, that there is the least political or religious prejudice in any way mingled with it. It may also mortify us to know, how readily the authority of the Government may be invoked in the propagation of error—to say nothing of the distinguished man, whose name is associated with an act of such gross historical injustice. My meaning will be apparent upon the reading of a paragraph from the huge volume now lying before me, and

entitled "Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, performed in the years 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the command of Commodore M. C. Perry, United States Navy, by order of the Government of the United States, compiled from the original notes and journals of Commodore Perry and his officers, at his request and under his supervision, by Francis L. Hawks, D.D., LL.D., with numerous illustrations. Published by order of the Congress of the United States."

"Commodore Perry," according to this Narrative, "after careful examination, believed that, under all the circumstances, there was a favorable opportunity for our country to establish commercial relations with Japan, and avowed his belief to several of his brother officers, as well as to some of the dignitaries of the Government, and eminent citizens, long before the subject was discussed publicly, and the expedition resolved upon. There were doubtless others (and among them probably some of high station in the Government) whose minds had been led to a similar conclusion, and who, like Commodore Perry, anticipated popular opinion on the subject of an expedition. Indeed, instructions had been sent out to Commodore Aulick, then on the East India Station, directing him to proceed to Japan; and the State Department, then under the charge of Mr. Webster, had sought information concerning Japan from the officer who commanded the Preble on her visit, Commodore Glynn, who very strongly felt and urged the importance of establishing, if possible, a friendly communication between that kingdom and our own country. We believe, however, we do no wrong to any one when we say,

that the thought of making an *immediate* effort was urged by Commodore Perry; and, at all events, on the recall of Commodore Aulick, he proposed to the Government of the United States the Expedition which was finally sent. The proposition was favorably received; and it was determined that a squadron should be dispatched, under his command, on the peaceful mission of endeavoring to open a friendly commercial intercourse with the Japanese." See page 77.

Such, I regret to add, is a specimen of the loose, slipshod method of the Reverend narrator. Will it be believed that the Expedition was actually projected eighteen months before the sailing of Commodore Perry; that a proposal was submitted to the Government, by Commodore John H. Aulick, as early as the 9th of May, 1851; that the Expedition was then set on foot; that, on the day afterwards, a letter was addressed by the President to the Emperor of Japan; that, on the 30th of the same month, a commission was given to Commodore Aulick to make a treaty with the Emperor; and that this Expedition was in the East under the command of Commodore Aulick, at the very time to which the preceding paragraph of the Rev. Dr. Hawks refers? Yet there is ample evidence in support of each of these propositions. The first paper I will read develops the ground-work of the design; and clearly proves, that while Mr. Webster promptly approved of the project, the credit of originating this far-famed Expedition is due to Commodore Aulick. It is a letter from the pen of the great statesman, at that time the Secretary of State, to Mr. Graham, the Secretary of the Navy, written in the author's very best style, and dated on the 9th of May, 1851.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,

WASHINGTON. *May 9th, 1851.*

Honorable WM. A. GRAHAM,

Secretary of the Navy:

SIR:—You will doubtless have seen in the public journals, that a number of Japanese were sometime since picked up at sea, six hundred miles from the Japanese Islands, by the barque Auckland, Captain Jennings, by whom they had been treated very kindly, brought into the port of San Francisco, and subsequently placed on board the revenue cutter Polk, to await arrangements for their return to their native country.

Captain Aulick has suggested to me, and I cheerfully concur in his opinion, that this incident may afford a favorable opportunity for opening commercial relations with the Empire of Japan, or at least of placing our intercourse with that Island upon a more easy footing.

Under these circumstances, I have the honor to inquire, whether there is any small national vessel on the Western coast of the United States, that could, without inconvenience to the public service, be ordered to take these unfortunate men on board at San Francisco, and proceed with them to Hong-Kong? Commodore Aulick is charged with the delivery of a letter from the President of the United States to the Emperor of Japan. And if these Japanese mariners can be thus forwarded to Hong-Kong, there to await the arrival of the Commodore, he could then take them on board of one of these vessels under his command, and return them to their native land. Accompanied by an imposing naval force, as he probably would be on this

service, and with the kindly disposition awakened in the bosom of the Emperor towards this Government, by the act of restoring these unfortunates to their homes, the occasion, it is believed, would be most auspicious for the accomplishment of the more important objects of Commodore Aulick's mission.

I am, sir, respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

DANIEL WEBSTER.

The Japanese mariners were subsequently sent to the East, in conformity with the suggestion contained in the preceding letter. But let me here add another very interesting epistle signed by the President, but written (we may presume) by the same illustrious Secretary of State:—

MILLARD FILLMORE,

President of the United States of America,

To His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan:

GREAT AND GOOD FRIEND:—I send you this letter by an envoy of my own appointment, an officer of high rank in his country, who is no missionary of religion. He goes, by my command, to bear to you my greeting and good wishes, and to promote friendship and commerce between the two countries.

You know that the United States of America now extend from sea to sea; that the great countries of Oregon and California are parts of the United States; and that from these countries, which are rich in gold and silver and

precious stones, our steamers can reach the shores of your happy land in less than twenty days.

Many of our ships will now pass in every year, and some perhaps in every week, between California and China; these ships must pass along the coast of your Empire; storms and winds may cause them to be wrecked on your shores,—and we ask and expect, from your friendship and your greatness, kindness for our men, and protection for our property. We wish that our people may be permitted to trade with your people; but we shall not authorize them to break any laws of your Empire. Our object is friendly commercial intercourse, and nothing more. You have many productions which we should be glad to buy; and we have productions which might suit your people.

Your Empire has a great abundance of coal; this is an article which our steamships, in going from California to China, must use. They would be glad that a harbor in your Empire should be appointed to which coal might be brought, and where they might always be able to purchase it.

In many other respects, commerce between your Empire and our country would be useful to both. Let us consider well what new interests arise from the recent events which have brought our two countries so near together, and what purposes of friendship, amity and intercourse they ought to inspire into the breasts of those who govern both countries. Farewell.

Given under my hand and seal, at the City of Washington, the 10th day of May, 1851, and of the Independence of the United States the seventy-fifth.

MILLARD FILLMORE.

By the President: DANIEL WEBSTER, *Sec'y of State.*

On the 30th of the same month is dated the commission to Commodore Aulick, (a copy of which will be filed with this Paper in the Archives of our Society,) clothing him with the full power to negotiate and sign a treaty of friendship, commerce and navigation between the two countries.

The next document (which also I will beg leave to file) is a copy of the instructions to our newly appointed envoy, dated about ten days later than the commission. It alludes in eloquent terms to the approach of the moment when the "last link" in the great "chain of oceanic steam navigation" shall be formed; describes the manner in which the poor shipwrecked mariners shall be delivered at Jeddo, the capital of the Japanese Empire; specifies a number of objects as desirable and proper articles for the proposed treaty; and recommends the propriety of securing a period of three years "for the exchange of ratifications."

Notwithstanding the gigantic proportions and vast pretensions of the Narrative written by Dr. Hawks, it will be observed that not one of the above named documents is mentioned or even quoted in that work. Commodore Aulick is entirely ignored as the originator of the Expedition; and the only reference to him in this connection, is the one which states that he was the commanding officer of the East India squadron, and that he had been ordered "to proceed to Japan." To make the injustice of this grave omission on the part of the Reverend narrator the more apparent, and to show what little connexion Commodore Perry really had with the origin of this Expedition, it is only necessary to add, that Commodore Aulick had sailed to the East, with the full expectation of carrying out the

design, and executing the noble purposes of the mission, when he was suddenly arrested by a hand behind him—by the powerful hand of Secretary Graham—and soon afterwards succeeded in the command of the squadron by Commodore Perry, the officer who subsequently became so conspicuously connected with the history of the Expedition.

It is not good for us to make a charge without the exhibition of proof; and as it is no part of my purpose, in this Paper, to go beyond the origin of the Expedition, I will not accuse Mr. Graham of any injustice in the recall of Commodore Aulick, at the moment when this veteran in the sea-service of his country was upon the eve of reaping so rich a reward, and of enjoying so high an honor. But to rebut any presumption which may arise against the originator of this Expedition, from the extraordinary order of Mr. Graham, Secretary of the Navy, it is but due to Commodore Aulick for me to say, that Mr. Dobbin (successor to Mr. Kennedy in the office vacated by Mr. Graham's resignation) did most distinctly state he was fully satisfied with the explanation submitted by this officer, of everything relating to the aspersions which had been cast upon him; and, notwithstanding the request of Commodore Aulick, he refused to order a court of inquiry.

There are many claimants besides Commodore Perry for the honor of originating an Expedition which, all must now admit, is destined to exert a powerful influence upon the social, commercial and political fortunes of the whole world. I do not pretend to say what did or what did not pass through the mind of the President or his constitu-

tional advisers, either before or even after the interview of Commodore Aulick with Mr. Webster, on the 9th of May, 1851; nor will I stop to inquire into the date either of this or of that particular proposal, or into the exact character of the facts and suggestions submitted to the Government, upon various occasions, by different distinguished individuals. In tracing a point of external history, we must look to the record; and the difference between the case of Commodore Aulick and that of all the other claimants, is most striking and conclusive. Whatever may have been thought of other suggestions, it is certain that the proposal submitted by this officer was the one accepted by the Government. It instantly became a living embodiment, a tangible and potential reality. It was the express—the openly avowed—the direct—the immediate basis of the Expedition. And this fact is proved by the documents I have cited and read.

No blame should be cast upon Dr. Hawks for becoming the mere amanuensis of Commodore Perry, or assisting his friends in making out a report for the Government. But when he goes beyond the journals and legitimate notes of Navy officers, and assumes the functions of a historian, he comes under a stricter responsibility; and I hold it to be a duty as well as a right to expose his grave delinquencies.

Commodore Aulick is indeed a native of Virginia, and a well tried officer of the Federal Government. But our field of labor is not confined to the limits of Maryland. And I may mention as an interesting fact, that the Commodore did spend a portion of his boyhood within the bosom of our own dear State, and entered the Navy of the United

States under the auspices of General Roger Nelson, a very eminent Marylander of that period, and the father of our present distinguished townsman, the Honorable John Nelson.

I now beg leave (with this explanatory Paper) to file the documents I have cited, as a sacred deposit among the Archives of this Society, and a means of counteracting, in some degree, the tendency of erroneous statements, put forward before the whole country with an air of such imposing authority. If I understand the high objects of this Society, it is a part of her mission to collect and hand down to the future the all-important facts of the present; and to preserve the purity of the fountain, whatever may be mingled with the muddy streams which flow in every direction around us.

GEO. LYNN-LACHLAN DAVIS.

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