

House of Commons, Vote of Thanks to the Naval and Military Forces, Feb 14, 1861

- [the original text.](#)

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§ VISCOUNT PALMERSTON

I rise, Sir, to perform one of the most agreeable duties which can fall to the lot of a Member of this House; and, in doing so, I call upon the House also to discharge one of its functions which, I am sure, must be the most gratifying to every Member of it. I am about to move that the Thanks of this House be given to a number of brave and gallant officers of the Army and Navy who have performed brilliant and distinguished services under circumstances of great difficulty, and with the most complete success. The operations to which I refer are those that took place in China in the course of last year, and they were in many respects of a most remarkable description. They were, in the first place, performed by a comparatively small European force at one of the most distant parts of the globe. They were performed by a force that was, perhaps, better equipped in every respect than almost any force that ever left the shores of this or any other country. There was nothing, in short, wanting on the part of those who in this country sent out a portion of the troops which were employed in China; nor on the part of the Government of India in that portion of the expedition which went from India to make the arrangements as complete and efficient as possible. The operations of the force were

conducted with the greatest possible skill, gallantry, and in-
[401](#) trepidity. Not a single mistake was made in the whole
course of the expedition. There was no deficiency in any of
the arrangements made either for providing the force with all
those things that are necessary for service, and in
transporting it from place to place, or in those naval and
military operations which it was in the end called on to
perform. There prevailed, also, I am happy to say, the most
perfect harmony between the British and French forces, both
military and naval, employed in the expedition. The
difficulties were great, but they were overcome with rapidity.
The period during which the operations lasted was
comparatively short – comparatively, I mean, with reference to
the dangers and difficulties that lay in the way, and the
success, as I have said, was complete, without a single check
being sustained throughout.

It is well known that the operations in China arose from the
refusal of the Chinese Government to ratify the Treaty of
Tientsin which had been concluded between the two countries.
It became necessary to obtain the ratification of that treaty.
The French and English Governments both concurred in that
necessity, and each sent a force to obtain it; but both
Governments resorted in the first place to persuasion and
diplomacy to insure their object. Both Governments sent their
representatives to China before they had recourse to extreme
measures to endeavour to persuade the Chinese Government to
fulfil the obligations which it had contracted; and it was not
till every effort was made, and it was evident that nothing
but force would obtain the ratification of those engagements,
that force was resorted to.

It was at the end of May that our whole force assembled at
Hong Kong; at the beginning of June it left Hong Kong, and by
the end of June reached the rendezvous at Talin-Whan, where
the English and French forces joined each other. On the 26th
of July everything was ready for commencing operations. I

believe the French force had sustained by shipwrecks and storms the loss of some portion of their supplies, and it was necessary to wait till those losses could be made good. On the 1st of August the forces landed at Pehtang, at the mouth of a river which runs a certain way parallel with the Peiho, being the point at which the Chinese Government had requested the Ambassadors on a former occasion to wait. The landing at Peh-tang was an operation performed with the greatest possible suc- [402](#) cess, though not without great difficulty. The troops had to wade to a great extent up to their knees in mud before they reached dry land, and they then found a fortified position which might have been defended. They took possession of the town and forts the next day. For several days they had encountered difficulties from the weather, as there came on a very heavy rain that rendered it impossible for them to advance upon the Taku Forts they intended to attack.

On the 13th of August they left Pehtang for Ting-hoo, and prepared to land and to take the Taku Forts. It was thought more desirable to land in the north and take the forts in rear than to attempt a second time to force the barrier in front under the fire of the guns. In the march from Peh-tang the force came upon an entrenched camp of the Chinese, from which the Chinese were driven with great success. On the 14th of August they took possession of a place called Ting-hoo, where they gallantly captured forty-five guns. On this occasion there was resistance on the part of the Chinese, but it was rapidly overcome. On the 21st of August they performed a most brilliant operation in the capture of the Taku Forts. It is just to the Chinese to say that they conducted themselves on this occasion with the greatest intrepidity and valour. The position was strong, and there were a great number of forts armed with a great number of guns, and also defended with stockades and palisades. They were not taken without considerable loss on our part; but the loss of the Chinese, who defended themselves with a courage that commanded admiration, was much greater. On that occasion the force

captured 400 guns, and after the northern forts were taken by storm, the southern forts surrendered.

On the 6th of September the allied forces reached Tien-tsin, the place where the treaty had been concluded. Many attempts were made by the Chinese to induce the Ambassadors to enter into negotiations; but it was found that negotiations were begun by the Chinese, not to conclude an arrangement, but to gain time, in the hope that in a more advanced season the Allies would find operations more difficult. On the 9th of September the Allies left Tientsin, and advanced to a place within five miles of Tan-chow. An arrangement had been entered into between the Allies and the Chinese by which a place was to be marked out where the advanced guard of the Allies was to be encamped, and there [403](#) negotiations were to be conducted by the Commissioners on both sides. This arrangement was entered into on the 9th of September; but on the 10th, when the troops arrived there, they found the ground which had been mentioned as a place of encampment during the negotiations, occupied by a large Chinese force very much superior in number to that portion of the Allies which had arrived there, and supported by a great quantity of artillery, placed in a most formidable and menacing position. Mr. Parkes, and other gentlemen who had been employed to negotiate, went for the purpose of demanding explanations of this change of position, so entirely at variance with the arrangement that had been made. On that occasion these civil and military officers, advancing under the protection of a flag of truce, a signal which was well known to the Chinese, and had often been used by them in their communication with the Allies, were treacherously captured; and, I am sorry to say, that the greater part of them fell victims to the barbarous cruelties they suffered in their captivity. The troops then found it necessary to act, and an engagement took place in which this greatly superior number of the Chinese troops were dispersed in the most brilliant manner, and the Allies remained masters of the field. It was supposed that not less than 20,000

Chinese were engaged in this action, 600 of whom were captured, and 75 guns were taken.

On the 21st the Chinese again attacked the Allied army. They charged the field artillery, and were repulsed. A brilliant charge was then made by the British cavalry. The intrenched camp of the Chinese was taken, and they were driven back to Peking, with the loss of many men and 43 guns. I may here state that in the whole course of the operations the allied troops captured between 500 and 600 pieces of cannon. On the 2nd of October the Allies advanced to Peking, and part of the French army occupied the Emperor's Summer Palace. On the 7th of October the Chinese were informed that they must deliver up their prisoners immediately and surrender one of the gates of Peking. If that were not done, they were told the town would be stormed, and the responsibility would rest on the advisers of, the Emperor.

This concluded the campaign, and Peking remained in the hands of the Allies after a two months' campaign. The Chinese Government acceded to a treaty of peace. They ratified the former [404](#) Treaty of Tien-tsin, and agreed to a convention. Certain prisoners who had happily survived were released, and restored to the Allies. Thus, in a few days over two months, the operations of the Allies which were apparently of great difficulty were completed in the most brilliant manner, without a reverse, the result being the ratification of a former treaty and the conclusion of an additional convention, which has been laid before the House. One circumstance followed, which, had it not been more than justified by the outrages that preceded it, would be greatly to be regretted, and, indeed, would not have occurred—I allude to the total destruction of the Emperor's Summer Palace.

I will not put the House to the pain of stating in detail the barbarous cruelties inflicted upon those who were thus taken prisoners against the law of nations, who were at the time under the protection of a flag of truce, the value and respect

due to which were, as I have stated, well known to the Chinese. I will not dwell upon the inhuman cruelties inflicted upon those unfortunate men. The greater part of them sank under the barbarities of which they were the victims. Nor will I dwell on the intended treachery on a larger scale, which contemplated the environment of the advanced guard of the army and the taking our Ambassadors prisoners, who would, doubtless, have been exposed to similar tortures. Negotiations had been entered upon, in the course of which the Earl of Elgin and Baron Gros were invited to go to Peking, and when they said they required an escort each of 1,000 men the Chinese then no longer wished them to come, because they knew that our Ambassadors would then be safe against the treachery of which it was intended they were to be the victims. It is quite clear, therefore, that the treachery to those who were actually taken prisoners was only part of a much larger tragedy which the Chinese had planned. At the very time these unfortunate men were lingering under the most intolerable torments, the Chinese, when asked about them, said they were quite well and very well treated, and that the Allies need not be uneasy about them.

It was absolutely necessary to mark by some signal act of retribution the extreme detestation that was felt at this cruelty and treachery, and to warn the Chinese against the repetition of them. These semi-barbarous Governments appear to deal with each other with treachery and cruelty, and [405](#) they are apt to think that they may act in the same manner against civilized Governments. It was, therefore, necessary to prove to them by some signal retribution that such deeds are not to be committed with impunity. It was, however, difficult to find any act that would punish the Chinese Government for its atrocities, and which would not at the same time involve in the punishment the innocent with the guilty. Had Peking been stormed, or had even the Palace of the Emperor in Peking been burnt, consequences might have ensued that every one must have deplored. It was therefore thought, and justly thought, both

by the Earl of Elgin and Sir Hope Grant that the appropriate retribution for these abominable acts committed by the Chinese Government and authorities was the destruction of the Summer Palace of the Sovereign.

The Emperor would thus be the only person to suffer, and the people of China would not be involved in the punishment. An hon. Friend of mine (Mr. Scully) has given notice of his intention to put a question to me, and to ask whether the French General acquiesced or not in this act of destruction. I have no hesitation in saying that General Montauban did not acquiesce in the destruction of the Emperor's Palace. The French had not suffered in the same way; and the French, having occupied the Summer Palace, had, to a certain degree, retaliated, because a portion of it had been destroyed, as the French General has said, by his troops and some Chinese people that were present. But the Earl of Elgin and Sir Hope Grant very properly judged that, notwithstanding the French General declined to take part in that destruction, it was their duty to carry out this act of retribution, and I have no hesitation in saying that Her Majesty's Government fully approve their determination. I trust that these incidents – the great and rapid success of our arms, and this punishment which has fallen upon the Emperor of China – will teach them that in dealing with the Powers of Europe they must obey those laws of international right which prevail among the civilized nations of the world.

Sir, these transactions have been in every respect satisfactory. In the first place, we have obtained the ratification of one treaty and the conclusion of another convention, which, I trust, after the example that has been made of Chinese treachery and bad faith, will induce the [406](#)Government of China to maintain their engagements with the people of England. It is clear that, if they do, these arrangements will open up a field of commercial enterprise to the people of Europe, and especially to the people of this

country, which will quite realize the expectations that have long been entertained from free intercourse with China, because we have now not obtained access only to the coast, but have gained the right of going up that great river, the Yangtse-Kiang, and of greatly extending our commerce by the privileges thus afforded to us. We have also had the great satisfaction of finding that the officers and men both of our army and navy have shown themselves worthy of the example of those who have gone before them, and of the country to which they have the honour to belong. I am glad to find among those who have distinguished themselves in these operations names already familiar in our naval and military exploits. The name of Hope, for example, already well known in the Peninsular war as connected with the distinguished services of the army, is now associated with the brilliant services of the naval portion of these operations. We have also the name of Napier, well known both by sea and land. I do not know whether that officer be nearly allied to those of that name whose fame is recorded in the annals of this country, but I trust that he is destined to equal their exploits. I will not trespass too long by enumerating the names of all those who have distinguished themselves on this occasion. Their services are recorded in the papers before the House, and they already enjoy the gratitude of their country. We have also the satisfaction of knowing that in this expedition, at a remote part of the globe, encompassed by great difficulties, but attended with great success, we have the forces of two great nations marching side by side, fighting in a common cause, and carrying out those operations which, although not long in point of time, were long in point of incident, with the most perfect harmony and accord, and without those dissensions which too frequently prevail in the operations of forces, whether naval or military, belonging to two different nations. I trust that this is only a happy omen of the concord which will long prevail between the two nations. I trust that it may be long before the forces of England and France will go into action in any other way than side by side, for the common

interest and [407](#) the common glory of the two countries, and for objects alike honourable to the one and the other. Sir, I will not trespass longer on the attention of the House, but will conclude by moving the Resolutions which I have to propose. The noble Viscount concluded by moving the Resolutions.

[§](#) [See Page 417.]

[§](#) MR. DISRAELI

I have the honour to second the Motion of the noble Lord. The noble Lord has given the House such a clear and animated narrative of the various operations in China, that it is unnecessary for me to dwell upon them; and, indeed, it would be presumptuous in me to do so. It is enough that we all feel that a great military operation has been performed with power and precision, with undaunted bravery and indomitable perseverance. The army and navy of England have more than once expressed their conviction that one of their greatest rewards is to receive the thanks of Parliament, and, I trust, I may say for the House that we consider it one of our greatest privileges to offer the expression of our thanks and admiration for their achievements. Although in the course of the events that have occurred in China it is impossible to point to any of those immortal fields which posterity ever afterwards looks at with feelings of awe and admiration, yet merely in a military sense, and regarded simply in reference to military considerations, there is one view of the case the importance of which cannot be overstated, and that is, that in a remote part of the world, and in a strange climate, we have found the health of our troops so wonderfully preserved. I attribute this, Sir, to our now perfect organization, and to the application of all the resources of modern science to the maintenance of the health and the equipment of our troops; and if, as I believe, this result is not of an exceptional character, but one on which we may count for the future, we

may have the satisfaction of feeling that, so far as this is concerned, we have already mitigated one of the miseries of war. The noble Viscount has touched upon the singularity of such great results having been' achieved in a distant part of the world by so small a body of men, and at such a trifling sacrifice. Indeed, I think this is a subject that well deserves the consideration of the House. A handful of men, not, I believe, amounting in numbers to those who followed Xenophon, have waged war in a country almost in the remotest part [408](#) of the globe, and have dictated peace in the ancient capital of a nation which numbers more than one-third of its population. Sir, this is not the first occasion during the last quarter of a century when mankind have been impressed with the immense influence which Europe exercises over the rest of the world. This is not the first occurrence of exploits which has proved the predominant power of that part of the globe in which it is our happiness to exist. But, Sir, there are other considerations connected with this result, which ought not, I think, to be absent from our thoughts. At this moment, under Providence, it is not merely this quarter of the globe, but we may say it is Western Europe that commands the world. Sir, if that power be so irresistible, if those means be so great, I think we ought all to feel that the moral responsibility of their exercise is proportionably increased. This appears to be a consideration which ought not to be wanting in the councils of the Sovereign, and which may blend advantageously even with the triumphant gratitude of Parliaments.

[§](#) MR. VINCENT SCULLY

said, it was not his intention to interfere with the passing of this Vote of Thanks, but he did think it right that the nation should know whether the wilful act of destruction – the sacking and burning of the Emperor of China's palace – was done with the united consent of the French Ambassador and our own. For the first time he had heard from the noble Lord

(Viscount Palmerston) what previously he could hardly have believed, that this act was committed on the authority of the English Ambassador without the consent of the French Ambassador; nay, contrary to his wishes. He (Mr. Vincent Scully) had very carefully read all the papers connected with the expedition to China, and he must say that he could not agree with the noble Lord that greater provocation to this act of retribution, as it had been called, had been given to the English than to the French. It was a matter about which it was important to have the correct dates. He had endeavoured to get them, and as well as he could make out it was on the 7th of October that the French first entered the Summer Palace. They retained possession till the 16th, upon which day this act of conflagration took place. All the cruelties and barbarities which had been perpetrated had been completed before the destruction of the palace was ordered. Now, he did not wish to cast any imputation on the [409](#) army and navy. They had performed their duty during the whole war in the only manner in which it was possible for soldiers and sailors to do it: they obeyed their officers and the commands given to them with bravery and determination; and they did not appear to have been guilty of any great excesses. But when they found the British Ambassador acting on his own responsibility, and transgressing the authority given to him, it did become them to inquire into it. He (Mr. Vincent Scully) did not blame Her Majesty's Government in any degree for anything that had occurred in regard to the contest of the war previous to the burning of the palace. It appeared to him that the noble Secretary for Foreign Affairs had given very clear and proper instructions to the Earl of Elgin. The only culpability which attached to the Government was in respect of subsequently endorsing the proceedings of their Ambassador. All Governments, however, did the same thing, and it was called "backing their friends." Let the House see how the orders given by the Government were carried out:—and he must apologise for trespassing upon the time of the House, while he pointed out what were the instructions given to the Earl of

Elgin.

CAPTAIN JERVIS

said, he rose to order. The Question before the House was one of a Vote of Thanks to the Army and Navy, not as to diplomatic matters.

§ MR. SPEAKER

ruled that the hon. Member was in order.

§ MR. VINCENT SCULLY

said, that that was only another instance of the system which prevailed when an independent Member was endeavouring to elicit information, of some one rising on the back benches of the Opposition, and, in some convenient form, interrupting his (the speaker's) pertinent remarks with his (the interrupter's) not very pertinent observations. The matter to which he wished to call the attention of the House was an important one, and one in which the nation was deeply interested. He could assure the Gentleman who had interrupted him, if he belonged to the army or the navy, that lie (Mr. Vincent Scully) had no intention to cast the least slur upon those honourable professions. But if the act deserved to be reprobated and condemned the nation ought to separate itself from the act, and if the act was susceptible of palliation and justification those reasons ought to be stated. Let the House see the instructions given to Lord Elgin by the noble [410](#) Lord the Secretary for Foreign Affairs (Lord John Russell) in his letter dated the 6th February, 1860. If hon. Members would read it they would find that the noble Lord (Lord John Russell) anticipated by six months what subsequently occurred. The noble Lord, after alluding to the possible flight of the Emperor, the encouragement which that would give to the rebels, and the possibility of the whole Empire being involved in Revolution, said – Under these circumstances you and your

enlightened colleague Baron Gros will exercise those personal qualities of firmness and discretion which, induced Her Majesty and her Ally to place confidence in you and the French Plenipotentiary. Thus the settlement of any difficulty was not left to the Earl of Elgin alone, but conjointly with Baron Gros. How, then, was it that, with such instructions, the Earl of Elgin ventured to order the destruction of the Summer Palace, not only without the consent of Baron Gros, but contrary to his wishes? The noble Earl was about to do an act which might blast the fair fame of the country which he represented, and yet he took no notice of the objections of his co-ambassador. He would not detain the House by going through the justifications of the Earl of Elgin—he saw it would be almost an annoyance to the House to occupy its time at any length, and certainly it would be so to himself to go through those details. Suffice it to say that the Chinese had been humiliated to a much greater degree than was contemplated by the noble Lord the Secretary for Foreign Affairs. On the very day upon which intelligence was brought that the prisoners had fallen victims to Chinese treachery, as a sort of holocaust to their manes, the Earl of Elgin, of his own authority, and contrary to the wish of the French, whose officers and men had been treated with equal cruelty, indignity, and treachery, committed that act which certainly in his (Mr. Vincent Scully's) opinion, and in that of a great many out of that House, was an act of barbarism and vandalism, for which it was difficult to find any precedent in ancient or modern history, and the nearest resemblance to which was the burning of Persepolis under somewhat similar circumstances by Alexander the Great. It would be no excuse assuredly that the French had first satiated their revenge. He knew that was the received version; but he did not find that in the blue book, and the version given by the French [411](#) General Montauban, in his despatch to; the French Minister of War, as translated from the Moniteur, in The Times of January 2, 1861, was to the effect that sentries were placed everywhere to see that no one entered the palace until the arrival of the English General

Sir Hope Grant who was immediately sent for; and that a certain sum of money was afterwards equally divided among the soldiers of both armies. He could not see the necessity of inflicting such an act of retribution on the Chinese, nor did he understand how it could be a matter of ridicule to hon. Gentlemen in that House. Let hon. Gentlemen consider whether it would be a matter for ridicule if Chinese barbarians on being admitted into London had treated the palace of the Sovereign as we had treated that of the Emperor of China? What was the object of burning the Summer Palace? Was it to conciliate the Chinese, or was it to Christianize them? They would have been the first to condemn the act if the case was reversed; and Baron Gros had done it contrary to the opinion of Lord Elgin. Nothing could be more impolitic than to inaugurate a peace by an act of cruel retribution, the effect of which could only be to excite ill-feeling towards us among the natives, and to check the extension of our commerce. He feared that the obloquy of the transaction would be transferred from Lord Elgin to the nation he represented if it were now tacitly adopted by the House, and, therefore, he had felt bound to draw their attention to the subject.

MR. WHITE

said, that had the noble Lord who made the Motion shown the good taste and excellent judgment which had distinguished his seconder, he (Mr. White) would be quite content to give a silent assent. But when the noble Lord told them that the origin of the war was because the Chinese refused to ratify the treaty, he (Mr. White) was really astonished, because he was sure the noble Lord did not count upon the credulity or ignorance, but upon the forgetfulness of the House. He (Mr. White) had passed ten years of his life in that part of the country which was the scene of the great events which they were called upon to commemorate as so honourable to our army and navy, and, therefore, he might speak with some authority. He hoped the House would acquit him of the slightest

disposition to derogate from the merit of those gallant officers and men, but he was con- [412](#) strained to draw the attention of the House to what had fallen from the noble Lord. As he (Mr. White) understood the transaction, not only did the Chinese not refuse to ratify the treaty, but they said they were willing to do so, and at the same time they did ratify the American Treaty. The noble Lord did not confine himself to the Vote of Thanks, but spoke of the vast advantages which would accrue to commerce from what had happened. He (Mr. White) was a merchant, and were he silent he might be supposed to assent to the dictum of the noble Lord. But, however deplorably consistent the noble Lord might have been in his course, the same remark could not apply to many of his Colleagues, who had distinguished themselves by the most determined opposition to the war. Not only had the Chinese wished to ratify the treaty, but the Government itself, of which the noble Lord was the head, had acknowledged its substantial ratification, as would be seen by referring to the Estimates, in which the expenses of the consuls that were to be established under it were voted. And yet that was the treaty which the noble Lord said the Chinese would not ratify. All the advantages which had accrued to the British had been demanded and obtained from the Chinese before this war was brought to a conclusion. The noble Lord, on a former occasion, reminded the House that the American Minister had been smuggled into Pekin in a wooden-box. The truth was that the American Minister only used those carriages which the Prime Ministers of China and the first administrators in that land were accustomed to use; and, still more, they were the very carriages which were now being used of choice by the British officers in their journies from Taku to Tien-tsin. That no indignity had been used towards Mr. Ward could be shown very briefly. The treaty with the American Government had been carried out most successfully, and the indemnity which was stipulated under that treaty to be paid to the American merchants had been paid to them. On the other hand, the indemnity which was due to the British merchants had not yet

been paid, notwithstanding that they had sacrificed human life, had devastated property, and had imposed £6,000,000 of taxation on an already over-burthened people. He denied that commerce would derive any benefit; and he should blush for his brother merchants did he not know that those in [413](#) the East almost unanimously repudiated any concurrence or sympathy in the objects of the late war. He had received a letter only yesterday from his agent in Shanghai, which was dated the 20th of December, wherein he stated – So far from benefiting by the late treaty, we are much worse off, seeing that we now have to pay full duties, which, by consent of the Imperial authorities, were before diminished to one-half. The present was not the proper time to point out what would be the consequences which would probably result from the last war; and, therefore, he would merely content himself with entering his solemn protest against the observations made by the noble Lord. At the same time, he had much pleasure in concurring in the Vote of Thanks to their gallant Army and Navy.

[§](#) SIR JAMES ELPHINSTONE

said, he concurred most heartily in the Vote of thanks to the Army and Navy in China. Indeed he would not have detained the House for a moment from what must be their unanimous decision respecting the brilliant and heroic services which had been performed by the army and navy, were it not that he thought there was an omission, which needed only to be brought under the notice of the House in order to be rectified. On the advance of the army on Peking, a number of our men fell into an ambuscade. He would remind the House that in the previous year there was an ambuscade of an equally gross character, in which the lives of a larger number of men had been sacrificed than in almost any disaster which had taken place to our arms. The only case he could recollect at all similar was Nelson's attack on Teneriffe. Then the gallantry of our seamen had fought themselves out at an enormous loss of life, but they maintained the character of the British arms in a manner which

was equalled by the gallant Hope and the officers and men under his command at the Peiho. Then we had three vessels sunk, four disabled, and three much daaiaged; eighty-nine men killed, 345 wounded, leaving 660 survivors out of a force of 1,100. He last year called the attention of the House to that case, and recommended that the Government should instruct our Ambassador as a preliminary demand, to exact from the Chinese Government distinct satisfaction for the loss of material and men upon that occasion. That principle had now been distinctly recognized in the case of the officers who [414](#) were taken captive and so barbarously treated last year, and a sum was exacted for the benefit of the relatives of each of those men whose death had resulted from the treatment they had received. He thought he need only bring to the notice of the noble Lord the similarity of the two cases. In both cases they were acting under a flag of truce. In both they were led into an ambuscade; in both cases a loss of life took place under the protection of a flag of truce. He wanted, therefore, to know why the same compensation was not exacted for the relatives of the men who fell at the Taku Forts in 1859 as had been lately exacted for those who were taken prisoners and ill-treated in the neighbourhood of Pekin in 1860? It was a grave omission; but, fortunately, the Government had received a large amount for the expenses of the war, upon which there were, in his opinion, liens:—First for the lives of the men who were killed before those forts; next, for the remuneration of those who were wounded; and, thirdly, for the material which was sacrificed in that action. He did not believe that the treaty which had been concluded would produce the good effects which were anticipated from it; but it would be ungracious on that occasion to discuss that matter, and he would, in conclusion, express the warmest admiration for the brilliant services which had been performed both by the army and the navy.

[§](#) LORD JOHN RUSSELL

Sir, the hon. Member for the county of Cork (Mr. Vincent

Scully) who has raised a question not immediately before the House, with respect to the conduct of the Earl of Elgin and Sir Hope Grant in directing the destruction of the Summer Palace, said that it might be objected to him that he was an Irishman, but he followed up that remark by saying that no doubt among the killed and wounded of every action which occurred in China he could find many of his countrymen. No doubt that is perfectly true. Full justice is always done in this House to the gallantry and good conduct of the Irish troops; and the hon. Gentleman, although the representative of an Irish county, is fully entitled to make any representation which he thinks proper with regard to the conduct of the officers employed in China. But as to the substance of his complaint, I must say that I am greatly astonished and somewhat surprised to find that he has not been satisfied with [415](#) the reasons given by the Earl of Elgin. Here was a case in which most barbarous treatment had been inflicted by officers of the Emperor of China upon military and civil officers of Her Majesty who were not engaged in any military operation, but in forwarding the desire which the Earl of Elgin and Sir Hope Grant entertained, in common with their French colleagues, to conclude the war as speedily as possible, and with as little suffering as might be to the Chinese people. They were engaged in arranging an armistice which was intended to lead to a peace, and for that purpose they went forward upon the faith of the Chinese Government and of the Chinese General to a place where it was supposed that they would be in perfect safety. There they were treacherously captured, and they were afterwards so barbarously tortured that the lives of Captain Brabazon and Captain Anderson, two most distinguished officers in Her Majesty's service; of Mr. De Norman, whose praise was most properly recorded by Mr. Bruce, and who was certainly one of the most promising members of Her Majesty's diplomatic service; of Mr. Bowlby, whose graphic and interesting account of the attack upon the Taku Forts in The Times must have excited the admiration of every one who read it, and who appears by the testimony of those acquainted with

him to have been a most accomplished man – the lives of these four gentlemen, and of several soldiers, were taken by the Chinese under circumstances of atrocity which must excite the horror and detestation of all civilized men. The Earl of Elgin had to consider how he should treat a proceeding of that kind. The most obvious course was to demand that, as an atonement for the suffering which had been inflicted upon our officers, a certain number of the persons who had ill-treated them should be given up to us to be capitally punished; but the Earl of Elgin says, and says most truly, as I believe, that if he had made such a requisition the Chinese would have no difficulty in complying with it, but that the lives of some miserable subordinates would have been sacrificed, while the higher Chinese authorities, or the Tartar generals by whose orders more probably these tortures had been inflicted, would escape scathless, That course, therefore, was not adopted. The Earl of Elgin might also have asked for a very large sum of money, but, considering the indemnities which we already had to demand, he did not think [416](#) that it was desirable to press more severely upon the Chinese finances, or to delay the conclusion of peace by a demand for any very large sum of money. There was another course, which no doubt must have been discussed between the Earl of Elgin and Sir Hope Grant, and that was the infliction of some severe punishment upon the inhabitants of the capital itself. That, however, would have been still worse than asking for the lives of the subordinate torturers; it would have been to punish an innocent people for what was in fact the act of the Government. The Earl of Elgin, therefore, determined, with the concurrence of Sir Hope Grant, that punishment should be inflicted upon the Emperor of China himself by the destruction of a palace which was assuredly a most costly structure, which was filled with every possible object of luxury, and the loss of which would show to him that we were not indifferent to the loss of our officers, or unmindful of the treatment to which they had been subjected at the hands of his servants. It is true that the French Commander, General Montauban, did not assent to that proposal,

but the principal reason which he gave for objecting to it was one which experience did not corroborate. He said—and Baron Gros used the same argument—that the destruction of the palace would strike such terror into the minds of Prince Kung and the Chinese negotiators, that the negotiations would be broken off, we should have to destroy the Imperial Palace in Peking as well, and the final object of the expedition, the conclusion of peace, would be further off than ever. The Earl of Elgin, with more knowledge of the Chinese character, and with a truer appreciation of the course which they would take, did not believe that the destruction of the palace would delay the signing of the treaty a single day. Events proved that he was right. The palace was destroyed, and the treaty was signed. Some persons think that the Chinese were even more willing to sign the treaty after the destruction of the palace than they were before. Of course it is impossible to speak with certainty as to that; but, at all events, this act of severe retribution did not delay the conclusion of peace. So far, therefore, from blaming the Earl of Elgin, I think that he is entitled to high praise, for having, without destroying the power of the Emperor upon the one hand, or punishing the innocent people of China on the other, inflicted a [417](#) severe chastisement for the atrocities which had been committed under the authority of the Government.

The Resolution now before us is a Vote of Thanks to the gallant Officers who took part in these operations. Against that proposition no one has said a word, and I hope that it will be carried unanimously. The question respecting the propriety and policy of a war with the Emperor of China was amply discussed last year, and I shall not now enter into it. An hon. and gallant Gentleman has asked me why there was not some vote of indemnity to the families of those who suffered at the Peiho? but their case is totally different from that of the men who entrusted themselves under a flag of truce to the authorities of the country. Those who engage in war enter into it with all its risks, and it has therefore not been usual to

ask for indemnities on behalf of those who fall in actual warfare. I am happy to state that there can exist no difference of opinion as to the gallantry and good conduct of the Army and Navy of England. It has, indeed, been above all praise. And it is satisfactory to learn that so far from its being the case—as was stated in one of the telegrams — that the Articles of the Treaty were not known in the South of China, a despatch has arrived from the Consul at Canton stating that the treaty had been published there, that the new tariff was declared, and that trade had begun under the provisions of the treaty and in conformity with the tariff, and was proceeding to the perfect satisfaction and contentment of English, French, and Chinese.

§ Motion agreed to.

§ Resolved, Nemine Contradicente, That the Thanks of this House be given to Lieutenant General Sir James Hope Grant, Knight Grand Cross of the Bath; Vice Admiral Sir James Hope, Knight Commander of the Bath; Major General Sir John Mitchell, Knight Commander of the Bath; Major General Sir Robert Napier, Knight Commander of the Bath; and Rear Admiral Lewis Tobias Jones, Companion of the Bath, for the distinguished skill, zeal, and intrepidity with which they conducted the combined operations in the North of China, which terminated in the Capture of Peking, whereby an honourable Peace has been obtained on the Terms proposed by Her Majesty and Her Ally the Emperor of the French.

§ Resolved, Nemine Contradicente, “That the Thanks of the House be given to the other Officers of the Navy, Army, and the Royal Marines including Her Majesty’s Indian, Forces, both European and Native, for the energy [418](#) and gallantry with which they executed the Services they were called upon to perform.

§ Resolved, Nemine Contradicente, That this House doth acknowledge and highly approve the gallantry, discipline, and

uniform good conduct displayed by the Petty Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, Men of the Navy, Army, Royal Marines, and Her Majesty's Indian Forces, European and Native, and the cordial good feeling which animated the United Forces; and that the same be communicated to them by the Commanders of the several Ships and Corps, who are respectfully desired to thank them for their gallant and steadfast behaviour.

§ Ordered, That the said Resolutions be transmitted to Lieutenant General Sir James Hope Grant and Vice Admiral Sir James Hope; and that they be requested to communicate the same to the several Officers referred to therein.