

“A FAIR, HONORABLE, AND LEGITIMATE TRADE”

by Geoffrey C. Ward with Frederic Delano Grant, Jr.

Illustrated by Burt Silverman

The opium trade is remembered as a British outrage: English merchants, protected by English bayonets, turning China into a nation of addicts. But Americans got rich from this traffic—among them, a young man named Warren Delano. He didn't talk about it afterward, of course. And neither did his grandson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.



Edward Delano arrived at Macao off the South China coast aboard the American vessel *Oneida* on December 7, 1840. His initial impression of the tiny Portuguese colony was reassuring. A crescent of handsome white-washed houses with a half-dozen church spires scattered among them, clinging to a green hillside, it reminded Massachusetts boys like Ned of the fishing village of Nahant.

It had been a long, uneasy journey of 160 days. Ned was just twenty-two and prone to seasickness. He had never before been more than one hundred miles from the family home at Fairhaven, near New Bedford, and he had not seen his older brother, Warren Delano II, since Warren had sailed for China seven years before. Now Warren was the head of Russell & Company, the biggest American firm in the China trade, and had sent for Ned to join him as a clerk.

Their reunion was restrained at first. "W. came in . . . with his dressing gown on," Ned reported. "I should not have known him under circumstances different from which I was now placed—he appeared to me worn out—a yellow cadaverous visage [he was recovering from an attack of jaundice] added to a slow gait and body [a] little inclined forward—we embraced—scarcely a word was said—only that he was heartily glad to see me . . . he said that I had arrived . . . at a time when he could do much for me and hoped that I should not have to stop here [in China] as long as he had. . . ."

Warren is "a perfect Number One," an admiring Ned wrote home. "Of course he feels his authority—yet he does not abuse it—a *young man* of 31 at the head of R & C[ompany] . . . he can carve a duck, eat curry, be interesting in conversation, be sarcastic in his remarks, tell a good story, and do many other things 'too numerous to mention.'"

Macao was only the off-season residence of the China traders; most business was conducted at Canton, on a single riverfront block of thirteen factories. These two-story buildings where foreign traders lived and worked were located in a small compound to which the Chinese tried to keep all foreigners confined. A few days later the brothers set out together on the eighty-five-mile

voyage to Canton. It was a pleasant three-day trip aboard a dispatch boat propelled by crimson sails and eight oarsmen.

Away from the other traders, Warren abandoned his public reserve, and he and his younger brother engaged in what Ned called "a delightful frolic . . . biting and pulling ears, pinching flesh, etc . . .," then lay back on carved benches and talked of old times as they glided among brilliant green islands, past weathered pagodas, orange groves, and fields of rice. "We amused ourselves," Ned remembered, "with shooting birds, snipes and magpies, the boatmen swimming on shore after them."

Only one thing intruded upon this idyll. From time to time shrill voices reached them across the water, shouting "*Fan kuei! Fan kuei!*"—"Foreign devil." And when Ned scanned the shore to see who was calling to them, some of the villagers grinned and made an odd hacking gesture at the side of their necks.

Warren explained that the villagers were warning them that before long all the foreigners' heads would be cut off.

Ned had arrived at a tense but profitable time for the American traders. A curious, on-again, off-again war had been under way between Britain and the Chinese emperor since June, and the neutral Americans were its beneficiaries.

Tea was the staple of the China trade, and December marked the height of the Canton season; as Ned was shown to his room on the second floor of the Russell factory, the smell of the tea chests newly stored in the godown below was almost overpowering, and he would spend much of his first weeks in China weighing and tasting teas, "a dirty business . . . the tea getting into the nostrils, soiling the hands, etc."

But opium ran a close, shadowy second.

Though China and opium remain linked in the popular mind, the drug was not native to that land. The first opium was thought to have arrived from Egypt with Arab traders around the turn of the seventh century A.D., and for hundreds of years it was used only in small quantities as a medicine and restorative. Dutch traders at Formosa were probably the first to smoke opium mixed with tobacco to fend off the effects of ma-

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laria. In the mid-seventeenth century, Chinese merchants along the South China coast imitated them, gradually eliminating the tobacco from their pipes and thereby inducing a state of euphoria unknown to those who simply swallowed the drug. Soon this indulgence became addiction and spread from the wealthy to the poor.

Opium smoking had been officially barred by the Manchu emperors at Peking since 1729—an inconvenient fact, which, until shortly before Ned arrived in China, Chinese officials and Western traders alike found it easy enough to ignore in the interest of vast profits. By 1830 the opium trade at Canton was said to be the most valuable trade in any single commodity, anywhere on earth.

The British dominated it as they did every aspect of the China trade, but their American competitors were fast gaining on them. The very first American in the China trade, Samuel Shaw, who sailed with the *Empress of China* to Whampoa in 1784, had foreseen the big profits those who followed him would make handling opium, which, he said, could be "smuggled with the utmost security." It had taken a little time for Americans to make good his prediction, not because they had higher moral standards than their British rivals but because they had a less dependable source of supply.

When the British East India Company established its grip on India in the eighteenth century, it took over a system of state control over opium that had been a source of revenue for the Mogul empire. Warren Hastings, India's first governor general, had understood both the drug's dangers and its attractions: "Opium is not a necessary of life," he said, "but a pernicious article of luxury which ought not to be permitted except for purposes of foreign commerce only." At his direction the company planted vast pink and white fields of opium poppies on the Ganges plain, then monopolized the sale of the drug they yielded. (Hastings's encouragement paid off; opium exports to China eventually accounted for one-seventh of British India's revenues.)

The Americans, on the other hand, had to make do at first with the drug produced in Turkey. Hard economic facts helped boost American participation in the drug trade. The United States

had precious little silver with which to pay for China's tea, silk, and porcelain; the Chinese were uninterested in the "strange or ingenious objects" in which American manufacturers took such pride, and the sandalwood and seal and otter skins that the Chinese had once accepted as payment were fast running out.

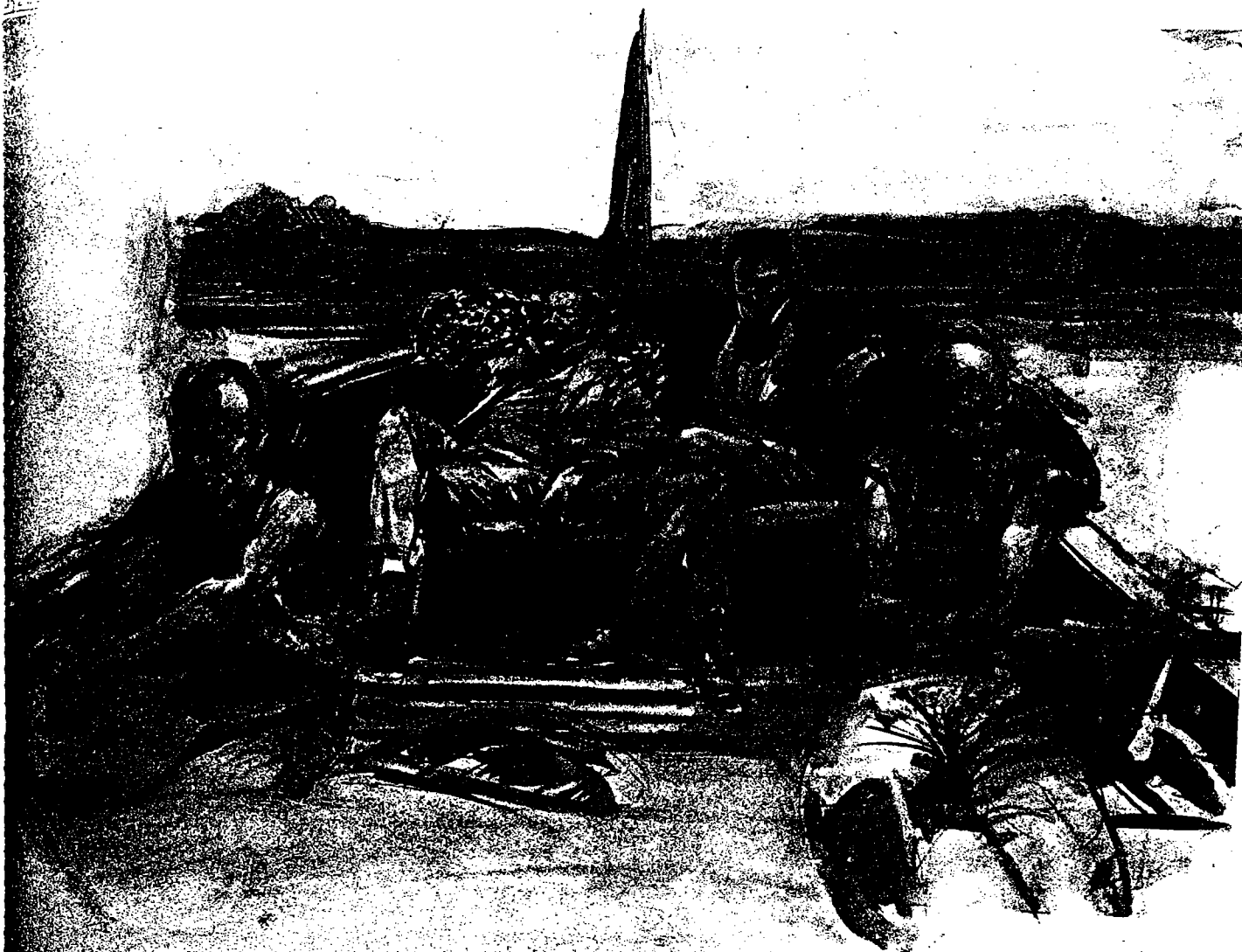
Opium proved as good for the dollar as it was for the British pound. By 1839 every American house at Canton handled the drug, with the lonely exception of D. W. C. Olyphant & Company, opposed to the trade on moral grounds and ridiculed by its rivals as "Zion's Corner."

Russell & Company, which Warren now headed, was the biggest U.S. dealer in opium, and the third largest firm in the Indian opium trade, British or American.

The drug business bred hypocrisy on both sides. In response to a new edict from the emperor, the British East India Company had solemnly vowed to abandon the drug traffic in 1800, but actually it expanded its poppy fields and sold the opium produced from them at auction to free-lance "country ships" owned by British and Indian traders. The drug supply never even slowed.

The emperor deplored the trade, drained precious silver from his empire, for one thing; not only coins but lumps of raw bullion called sycee flowed steadily out of China to the West. And opium vitiated his people: there were said to be more than two million Chinese addicts by 1835, and the number grew each day; even members of the imperial household guard were reportedly infected with the deadly craving for the "foreign mud." This seemed to him ungrateful behavior from outsiders to whom he had granted the right to trade, a concession about which the Manchus had never been enthusiastic in the first place.

Chinese officials were frankly contemptuous of the West, and the eagerness of Western traders to do business with them only underlined their scorn. To the emperor, all the other peoples of the world were vassals, a conviction that no amount of evidence seemed able to surmount. In 1793 an official British emissary, Lord Macartney, arrived at the



ates of Peking with gifts, hoping to demonstrate that a commercial treaty with London would be to the emperor's advantage. The Chinese ruler thanked George III for this gratifying evidence of his "respectful spirit of submission," but he saw no need to encourage commerce since "there is nothing we lack. . . ."

To minimize the damage done to his empire by the barbarians, the emperor restricted the traders to the Canton compound, licensed up to thirteen local merchants—called the "hong" merchants—to carry on all foreign trade, and held these merchants personally responsible for infractions of regulations by foreigners. Foreign traders were not to venture inside the city walls; foreign women were barred even from the factories; foreign ships were forbidden to approach closer than Whampoa, twelve miles downriver.

But Canton was a long way from the Manchu emperor's northern capital at Peking, and events in this southern city

had long resisted imperial control. Officials dispatched there by the emperor soon found themselves overburdened, underpaid, and subject to heavy taxes, for which they leaned heavily on the hong merchants. Some officials took bribes and in exchange promised to be less than rigorous in enforcing the opium laws. When an opium ship anchored offshore, for example, war junks were likely to be held back until all the precious chests were safely landed and the vessel was under way again; the junks were then dispatched to fire a noisy salvo into the sea so that their commander could boast to Peking that he had bravely driven off the barbarians.

If the Chinese authorities ever really became serious about halting the trade, Warren once wrote home, "Foreigners cannot by any possibility sell or smuggle the drug into the country."

Most drug transactions were handled briskly at Canton. Incoming opium vessels halted briefly under the lee of Lintin

Island in Canton Bay and often transferred their cargoes to waiting storeships before proceeding upriver to the official anchorage at Whampoa. Chinese buyers paid for their orders on shore at Canton with hard cash and were given a chit as proof of purchase. Then, aboard the buyer's boats rowed by as many as seventy men—the Chinese called these craft "fast crabs" or "scrambling dragons"—they raced one another to be first at the side of the latest vessel. Ned soon learned to recognize opium ships from afar by the smaller boats that invariably swarmed around them even before they dropped anchor.

On deck a representative of the firm filled the Chinese buyer's order, weighing out the fist-sized cakes of the drug from the 133.5-pound chests and receiving a five-dollar commission for every chest he handled. Robert Bennet Forbes, Warren's friend and predecessor as head of the firm, boasted that he made the very substantial sum of thirty thousand

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dollars for himself this way in one year. Warren was always more circumspect about his earnings, but the firm's opium profits soared while he was in charge, and his own commissions may have too.

The traders could not plausibly claim to be ignorant of the human toll the drug took. In 1844 William C. Hunter, a former Russell partner, showed a visitor two flourishing dens within a few hundred yards of the factories themselves, each filled with men in various stages of stupefaction. During a visit to Singapore that same year, Ned Delano himself visited several licensed dens: “Found smokers in all of them. One man was prostrate under its effects—pale, cadaverous, death-like . . . for when I took his pipe from his hand he offered no resistance, though his eyes tried to follow me.”

The Americans argued that they only *carried* the drug; what the Chinese did with it once it was out of their hands was not their concern. It was the British and the Turks who *manufactured* opium, and it was the corruption that pervaded China itself that made its distribution there possible. “The high officers of the Government have not only *connived* at the trade,” Warren wrote home, “but the Governor and other officers of the province have bought the drug and have taken it from the stationed ships . . . in their own Government boats.”

Such sharp, self-serving distinctions may have helped ease the traders' consciences—which were otherwise well enough developed. A number of opium traders, including Warren and Ned, held strong opinions about such moral issues as slavery, for instance. Ned even carefully pasted abolitionist doggerel into his scrapbook:

*A boasted flag of Stripes and Stars
Once fluttered oe'r the waves
Hangs dripping down in deep disgrace
Wet with the tears of slaves.*

The Americans treated the hong merchants upon whom they relied for their licit profits with considerable courtesy and respect. Warren and his partners had great admiration for Houqua II, for example, the grave, cultured old merchant who traded heavily with Russell & Company and was considered one of the world's richest men (worth twenty-six million

dollars in 1833, the year Warren first knew him, according to William Hunter). Even in Warren's old age, Houqua's portrait hung in his library, and he often quoted to his own children something this closest Chinese acquaintance had once said to him: “Mr. Delano, I strive to serve my Heavenly Father on earth as I would have my sons serve me.”

But cut off from the city of Canton itself by both law and custom, the traders had little opportunity to know ordinary Chinese other than as servants, shopkeepers, laborers, or members of





first, the mobs. Traditional Chinese xenophobia had a good deal to do with that. But so did the American zeal to get out of the country and get out fast. "From this country it is impossible for me to write any thing descriptive that can be interesting," John R. Latimer, a Canton trader who left China about the time Warren was there, once wrote home, "being denied the privilege of going into the country and even into the city, with no other society but our own countrymen. Business constantly occupies our attention. From the hour of our arrival our

constant study is to be away as soon as possible."

Only one of the early Russell partners, William Hunter, ever even bothered to learn Chinese; the rest made do with the curious amalgam called *pidgin* ("business") English. And the pages of Ned Delano's diary are filled with evidence of his ignorance of the people and customs of the city that started just a few yards behind his bedroom. Perhaps the opium traders' inability to see most Chinese as other than menials or curiosities helped them keep faceless the hundreds of thou-

sands of Chinese who craved the drug they sold.

In any case, huge profits were being made, and the Delanos and most of their fellow Americans saw no reason not to compete hard for a share of them. The protests of missionaries and others that the drug trade was intrinsically wicked they found provoking. "I do not pretend to justify the prosecution of the opium trade in a moral and philanthropic point of view," Warren wrote home, "but as a merchant I insist that it has been a fair, honorable and legitimate trade; and to



say the worst of it, liable to no further or weightier objections than is the importation of wines, Brandies & spirits into the U. States, England, &c."

Robert Bennet Forbes agreed. "As to the effect on the people, there can be no doubt that it was demoralizing to a certain extent; not more so, probably, than the use of ardent spirits," he wrote later, "indeed, it has been asserted with truth that the twenty or thirty thousand chests,—say twelve to fifteen million pounds,—of opium, distributed among three hundred and fifty millions of people, had a much less deleterious effect on the whole country than the vile liquor made of rice, called 'samshue.'"

Besides, he added, all the best people did it: "I considered it right to follow the example of England, the East India Company . . . and the merchants to whom I had always been accustomed to look up as exponents of all that was

honorable in trade,—the Perkins's, the Peabodys, the Russells, and the Lows."

The drug trade was risky for the Chinese, who called it the "black tiger" because it had ruined so many: sporadic crackdowns sometimes cut into profits; captured smugglers were occasionally strangled; pirates cruised the coastline; and prices shifted wildly, depending on how much of the drug had made it to shore.

But for the foreigners, who took few risks and who were always paid in advance, it was relatively safe and wonderfully lucrative. Years later William Hunter recalled the drug traffic with something like rapture: the trader's "sales were pleasantness and his remittances were peace. Transactions seemed to partake of the nature of the drug; they imparted a soothing frame of mind . . . and no bad debts!"

It had all threatened to end suddenly in March of 1839, nearly two years before Ned arrived, when Lin Tse-hsü, the emperor's incorruptible new high commissioner of Canton, began enforcing long-standing edicts to end the trade forever. Lin surrounded the factories with troops and ordered the traders to turn over to him all their opium and to promise to import no more. Hong merchants who failed to bring about foreign compliance, Lin warned, would be decapitated. Warren and the other traders had spent several nervous weeks locked inside their factories before the British superintendent of trade, Charles Elliot, surrendered the last of 20,283 chests—each of them containing enough narcotic to render 8,000 of the most hardened, three-pipe-a-day addicts insensible for most of a month. Russell & Company turned over 1,400 chests. All of the drug was dissolved in water, diluted with

salt and lime, then dumped into the sea after apologetic prayers were offered to the gods for its defilement.

The British then withdrew to their anchored ships—taking with them in a crate the life-sized portrait of George IV that hung in the dining room of their factory—and waited for London to dispatch an expeditionary force to punish the Chinese and force the emperor to pay them for the drug his agents had destroyed.

The Americans did not go with them. When Elliot asked them to do so, and thereby help “bring these rascally Chinese to terms,” Robert Forbes had responded with considerable heat. “I replied,” he recalled many years later, “that *I had not come to China for health or pleasure, and that I should remain at my post as long as I could sell a yard of goods or buy a pound of tea. . . .*”

The British squadron had arrived in June of 1840, blockaded the approach to Canton, and begun a series of small, fierce actions up the coast. The sporadic conflict that followed, and which came to be known as the first Opium War, would last almost three years.

American opinion about the war was divided—just as British opinion was. Some people, including many churchmen, argued that the opium traffic was simply evil. English overseas adventures were never popular, especially along the New England coast. The former President and Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, now chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, nonetheless rose to England’s defense in a widely reported paper read before the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston. Opium was no more the cause of the quarrel, he said, “than the overthrowing of the tea in the Boston Harbor was the cause of the North American Revolution.

“The cause of the war is the *kowtow*!—the arrogant and insupportable pretensions of China, that she will hold commercial intercourse with the rest of mankind, not upon terms of equal reciprocity, but upon the insulting and degrading forms of relation between lord and vassal.” Adams’s views proved so unpopular that the editor of the *North-American Review*, who already had accepted his paper for publication, thought it wise to return it to him.

Still, it was also true that the end result of a British victory—a China more open and receptive to outsiders—would benefit both those who wanted to make money and those who wanted to save souls there. God did sometimes work in truly mysterious ways, and as the conflict dragged on, even some missionaries began to see virtue in it. “Although war is bringing its train of horrors upon this heretofore peaceful land,” wrote S. Wells Williams, a missionary from upstate New York stationed at Canton, “and the still sorer scourge of opium is slaying its thousands, we will encourage ourselves in the name of the Lord. The cause of the war is exceedingly objectionable, [but] so has been many of those in ages past which at the end have brought blessings upon the scene of their devastation.”

The Delanos’ sympathies, too, were divided. They had little affection for the English: Capt. Warren Delano I, the brothers’ mariner father, had been captured and mistreated by the British during the War of 1812. Warren and Ned sympathized with the Chinese determination to defend their homeland even against modern weaponry they could never hope to match, and they were outraged to hear that British sailors were raping and plundering along the coast. “I truly wish that John Bull would meet with one hearty repulse,” Ned wrote, “for why should he enter their peaceful habitations and commit the horridlest brutalities upon the women?” When news came of a British defeat in another colonial war being fought in far-off Afghanistan, Ned was privately pleased: “I very nearly hope that the true owners of the soil, the natives of India, may succeed and drive from their country, the ever-usurping and proud-hearted Britons—that they may never get a foothold in China is a wish connected with that.”

At the same time, the Delanos and their friends had often chafed at the same Chinese hauteur that so angered the British. “Great Britain owes it to herself and to the civilized world [in the West],” Warren wrote early in the conflict, “to knock a little reason into this besotted people and teach them to treat strangers with a common decency.” And they prayed that if the British were to strike, they should strike hard, for a

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long-standing
edicts, and
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traders’ opium.



less than telling victory might rouse the Cantonese to take revenge on the factories, and the Americans knew they could not count on the mob making fine distinctions among the traders they found there. Even the mandarins "cannot tell the difference between us," Warren noted; all foreigners remained *Fan kwei*.

Meanwhile, with the British traders away, the field was left to the Americans, and by the time Ned began his duties, Russell & Company was cleaning up. Robert Forbes had sailed for home, leaving Warren in charge of the firm; as the most senior trader in Canton, he was also the American vice-consul. Under his shrewd direction, tea for Britain was being carried out through the Chinese

counterblockade to waiting British ships—all at stiff rates, about which the British traders could do nothing but complain. "While we hold the horns," one Briton wrote, "they milk the cow."

"The English are awfully envious of the success of their rivals," Ned noted, "& throw at them every abuse you think of—quietly the Americans pursue a straightforward course, without condescending to notice them. . . ."

That straightforward course also earned Warren profits from the Chinese. A nine-hundred-ton British ship, the *Cambridge*, had been trapped inside the Chinese perimeter. Warren bought her cheap, renamed her the *Chesapeake*, then resold her at a comfortable profit

to Commissioner Lin, who, in turn, had her towed below Whampoa and lined her decks with cannons and barrels of powder; brilliantly colored streamers reading "Courage" fluttered from her masts meant to intimidate any foreigners who sought to sail past her.

Despite the rumors of riots in the city and assault from the sea that from time to time forced the Russell men to pack their belongings and flee to Macao, the life they led at Canton was comfortable. The company chef was superb; there was still plenty of Calcutta ale on hand; each man continued to have his own servant to lay out his white linen suit, see to the mending of his mosquito netting, and stand behind his chair at meals, which,

one American guest wrote, "could not have been more completely like home had it been transported by lightning line."

But it was also often a lonely and dispiriting existence. Neither Ned nor Warren ever saw Canton as anything more than a place to make money. Ned pronounced it a "vile hole" even before he got to China; Warren thought life there "about as monotonous as at sea on a long passage." Letters from home arrived months after they were written, if at all. During Ned Delano's seven years at Canton, four of his five sisters died; it became difficult for him to open new letters for fear of more tragic news. Portraits were sent back and forth just so that family members could remember how one another looked. Six months after their sister Susan died of "the fiend consumption," the brothers eagerly opened a parcel containing a memorial portrait of her: "Did not look farther than the head—my dear sister Susan was unlike the picture," Ned wrote. "I am much disappointed." Warren sent home at least two portraits of himself, painted by the celebrated Cantonese artist Lamqua, though he was not overly impressed with either likeness: "... in my humble opinion," he wrote, "neither of them look any more like me than they do—like—like—like Martin Van Buren."

There was little to do but work. Office duties filled the daylight hours. During the evenings Ned sometimes played bowls in a distressingly bumpy lane attached to the factory; more often he joined the other traders in the square out front for a stroll or a game of what one visitor called "the primitive and healthful sport of leap-frog," a favorite spectacle of the Cantonese who gathered there at dusk each day to see what the barbarians were doing.

On especially warm evenings the Russell men sometimes ventured out onto the river, being careful to stay out from under bridges and far enough from shore to remain beyond the range of the stones and garbage that were often hurled at them from hiding.

Locked up together in the compounds for months at a time, the traders got on one another's nerves. Ned was especially sensitive to slights, real or fancied; an

overly familiar joke about his expanding girth or his youthful appearance, or an unexplained shift in his place at table, could sour him for days.

Private smuggling sometimes added a little excitement. Ned evidently conducted a brisk independent business in silks; he got up early one morning, for example, and "saw 67 cases of silk smuggled into the *Lena's* launch. \$10,000 at risk. Gained by operation \$500. E. King [a Russell partner] discovered the move but I persevered and succeeded."

Hong life was unrelievedly masculine. Traders were at least theoretically barred from the brightly painted floating bordellos called flower boats that were tied up here and there along the crowded riverfront. One evening Ned noted that he had "played the gallant to a young lady in a boat. . . . Modesty would not force a kiss from me and I left her with only a squeeze of the hand. Chinese laws being against foreigners entering the boats *de plaisir*, I did not venture my person in the lady's chamber." Other persons were ventured, however, and some of the sturdy women who rowed the traders up and down the river also proved pliable.

Several of the Delanos' friends kept Chinese mistresses at Macao. William Hunter's bore him at least two children. He proved so fond of her that after setting out for America and his first vacation in eighteen years, he turned back halfway, apparently unable to be apart from her any longer. Ned was disgusted: "The man must be insane. . . . A man who has been from home since 1825 . . . and amassing more than \$200,000, return[ing] to China and his miserable Tanka mistress."

On January 7, 1841, the British captured Chuenpi and the Big Taikok, two fortresses guarding the mouth of the Pearl River. Ned and several other Russell men had themselves rowed out to Chuenpi a few days later to see the damage firsthand. British steamships had first perforated its walls and silenced its guns; then, landing parties of infantrymen and sailors had trapped some seven hundred defenders and slaughtered all but a handful as they tried to flee into the sea.

After poking through the ruins, Ned wrote: "I saw the burned body of a Chinaman. Some [British] sailor had put

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a bamboo in his mouth surmounted by a Chinese scroll. In another room [a] large stain of blood . . . then a mandarin's boot and remnants of hats . . . guns, bows. . . ." A British marine showed him five still unburied bodies and cheerfully cut a souvenir for him from the coat of one of them, a wooden tag painted with the dead man's name and unit in Chinese characters. The rest of the bodies had been hastily buried in a mass grave just outside the walls, over which the British had put up a bamboo topped with a coolie's straw hat and a hand-lettered sign: "This is the Rode to Gloury."

Ned was appalled—"What horrid butchery!" But he was not undone: "Ate a hearty dinner," he noted before going to bed that evening.

Tension was high, and the Delanos themselves inadvertently added to it. A few days after Ned's visit to the ruined fort, he and Warren were once again on the river, an arsenal of arms on deck as protection against pirates and for shooting at water birds. The boatmen acted as loaders, and as one returned Warren's shotgun to the deck, it went off. Two men were hit: one died within minutes; the other was only scratched on the scalp. Their angry companions refused to row further until the rest of the Delanos' guns were fired into the water. The bloody corpse was wrapped in a blanket and carried below.

Word of the shooting had somehow preceded them to Canton and, while they were still several miles from the factories, the dead man's family rowed out to meet them: "The wife or widow set up an ugly howling and wailing. Our boat was stopped until the matter should be settled. 2 of our servants [went] to Canton for money. We offered [the grieving family] in charity one hundred and fifty dollars. The family and relatives after quarreling upwards of an hour about it, came to the conclusion that the brother of the deceased would in consideration of a . . . present of \$200, marry the widow and receive said sum in consideration. This was granted, and after humbugging two or three hours more the body of the deceased was conveyed away with the whole concern. . . . The family have probably more money now than they have ever had or ever will have again.

The deceased was employed as a common boatman, which class actually gets from 1.50 to \$2 p[er] month! of course . . . the death of this man is a lucky thing for them. . . ."

Later, when an agitated trader whispered that he had heard some foreigners had killed two boatmen, Ned assured him "it is all nonsense."

The war seemed to be coming closer. On February 27 the British paddle steamer *Nemesis* sent a boarding party up the sides of the refitted *Chesapeake* the ship Warren had sold to the Chinese. The British sailors set her afire, and when the flames reached her magazine, she exploded. Looking out the factory window a dozen miles away, Ned saw the blast, "a sudden and brilliant light" on the horizon: "This spectacle made my heart and I reckon the hearts of those with me go pit a pat quite seriously."

That evening there were nine for dinner, eight Americans and a Spanish silk merchant unable to arrange passage home. It was a less convivial evening than usual for, as Ned noted, all the guests nervously believed that they represented the "entire foreign community of the city and most likely of the whole Empire."

A month later, when a British assault on Canton seemed only a matter of hours away, and thousands of Chinese were fleeing into the countryside, the French prefect of Canton asked Warren to intercede with the British. Warren said he would see what he could do, but only as a strict neutral interested in protecting his firm's property. The British commander received him politely enough but would guarantee nothing.

Going back to the city, Warren's fast boat, flying a white flag of truce, was ambushed from shore. He described what happened next to Ned, waiting anxiously at Whampoa: "When near Canton . . . the cowardly Chinese let go a shot at my boat, which passed some 30 feet over our heads, two men jumped overboard, two or three threw themselves on the bottom of the boat and roared like squalling babies, while the remainder in the greatest terror and confusion imaginable, screeched and screamed to the soldiers, to desist firing. . . . The Lingo [translator] then



ent on shore, and after an hour or more delay, half a dozen petty soldier Man-
brins came on board, and took me in
triumph to the city of Canton. Yes, I was
marched into the City, the distance of
three-quarters of a mile, a prisoner, to
my wondrous astonishment, admiration
and gratification of a gaping multitude.
The gallant soldiers informing those we
passed of the terrible conflict which had
taken place. . . . I was brought before
His Excellency [Gen. Yang Fang, assis-
tant commander at Canton], a decrepit-
looking man of the age of 74 years, with
clouded eyes, and deaf as a haddock,
who asked me some foolish questions,
examined my clothing, hat, shoes and
cane, and expressed his surprise that my
head was not shaved. He took my hands,
examining them carefully, and *smelling*
them, asked me to unbutton my shirt-
sleeve, and show my hide, which I did,
and he then pronounced me a good man,
an excellent man, one of the best men
he had ever known, and seizing a lousy,
ragged, dirty soldier, who stood within
three inches of His Excellency, said I was
all the same as he."

Warren was released after urging his
captors to seek some sort of compro-
mise with the British. They did, and the
Chinese agreed to pay the besiegers
within six days a ransom of six million

dollars, more than twice the annual Brit-
ish revenue from tea.

The British finally returned to Canton
in March 1841, firing naval guns at the
waterfront batteries and occasionally
over the factories into the city itself. Most
of the Americans, including Ned, took
cover when the first shot was fired, but
Warren stayed on the roof watching the
shells arc over his head to crash into
the tangled streets.

The Delanos had mixed emotions at
seeing a semblance of normal trade re-
turn: the threat of war seemed to have
lessened, but business was no longer ex-
clusively in American hands; looking
over the books for 1839 and 1840, Ned
could not help sighing over the "mag-
nificent profits, the like of which I think
cannot again accrue."

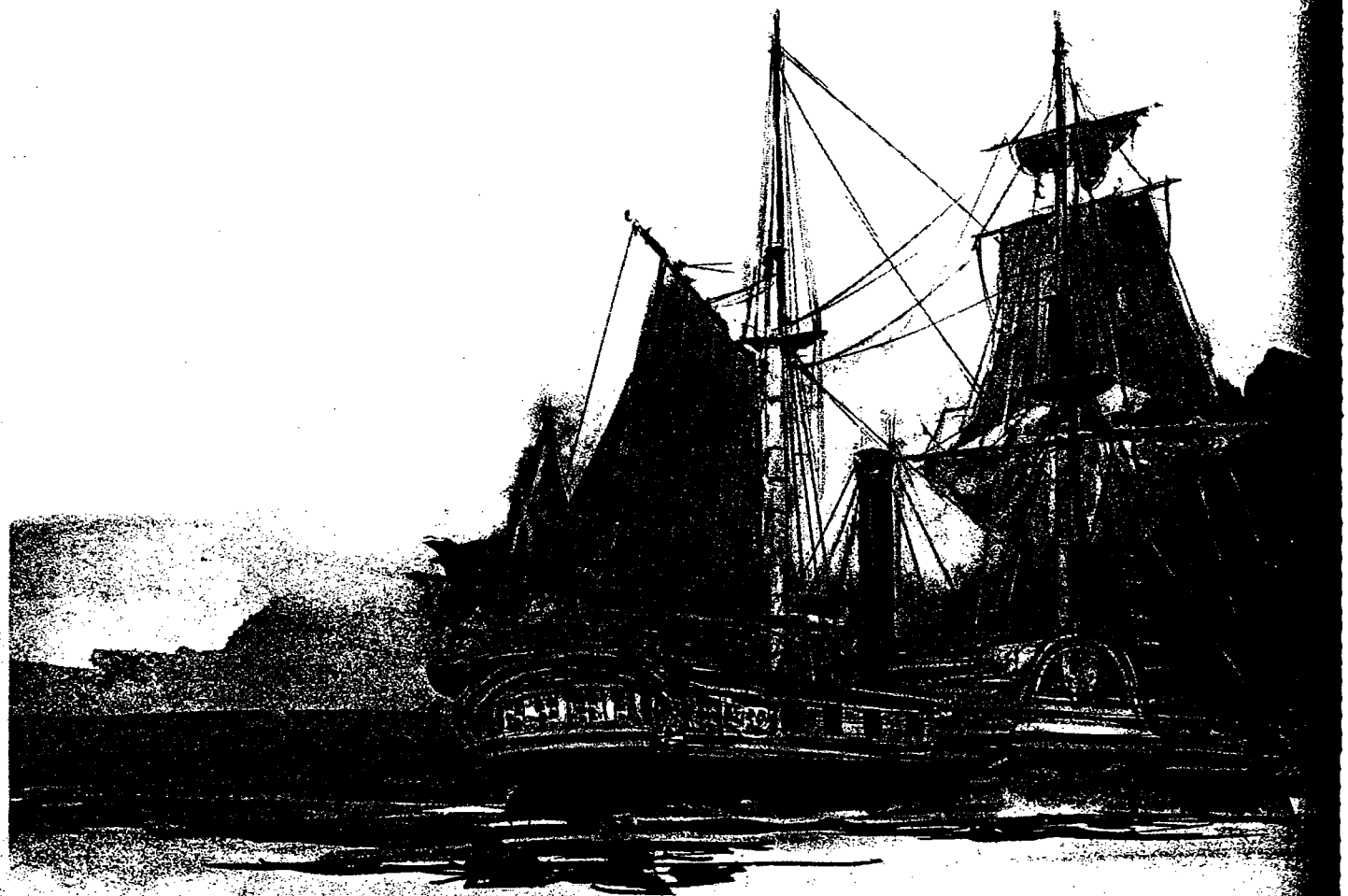
The war moved on northward along
the coast and up the Yangtze as far as
Nanking, the British fleet blasting its way
through the war junks to stop at one for-
tified village after another just long
enough to plunder it before moving on
to the next prize. (British soldiers and
sailors and Indian sepoys alike competed
for treasure, and the Hindustani word
for plunder—*loot*—entered the language
after this expedition.) The Chinese regi-
ments could do little to stop them; their
special whistling arrows and the sword-

waving warriors who turned brave som-
ersaults as they advanced were no match
for British firepower.

Ned was disgusted that the British vic-
tory had been so effortless. Had the Chi-
nese possessed "any of the Tartar spirit,"
he wrote, "not an Englishman would es-
cape from his *interior* position to tell
the tale of bloodshed, and of punish-
ment to the invader of the soil of a peace-
able people . . . I have no pity for them
—the idea of 10,000 men submittancing
10,000,000!!"

The Treaty of Nanking that officially
ended the war in 1842 extorted from the
emperor twenty-one million dollars in
indemnities and forced him to open five
new ports to commerce and to cede
Hong Kong to the British. There was
no mention of opium—both sides pre-
tending to know nothing about it—and
so the trade continued. The American
Treaty of Wanghia, negotiated by Caleb
Cushing two years later, expressly de-
clared the drug "contraband," but Yan-
kee traders, including the Delanos, con-
tinued to ship and sell it with more ease
and enthusiasm than ever.

(A second, and bloodier, Opium War
ended again in British victory in 1858;
the Treaty of Tientsin opened still more
trading ports and fixed a tariff rate for
opium, thereby finally giving the trade



at least quasi-legitimacy. The opium problem grew steadily worse. Since opium could now be imported without harassment, the emperor decreed that his subjects might grow it themselves; by 1875 fully one-third of the arable land in the mountainous province of Yunnan was blanketed with poppies, and at the turn of the century there were thought to be fifteen million Chinese addicts. In 1907 the British and Chinese jointly agreed to phase out the export of Indian opium over ten years, but the traffic continued to flourish inside China until 1949, when the Communists began to stamp it out.)

In the autumn of 1842 Warren sailed for home for the first time in almost a decade; he returned just over a year later with his sister, Dora, and a new wife, Catherine Lyman of Northampton, Massachusetts, and their lady's maid, aboard Robert Bennet Forbes's new *Paul Jones*. The ship was swift—the passage took just 106 days—and fitted out with the very first icehouse in the China trade. "We had ice from the [*Paul Jones*]," Ned

noted in wonder. "Sent out for mint and for the first time in China . . . mint juleps were concocted and drunk." There were crisp New England pippin apples too, "and I need not say that I have eaten [them] with much gusto," and the next day there was still enough ice left to make "ICE CREAMS, things before unheard of in China."

Life seemed to be improving for the Delano brothers. Warren and his little family—a child named Susan was born in 1844—bought a big abandoned bungalow overlooking the busy harbor of Macao and called variously Arrowdale (because the Delanos enjoyed archery in the garden), and Rat's Retreat (because of its original occupants, which had to be evicted before the family moved in).

Ned, soon to be a full-fledged partner in the firm, lived with them whenever he was at Macao. In 1844 he traveled to India to oversee the inspection and buying of opium, throwing himself into amicable but sometimes frantic competition at Bombay and Calcutta with the

representatives of other companies. (He was greatly pleased when the clipper *Atelope*, which he had managed to load with fourteen hundred opium chests, delivered that cargo to Warren at Whampoa before proceeding on to Macao with just two hundred and fifty chests for his chief rivals, the British firm of Dent and Company.)

While Ned was away, however, Warren's infant daughter died, a second was born but seemed alarmingly frail, and Arrowdale was gutted by fire. By the time he got back to China, his older brother had decided it was time to go home.

Before dark," Ned wrote a few days after his return to Macao, "I accompanied Warren to the Deadhouse . . . to see [the] case containing the remains of his sweet little Susie. Warren was a good [deal] affected—and coming home he discoursed freely to me about his fears for Katie's mind—its safety. Since Susie's death, K. has been queer. . . . The voyage home—the change of scene, mode of life, etc. etc. I



think must restore K. to her usual sanity." Warren and his troubled family returned to America in the summer of 1846, accompanied by a Chinese wet nurse and man-servant.

Catherine Delano did recover her equilibrium and eventually bore nine more children; one of them, named Sara, would become the mother of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Within a few months of his return, Warren was "heels & head in business," according to Ned. "Mixing in all kinds"—railroads, coal mines, shipbuilding; "I fear he is branching out too much."

Ned found Canton insufferable without his brother's benevolent protection. More senior partners were overseeing tea, opium, and imports, leaving him with only the firm's correspondence to handle, a clerkish task he now thought beneath him. He detested the new head of the company, Paul S. Forbes—"a miserable, sneaking fellow"—and the feeling seems to have been reciprocated; though the two men worked in the same small office every day and dined together

nearly every night, they often did not speak. Ned felt left out of things, had difficulty sleeping for "thinking, fretting, brooding," resented what he considered "a great deal of undertone conversation, whispering," and considered that "the looks of people betray the most horrible intentions toward me."

Finally—and probably to everyone's relief—Ned managed to work out satisfactory terms under which he could withdraw from the firm and sail for home, carrying with him almost eighty thousand dollars in profits. He began his journey on July 31, 1847. "Leave Canton," he wrote that night, "and wish I could say, never to be bothered more with the place."

He never really was. Ned did not marry and lived much of the time at Algonac, Warren's stately home at Newburgh, New York, dabbling in several businesses without much energy or success and growing hugely fat. He died suddenly of a heart attack aboard his yacht in the summer of 1881.

Warren Delano *did* have to bother

The British steamer *Nemesis* sent a boarding party onto the Chinese vessel and set her afire. When the flames reached the magazine, she exploded.

When
Westbrook Pegler
accused FDR of
living off a
fortune gained in
a traffic "as
degrading as
prostitution," the
White House did
not reply.

about China again, for Ned's fears about his overextending himself proved accurate. He had made himself a millionaire by age forty-eight, but the Panic of 1857 ruined him, and in 1860 he was forced to go back to China, to Hong Kong this time, where he spent five more years recouping his losses in the two trades that had initially made him so rich so rapidly—tea and opium.

In 1879, more than thirty years after Warren had left Canton, his old friend Robert Forbes asked him to write up his memories of life there in the old days. Both men had since earned distinguished reputations and several fortunes in fields unrelated to the China trade, but Forbes had grown nostalgic for it. He hoped that Warren and all the surviving Russell men would contribute memoirs, he said; there were nearly one hundred of them; the results would be used to compile a colorful company history.

Warren sent him a terse summary of his career in China in which he did not mention his participation in the drug trade. Some of Forbes's other former partners were still less obliging, wanting no part of any history that might prove too intrusive. Even Forbes finally thought better of his scheme: "The only thing I fear," he confessed to Warren, "is that in giving a sketch of the causes and effects of the opium traffic . . . I may say too much." He finally chose to say nothing.

Warren may have been relieved. He devoted his old age to keeping track of his investments, running his big estate, contributing to Republican candidates and to other causes he considered worthy, among them Booker T. Washington's work among Southern blacks.

The old opium days were allowed to fade from memory.

Some years after Warren Delano's death in 1898, an elderly Unitarian clergyman who had benefited from his generosity wrote a tribute to him. "This man seemed to have intuitions of right, justice and equity in small matters, as in great," he said. "Dishonesty, pretense, chicanery, come how they might and in whom they would, felt themselves rebuked in his presence. . . . His moral intensity and practical earnestness never relaxed their hold of what he felt to be good: the rest he left to God."

For a long time American historians also seem to have been content to let the Yankee trader's pursuit of opium profit its largely be forgotten.

Even Adm. Samuel Eliot Morison devoted just three uncharacteristically defensive pages to it in his monumental *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (1921). He found comfort (though it is not easy to see why) in the fact that "for English firms, [opium smuggling] was vital. For Boston firms it was incidental." Morison was perhaps on firmer ground when he went on, "the risk of appearing to black the kettle," to argue that "there is a difference between smuggling opium under the official wink [as the Americans did] and driving in opium with cannon and bayonet when officials are making a sincere if tardy effort at moral reform."

More objective study of the American opium trade and its impact on buyers and sellers alike had to await a more recent generation of scholars with access to Chinese as well as American sources—writers such as Jacques M. Downs, John King Fairbank, Peter Ward Fay, and Charles C. Stelle.

No one knows what FDR knew of his grandfather's involvement in the drug business. When the columnist Westbrook Pegler accused the President of living off the fortune left by "an old buccaneer" who had wrested it from slave traffic as horrible and degrading as prostitution, the White House maintained a discreet silence.

But Eleanor Roosevelt had been stung by Pegler's charge, and when she visited Hong Kong in 1953, she made a point of asking a veteran British merchant about the opium era. After talking with him, she reluctantly concluded, "I suppose it is true that the Delanos and the Forbeses, like everybody else, had to include a limited amount of opium in their cargoes to do any trading at all."

Geoffrey C. Ward's book, *Before the Trumpet: Young Franklin Roosevelt, 1882-1905*, includes additional material about the Delanos; a paperback edition will be published by Perennial Library this July. Frederic Delano Grant, Jr., is an attorney with the Boston law firm of McCabe/Gordon P.C.



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COURTESY J. N. BARTFIELD GALLERIES, 30 WEST 57 STREET, NEW YORK CITY



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THE COVER: Henry Farny painted *First Sketch for the Last of the Herd* in 1905. The artist was known for painting Indians as they really lived rather than overdramatizing either their nobility or savagery. For more on this subject, see page 18.

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In case you missed it.

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