

WONG KAI KAH TO FANNIE BARTLETT

January 28, 1882
Shanghai, China

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My dear Mrs. Bartlett,

You will be astonished to learn the shabby treatment we received at the hands of our paternal government. Perhaps you are already informed through some other source, but at any rate I will recount to you everything that has been done for our good (?)

The first sight of Shanghai as we steamed up to the wharf thrilled us thinking what joyous welcome was waiting for us, and what a sea of familiar faces would soon surround us, and our country would soon extend her arms to embrace us in maternal kindness! But alas! Vain thoughts! Tall spires grew taller, the indistinct buildings grew more distinct, and we grew wilder and more enthusiastic over our imaginary reception, while the launch glided over the placid and yellow waters of the Yang Tze until it touched the wharf, with a sudden jar, which awoke us from our Utopian dreams. True a sea of faces was looking down on us, but no friendly recognition, no kindly smile greeted our forlorn band. Crowds of coolies, wheelbarrow, and jinrikisha men were shouting, gesticulating and quarreling for business. One solitary man came aboard to receive us—our postal manager, Mr. Luk. Instead of employing carriages or boats to convey us to our destination, the Chinese Harbor Master's office, he packed us on wheelbarrows which have but one wheel and progress very slowly. And thus we were exposed to the gaping, jeering crowd who followed us... Some of the wheelbarrows had no pass to go through the French concession, and many of us had to get down and walk, carrying our bags in our hands, an almost inexcusable act of debasing oneself in the eyes of the so-called Chinese gentleman.

We came to the Harbour Master's house, and after roll call and a substantial supper, not elaborately prepared, we were dispatched with a detachment of Chinese marines acting as a guard over us to prevent our escaping from the grasp of our paternal government (?) to the "Knowledge Wishing Institution" inside the city behind the court of the Shanghai Taotai. Your Western imagination is too sublime to conceive a place so vile as this so-called institution; you may have read about Turkish prisons or Andersonville Horrors, but compared with this they must have been enviable places.

But sleep, like death puts an end to all the evils and griefs and while the body is in the blessed arms of Morpheus extreme suffering of the present often leads our mind to the happy times of the past and to mingle over again with joy and mirth of bygone days. Grey morning and chilly wind brought us from our happy

wanderings to stern reality again and the day wore away in vain hope of getting release from our confinement. It was doubly unfortunate for us whose fathers, relatives and friends were awaiting us with wines and banquets in full preparation and longed to gaze upon and sit by the sides of their dear ones who had been so long away on the other hemisphere across the big sea. But such pleasures were denied them as we were to receive no liberty until we had made our "Kewtous" to the Shanghai Taotai. Accordingly, after four day's groaning and complaining, we were summoned to hold audience with the highest official in Shanghai. In three bodies we were mustered with enough guards to keep a regiment in quiet subjection; we commenced our journey amidst crowds of spectators whose comments were far from being flattering, and marched through piles of dirt and filth which commanded the entrance of the Taotai Yamen.

After much waiting and unnecessary delay we were at last ushered in to the presence of his Excellency and we prostrated ourselves before his majestic presence; he however returned our salute and motioned us to stand out each according to his division in which he went to America. After he inquired of us our different accomplishments and the courses we pursued, the "great Man" dismissed us allowing us to depart from the "Prison" at 10 a.m. and returning at 4 p.m., much to the dislike of the boys. Two days after, I boarded the English steamer "Rosetta" and accompanied Yung Weu Chun to Hong Kong.