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ART. VI.—THE OPIUM TRAFFIC.

THE present position of the opium-traffic is the result of the Ratification of the Chee Foo Convention on the 13th of September, 1885. I shall have to refer in detail, further on, to this Chee Foo Convention and its long-delayed ratification, delayed nine years. But in the meantime it will be necessary to go somewhat into the history of the traffic, if we are to understand the place which England occupies in this painful subject.

At home we class opium among poisons, and, as such, it is not allowed to be sold except by registered chemists and druggists, and always with a label declaring it to be "poison;" we also restrict its consumption as much as possible in our Indian dominions; and within recent years the British authorities have declined to permit its cultivation in Bombay, because of the necessary moral and physical evils which must follow. Certainly, to our shame be it said, we taught the natives of British Burmah its use; but, in consequence of the terrible ravages resulting, we are now doing what is possible to cure the evil. So much for our attitude at home and in our dependencies.

But what has been our policy on this matter in regard to China? It is not a question which concerns us to decide how long opium has been smoked in Western China: the evidence points to a comparatively recent period, a hundred to a hundred and fifty years back; but the extensive use is to a large extent contemporary with the use of this poison in Eastern China. The fact which we have to face is this, that England is directly responsible for whatever has happened in Eastern China, and that for well on to a century we have been forcing the drug into the country, for a long time smuggling it in, and since 1860 availing ourselves of treaty-powers extorted at the cannon's mouth, to supply it in immense quantities against the opposition of the Chinese Government and known wishes of the Chinese authorities.

We have, therefore, made ourselves responsible before God and man for whatever misery and sin have resulted from our policy.

A "Jubilee" lyric, which appeared the other day, and met with approval in the highest quarters, whether deservedly or not we need not trouble ourselves to say, speaks of our English colonies, which of course includes our dependencies, as "ruled in love for the world's gain," and of the wealth thence derived as "without a stain." Such language is beyond the wildest liberty of poetical license when you remember the opium-traffic. As long as that traffic lasts, we may no more boast of ruling

for the gain of the world, and without a stain, than we could when the British flag protected the slave-trade and the West Indies were cultivated by slaves. It is not too strong to describe that traffic, as it has been described in the House of Commons as "the foulest blot upon the escutcheon of England."

Baron Bunsen, in a letter to Mr. Gladstone in 1840, commending the course which that statesman had taken in regard to the first Chinese war, says, "You have enabled the friends of England abroad to maintain their ground against her numerous enemies—all Romanists, atheists, Jacobins, etc., who throw that question of the opium-traffic in our face as proving the humbug and hypocrisy of the English." Sir Herbert Edwardes believed that this traffic was one of the national sins which brought down on us the Indian Mutiny of 1857.[1] And Dr. Kay, formerly Principal of Bishop's College, Calcutta, fears that "within the lines of our fortifications there may be present a deadly enemy, the unexpiated guilt of the opium-traffic; if so, no military adamant can keep out Divine retribution."[2]

The smuggling of opium had long been a sore point in the intercourse between China and England; and in 1840 led directly to the first Chinese War. I am not concerned to demonstrate that the action taken by Commissioner Lin at that time was strictly within his international and treaty rights, although high English authorities hold that it was; but at all events the provocation was intense. We were victorious; but no efforts of our negotiators could obtain from the Chinese any terms for the admission of opium—they would not sacrifice the interests of their people. Of this war, Mr. Gladstone said at the time that "a war more unjust in its origin, or more calculated to cover the country with disgrace, he had never read of." And in almost equally strong terms he denounced the wars of 1857 and 1860. This opinion he has never modified. And many even of those who most respect Mr. Gladstone have often regretted that his policy in more recent times has not been so unquestionable as his language was formerly.[3] But, indeed, both political parties have tolerated and accepted this iniquitous traffic.

As regards all three of our Chinese wars, it is not too much to say, that no one wishing to celebrate the glories of England would care to recall them—the least said about the wars the better: in the words of the old Scotch proverb, "He was scarce of news that told that his father was hanged."

The principle recognised by the Chinese Government is that it exists "for the physical and moral welfare of the people;"

[1] "Friend of China," 1886, p. 52. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[3] "National Responsibility," p. 26.

and throughout this whole opium business the policy of China has been based on this principle; while England, for mere gain, has been endeavouring to force her from this position. Well might a Chinese diplomatist say, "We cannot meet you English on common ground on this question. We view it from a *moral* standpoint, England from a *fiscal*."[1]

By the Treaty of 1842, five more Chinese ports were opened to English commerce, but no legalization of the opium trade was granted; and so the smuggling went on as before, over a wider area, and with the full cognizance, and it must be candidly acknowledged with the tacit approbation, of England, whose pecuniary interest was bound up with its continuance.[2]

A few words about the methods in which the manufacture and trade are conducted.

The Government of Bengal licenses the cultivation of the poppy, and does not permit its cultivation without a license; it advances the necessary funds to the farmer, or ryot, receives the whole of the crops, and prepares it for the market—which means almost entirely for the Chinese market; it is then packed in cases and sent to Calcutta, and there sold by auction at periodical sales, and by the purchasers exported to its destination. Opium is also produced in some of the independent Native States. At first, up to 1831, the East India Company had a monopoly of the trade within these States; but since that date they have indemnified themselves for the loss of this direct interest by laying a high duty on the opium as it crosses British territory on the way to the port of shipment. The responsibility for this portion of the supply is not so directly ours; but the smuggling of this opium into China up to 1860 was as much our responsibility as that of the opium grown and manufactured by the British authorities. Much the larger quantity of that which reaches China is British manufactured, the quality being superior; and in order to be able "to provide a constant and adequate supply for the China market," in recent years the Government has bought large quantities of Malwa or native-grown opium for sale in India, thus freeing a proportionate quantity of British manufacture for China.[3]

The Queen is owner of the largest drug manufactories in the world, and manager of the largest commercial concern under the sun. Alas that they should be such as they are! Could her Jubilee year be better celebrated than by the beginning of the end of the opium-traffic? This would indeed be a demonstration to the world that England "rules in love for the world's gain," and, though so long delayed, an assertion of the Christianity of

[1] "National Responsibility," p. 16. [2] Moule, p. 23.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the nation. The cost would be a good large sum, no doubt, but the money would be well spent in conferring an inestimable benefit on a friendly nation, and a real blessing also on India herself, while the moral gain would be simply incalculable.

A curious chapter in the history of the traffic would be that which should detail the increase and decrease of the quantity manufactured and poured into China, and the rises and falls in the price per chest; it would demonstrate one fact, that the only consideration kept in view by the British authorities in India is revenue, and that the interests or wishes of the Chinese authorities and people are absolutely left out of consideration. For example, when increased production was reducing profits by bringing down the price, the production was reduced to 48,000 chests; but in 1870, just at a time when convincing proofs of the hostility of the Chinese Government to the trade had been laid before the Viceroy by Sir Rutherford Alcock, the exigencies of the revenue seeming to demand it, the quantity was increased to 60,000 chests. As the *Spectator* has put it, the traffic "has been worked from year to year for the sake of increasing the revenue to a maximum."[1]

For fourteen years after the treaty of 1842 the smuggling continued, without any attempt to check it on our part, and indeed, as we have already said, under our tacit approbation. There were five ports by which now to pour it into China, and naturally the Chinese Government were greatly irritated by what was going on; while the use of opium was spreading in all directions, and untold misery and mischief resulted. I need not dwell upon the effects of opium-smoking; the words of Sir Thomas Wade—a high authority—are worth quoting. He says: "It is to me vain to think otherwise of the use of the drug in China than as a habit many times more pernicious, nationally speaking, than the gin and whisky drinking which we deplore in England." "I know no case of radical cure. It has ensured, in every case within my knowledge, the steady descent, moral and physical, of the smoker; and it is so far a greater mischief than drink, that it does not, by external evidence of its effect, expose its victims to the loss of repute which is the penalty of habitual drunkenness."[2]

As to the views of the Chinese authorities on the subject there has never been any question. There have no doubt been venal officials and corrupt Chinese who have shielded or co-operated in the introduction of the drug, but as a nation and through its representatives China has maintained one attitude of opposition. Under such circumstances the manufacture of the drug in India for China, and its export from Indian ports and illegal introduction into China—at least with the indirect

[1] "National Responsibility," p. 7.

[2] Moule, pp. 18, 19.

sanction of the British authorities there, while every effort of diplomacy and war has been used to obtain the legalization of the trade—is one of those episodes in international relations which it would be hard to match for baseness and dishonour. England had nothing to do with deciding whether opium was a desirable article for Chinese consumption, even if that were an open question; if the Chinese Government objected to it, that should have at once settled the matter.[1] It is simply impossible that such an attitude towards a friendly European nation, if fully realised, could have been condoned for a moment by Englishmen, or tolerated by the public opinion of Europe. It has been possible only because of the remoteness of India and China; because whenever public attention has been directed to the subject, it has been mixed up with other topics of a personal or national character, or because so few people feel any real concern in Indian or Chinese affairs; and it is so difficult to create any public interest in a matter of this sort. We have applied the Christian rule of "thinking no evil" to the deeds of our representatives and officials, and have used the contrary rule in judging the Chinese, whom we have despised, while it suited us to doubt the sincerity of their opposition to the trade.

In 1856 the lorcha *Arrow* affair happened. I need not enter into the particulars of that question, except to say that our representatives made fatal mistakes in dealing with it; it led to the second Chinese War. A treaty—the Treaty of Tien-tsin—was drawn up on the cessation of hostilities in 1858, one clause of which legalized the opium-traffic; but the Chinese refused to ratify that treaty, because of the opium clause. War was resumed, and only after the capture of Pekin and the burning of the Emperor's Summer Palace was the treaty signed with the Convention of Pekin legalizing the opium-traffic attached: this was in 1860.

Of this war, and the resulting treaty, Sir Thomas Wade writes: "Nothing that was gained was received from the free-will of the Chinese. The concessions made to us have been from first to last extorted against the conscience of the nation."[2] And Li Hung Chang, one of the Chinese Government, has recently said, "that war must be considered China's standing protest against the legalization of such a source of revenue" as opium.[3]

By the Convention and Treaty of Tien-tsin, opium was allowed to be imported on payment of an import duty; but China was at liberty to lay what inland tax she pleased. It was a concession won at the point of the bayonet, and against the national conscience; and Sir G. Campbell only expressed

[1] "National Responsibility," p. 30. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 18. [3] Moule, p. 13.

what all honourable men must feel when he said that "We are not justified in enforcing treaties for the admission of opium extorted in those wars."[1]

This treaty was to be open to revision in ten years; and in 1869 Sir R. Alcock and the Chinese Government held lengthened negotiations for this purpose, in the course of which Prince Kung and the Chinese Foreign Office, both verbally and in writing, urged and entreated the abolition of their obligation to admit opium into their country. "What wonder," said the Prince, "if officials and people say England is wilfully working out China's ruin, and has no real friendly feeling for her?" Sir R. Alcock represented all this to the Viceroy of India and his Council, telling them that he had no reason to doubt the genuineness of the Chinese abhorrence of the traffic; and that he was persuaded that if England gave up the opium revenue and suppressed the cultivation, the Chinese Government would have no difficulty in suppressing it in China, and so, both in Western and Eastern China, the plague could be stayed; but all in vain. The response of the Indian Government to this appeal was that increase of the export of opium by 12,000 chests to which I have already alluded.

I should mention here that, previous to the Treaty of Tientsin, the law forbidding the cultivation of opium in China had been very generally enforced; but when the trade with India was legalized, such enforcement was found to be no longer possible; and from that period must be dated a large increase in the production of native-grown opium in China, and by consequence a large extension of the consumption and its consequent wretched results. In this way England has become indirectly responsible for whatever evils have proceeded from this increased production and consumption; so that while previously her responsibility for what went on in Western China was not so great, she has now on her shoulders the guilt of most of the Chinese opium misery.[2]

In 1876, things continuing in a most unsatisfactory state to the Chinese, the Convention of Chee Foo was drawn up. Its tendency was to check smuggling, and to enable the Chinese to impose higher "Li-kin" or inland duties. The results were regarded by the Indian and Home Governments as sure to interfere with their trade. As Lord Salisbury said, by such a convention "smuggling would be absolutely barred, and the tax upon opium might have been raised to any amount provincial governors pleased;" and he continues, "that would be a result which would practically neutralize the policy which

[1] Moule, p. 30. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

hitherto has been pursued by this country in respect to that drug."[1] This was plain speaking, at all events.

For nine long years that convention remained unratified, although China was frequently pressing the question. At last, in an amended form, it was signed in September, 1885. The main point between the Governments was the amount of the inland tax, China wishing to be unfettered as to this, as England or any other country would wish to be, and as she would concede to any other country and to her own colonies. If this natural right of an independant Government could not be obtained, then China wished at all events to be able to lay a high tax. The result has been that a rate, named by China, of 80 taels of 5s. 6d. each, has been adopted, and so the convention is signed. Two circumstances probably produced the proposed and adopted rate: one the impossibility of getting anything higher out of England, and the other the bad state of the Chinese finances. That such a settlement is what China of her own accord desired, it is impossible to suppose, seeing that she had been pressing for independent powers as regards the Li-kin; and her policy in treaties with other nations has never varied. In recent treaties with the United States, Russia, and Brazil the trade in opium is prohibited, while in opening Corea to commerce the introduction of opium is expressly forbidden. In dealing with England, China has made the best of a bad job.

It is maintained that now that this convention is adopted there is no longer any coercion on our part, and China has been treated and has acted as an independent power. Technically it may be so, but in effect it seems to me that the most that can be said is that China has made the best terms she could; while if she had been free to carry out her own wishes, the opium-trade would have been prohibited in her treaty with England as in those with other Powers, or at least concessions on the part of China would have been conditional on concessions on our part with regard to the manufacture and traffic.

Some remarks of the Marquis Tseng, in a letter to the Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Traffic, are worth considering. He says that although "the Chee Foo Convention does not accomplish the desired result, it will prove, nevertheless, the first important step towards checking the use and abuse of opium," *i.e.*, because it prevents smuggling. The treaty is open to revision in five years, years which he hints should not be lost by the Society; and he trusts that the British Government will, in the meantime, see its way clear to place restrictions upon the cultivation of opium, in which case the Government of China will surely lose no time in following its

[1] "National Responsibility," p. 21.

example, and putting an effectual check upon the growth of opium in China. Clearly he sees that the question is more in the hands of England than of China, as in fact it has been all along. There is no reason why this terrible curse should not be removed from China, but the country whose guilty conduct introduced opium is alone able to adopt the policy by which the plague can be stayed.

With the signing of the Chee Foo Convention the labours of the opponents of the opium-traffic are by no means at an end. China has not accepted opium as a necessity from which there is no escape. What she has done is to bow to circumstances beyond her control, but not beyond ours. England is still the guilty party, and until the religious and moral sentiment of England expresses itself with decision and imperatively on this disgraceful phase of her Eastern policy, the sin will continue, and China's hands will be tied, and the tens of thousands of Chinese will be sacrificed to the supposed exigencies of the revenue of India.

There are political questions before which party considerations are simply out of court—one of these is this opium-traffic question; and among those with whom such questions should be paramount, of course the clergy stand first. Where justice and mercy to another nation are concerned, when it is a question of right or wrong, of promoting the welfare of peoples, or putting terrible stumbling-blocks in their way, no Christian, least of all no clergyman, may hesitate. No wonder that the Bishop of Victoria should have been stopped again and again while preaching, with the question, "Are you an Englishman? Is not that the country that opium comes from? Go back and stop it, and then we will talk about Christianity."[1]

England has no right to dictate, directly or indirectly, to China as to what she shall or shall not receive into her dominions. Nor is she guilty of anything less than an offence against God and man, when she cultivates a drug for importation into a neighbour's territory which can never be anything but a curse. India must cease the cultivation and manufacture of opium, and to countenance in any way the demoralization of China.

We are facing a serious loss of revenue in British Burmah in our endeavours to reduce the consumption of opium. That country has been so terribly demoralized by the taste for opium which England fostered at first that the cultivation of the soil is being neglected, and those arts which constitute the well-being of society are in danger of dying out. The loss which is being incurred is estimated at £70,000 or £80,000 a year. We must

[1] Davies, "International Christianity," p. 12.

be prepared also to face the loss which the abandonment of the opium manufacture and traffic with China will involve; but it need not be a loss equal to the revenue derived from opium now —*i.e.*, four to five millions annually, which is an estimate much higher than many authorities give. There will be many items to put in the opposite scale, such as the moral and social elevation of the native slaves of the drug in the opium-growing districts, and the diversion of their labours and earnings into more healthy channels; the results of the use of the immense tracts of land wasted on growing the poppy for the production of cereal and other crops, etc.[1] Some financial authorities believe that the cessation of the opium-traffic would be at once followed by a great rise in the value of silver, its present depreciation causing a loss of some four millions sterling to the revenues of India.[2] And if the falling-off in revenue necessitated greater economy in the military and civil expenses of India, it would not be a matter of regret. At all events, the result of a moral and Christian policy would not be, even in the beginning, all loss to finance; in the long-run, probably, it would prove an immense gain.[3]

I have thought it necessary to allude to this aspect of the question, because the great argument of Government and official supporters of the traffic is that the revenue of India could not afford to lose its opium profits.

However, there stands this giant iniquity, and if England desires God's blessing, she must rid herself of it at any cost.

It may be said that with the Chee Fou Convention signed, in which the Li-kin is that which China herself fixed, our only responsibility is for the manufacture and supply. Of course that means our responsibility for the present and for the future. It cannot include the accumulated guilt of well on to 100 years. But while we make and supply the drug, China is confessedly unable to stay its ravages either in the eastern or western districts. Our responsibility can never be other than immense and incalculable, and its limits impossible to fix; and there can be no question about our duty, namely, to cease the

[1] "Sir Arthur Cotton calculated that if sugar were grown instead of the poppy on the 800,000 acres now devoted to opium, the value of the crop of sugar would be six millions sterling more than the value of the opium crop."—"National Responsibility," p. 31.

[2] "Friend," pp. 83-86.

[3] "A word about the effect of the opium traffic on our general traffic with China. It is a startling fact to be noted in these depressed times, that the four hundred millions of China are very poor customers for our English goods; and that this is 'not because of any unwillingness on the part of the Government or people of China to receive our manufactures, but the purchasing power of China seems to be paralysed by the opium trade.'"—"Friend of China," ii., p. 295.

manufacture, and to induce the Native States of India to cease the cultivation; and then, as far as England and India are concerned, China will be free to adopt such measures as she pleases for reducing to a minimum, or zero, the evil habit of opium-smoking, with all its sad and terrible consequences.

One compromise often suggested, that the British Indian authorities should cease the growth and manufacture, but allow it to pass into private hands, contenting itself with levying a heavy export duty, will not meet the case. It would only establish the trade on a firmer basis, and restrict the power of Government for any future action. There is nothing else for it except the withdrawal of all licenses for the growth of opium, and except within a very small area perhaps for medical purposes, absolutely forbidding the cultivation of the poppy. This prohibition is in force in all our territories in Bengal, except where licenses have been granted; it prevails universally in Madras and Bombay, and it could easily be made universal.

It should be known that there is a difficulty in regard to the Chee Foo Convention, in reference to Hong Kong, which port being a free port and British territory, is not affected by the treaty, and may easily become a centre of smuggling. This hitch is regarded by the Marquis Tseng "as a very serious one," and should be settled quickly. All that we are promised is that it shall be "inquired into as soon as possible."[1]

I trust that there will be no hesitation on the part of any of my readers in endorsing the words of the late Archbishop of Canterbury: "I have, after very serious consideration, come to the conclusion that the time has arrived when we ought most distinctly to state our opinion that the course at present pursued by the Government in relation to this matter is one which ought to be abandoned at all costs."[2] "Better have unsullied poverty," says the Chinese proverb, "than turbid wealth."[3] Even if the right course meant poverty, there should be no hesitation; but "righteousness exalteth a nation." And in the present case, as in most others, there can be little doubt that a proper policy would promote the temporal welfare of England and India, as well as of China.

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[1] "Friend," 1885, p. 158, and pp. 82, 86.
[2] Moule, preface, vi.
[3] *Ibid.*, preface, vi.