

Merwin Samuel

Drugging a Nation: The Story of China and the Opium Curse



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Содержание

NOTE	5
I	6
II	9
III	18
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	20

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NOTE

These chapters were originally published during 1907 and 1908 in *Success Magazine*. Though frankly journalistic in tone, the book presents something more than the hasty conclusions of a journalist. During its preparation the author travelled around the world, inquiring into the problem at first hand in China and in England, reading all available printed matter which seemed to bear in any way on the subject, and interviewing several hundred gentlemen who have had special opportunities to study the problem from various standpoints. The writing was not begun until this preliminary work was completed and the natural conclusions had become convictions in the author's mind.

I CHINA'S PREDICAMENT

In September, 1906, an edict was issued from the Imperial Court at Peking which states China's predicament with naïveté and vigour.

"The cultivation of the poppy," runs the edict, in the authorized translation, "is the greatest iniquity in agriculture, and the provinces of Szechuen, Shensi, Kansu, Yunnan, Kweichow, Shansi, and Kanghuai abound in its product, which, in fact, is found everywhere. Now that it is decided to abandon opium smoking within ten years, the limiting of this cultivation should be taken as a fundamental step ... opium has been in use so long by the people that nearly three-tenths or four-tenths of them are smokers."

"Three-tenths or four-tenths" of the Chinese people, – one hundred and fifty million opium-smokers – mean three or four times the population of Great Britain, a good many more than the population of the United States!

The Chinese are notoriously inexact in statistical matters. The officials who drew up the edict probably wished to convey the impression that the situation is really grave, and employed this form of statement in order to give force to the document. No accurate estimate of the number of opium victims in China is obtainable; but it is possible to combine the impressions which have been set down by reliable observers in different parts of the "Middle Kingdom," and thus to arrive at a fair, general impression of the truth. The following, for example, from Mr. Alexander Hosie, the commercial attaché to the British legation at Peking, should carry weight. He is reporting on conditions in Szechuen Province:

"I am well within the mark when I say that in the cities fifty per cent. of the males and twenty per cent. of the females smoke opium, and that in the country the percentage is not less than twenty-five for men and five per cent. for women." There are about forty-two million people in Szechuen Province; and they not only raise and consume a very great quantity of opium, they also send about twenty thousand tons down the Yangtse River every year for use in other provinces. The report of other travellers, merchants, and official investigators indicate that about all of the richest soil in Szechuen is given over to poppy cultivation, and that the labouring classes show a noticeable decline of late in physique and capacity for work.

In regard to another so-called "opium province," Yunnan, we have the following statement: "I saw practically the whole population given over to its abuse. The ravages it is making in men, women, and children are deplorable... I was quite able to realize that any one who had seen the wild abuse of opium in Yunnan would have a wild abhorrence of it."

In later chapters we shall go into the matter more at length. Here let me add to these statements merely a few typical scraps of information, selected from a bundle of note-books full of records of chats and interviews with travellers of almost every nationality and of almost every station in life. The secretary of a life insurance company which does a considerable business up and down the coast told me that, roughly, fifty per cent of the Chinese who apply for insurance are opium-smokers. Another bit comes from a man who lived for several years in an inland city of a quarter of a million inhabitants. The local Anti-opium League had 750 members, he said and he believed that about every other man in the city was a smoker. "It is practically a case of everybody smoking," he concluded.

Twenty-five years ago, when the consumption of opium in China could hardly have been more than half what it is to-day, a British consul estimated the proportion of smokers in the region he had visited as follows: "Labourers and small farmers, ten per cent.; small shopkeepers, twenty per cent.; soldiers, thirty per cent.; merchants, eighty per cent.; officials and their staff, ninety per cent.; actors, prostitutes, vagrants, thieves, ninety-five per cent." The labourers and farmers, the real strength of

China, as of every other land, had not yet been overwhelmed – but they were going under, even then. The most startling news to-day is from these lower classes, even from the country villages, the last to give way. Dr. Parker, the American Methodist missionary at Shanghai, informed me that reports to this effect were coming in steadily from up country; and during my own journey I heard the same bad news almost everywhere along a route which measured, before I left China, something more than four thousand miles.

Perhaps the most convincing summing up of China's predicament is found in another translation from a recent Chinese document, this time an appeal to the throne from four viceroys. The quaintness of the language does not, I think, impair its effectiveness and its power as a protest: "China can never become strong and stand shoulder and shoulder with the powers of the world unless she can get rid of the habit of opium-smoking by her subjects, about one quarter of whom have been reduced to skeletons and look half-dead."

This then is the curse which the imperial government has talked so quaintly of "abandoning." This is the debauchery which is to be put down by officials, ninety per cent of whom were supposed to be more or less confirmed smokers. Such almost childlike optimism brings to mind a certain Sunday in New York City when Theodore Roosevelt, with the whole police force under his orders, tried to close the saloons. It brings to mind other attempts in Europe and America, to check and control vice and depravity – attempts which have never, I think, been wholly successful – and one begins to understand the discouraging immensity of the task which China has undertaken. Really, to "stop using opium" would mean a very rearranging of the agricultural plan of the empire. It would make necessary an immediate solution of China's transportation problem (no other crop is so easy to carry as opium) and an almost complete reconstruction of the imperial finances; indeed, few observers are so glib as to suggest offhand a substitute for the immense opium revenue to the Chinese government. And nobody to accomplish all this but those sodden officials, of whom it is safe to guess that fifty per cent have some sort or other of a financial stake in the traffic!

In the minds of most of us, I think, there has been a vague notion that the Chinese have always smoked opium, that opium is in some peculiar way a necessity to the Chinese constitution. Even among those who know the extraordinary history of this morbidly fascinating vegetable product, who know that the India-grown British drug was pushed and smuggled and bayoneted into China during a century of desperate protest and even armed resistance from these yellow people, it has been a popular argument to assert that the Chinese have only themselves to blame for the "demand" that made the trade possible. Of this "demand," and of how it was worked up by Christian traders, we shall speak at some length in later chapters. "Educational methods" in the extending of trade can hardly be said to have originated with the modern trust. The curious fact is that the Chinese didn't use opium and didn't want opium.

Your true opium-smoker stretches himself on a divan and gives up ten or fifteen minutes to preparing his thimbleful of the brown drug. When it has been heated and worked to the proper consistency, he places it in the tiny bowl of his pipe, holds it over a lamp, and draws a few whiffs of the smoke deep into his lungs. It seems, at first, a trivial thing; indeed, the man who is well fed and properly housed and clothed seems able to keep it up for a considerable time and without appreciable ill results. The greater difficulty in China is, of course, that very few opium-smokers are well fed and properly housed and clothed.

I heard little about the beautiful dreams and visions which opium is supposed to bring; all the smokers with whom I talked could be roughly divided into two classes – those who smoked in order to relieve pain or misery, and those miserable victims who smoked to relieve the acute physical distress brought on by the opium itself. Probably the majority of the victims take it up as a temporary relief; many begin in early childhood; the mother will give the baby a whiff to stop its crying. It is a social vice only among the upper classes. The most notable outward effect of this indulgence is the resulting physical weakness and lassitude. The opium-smoker cannot work hard; he finds it difficult to apply

his mind to a problem or his body to a task. As the habit becomes firmly fastened on him, there is a perceptible weakening of his moral fibre; he shows himself unequal to emergencies which make any sudden demand upon him. If opium is denied him, he will lie and steal in order to obtain it.

Opium-smoking is a costly vice. A pipefull of a moderately good native product costs more than a labourer can earn in a day; consequently the poorer classes smoke an unspeakable compound based on pipe scrapings and charcoal. Along the highroads the coolies even scrape the grime from the packsaddles to mix with this dross. The clerk earning from twenty-five to fifty Mexican dollars a month will frequently spend from ten to twenty dollars a month on opium. The typical confirmed smoker is a man who spends a considerable part of the night in smoking himself to sleep, and all the next morning in sleeping off the effects. If he is able to work at all, it is only during the afternoon, and even at that there will be many days when the official or merchant is incompetent to conduct his affairs. Thousands of prominent men are ruined every year.

The Cantonese have what they call “The Ten Cannots regarding The Opium-Smoker.” “He cannot (1) give up the habit; (2) enjoy sleep; (3) wait for his turn when sharing his pipe with his friends; (4) rise early; (5) be cured if sick; (6) help relations in need; (7) enjoy wealth; (8) plan anything; (9) get credit even when an old customer; (10) walk any distance.”

This is the land into which the enterprising Christian traders introduced opium, and into which they fed opium so persistently and forcibly that at last a “good market” was developed. England did not set out to ruin China. One finds no hint of a diabolical purpose to seduce and destroy a wonderful old empire on the other side of the world. The ruin worked was incidental to that far Eastern trade of which England has been so proud. It was the triumph of the balance sheet over common humanity.

And so it is to-day. British India still holds the cream of the trade, for the Chinese grown opium cannot compete in quality with the Indian drug. The British Indian government raises the poppy in the rich Ganges Valley (more than six hundred thousand acres of poppies they raised there last year), manufactures it in government factories at Patna and Ghazipur – manufactures four-fifths of it especially to suit the Chinese taste, and sells it at annual government auctions in Calcutta.

The result of this traffic is so very grave that it is a difficult matter to discuss in moderate language. To the traveller who leaves the railroad and steamboat lines and ventures, in springless native cart or swaying mule litter, along the sunken roads and the hills of western and northwestern China, the havoc and misery wrought by the “white man’s smoke,” the “foreign dust,” becomes unpleasantly evident. Some hint of the meaning of it, a faint impression of the terrible devastation of this drug – let loose, as it has been, on a backward, poverty-stricken race – is seared, hour by hour and day by day into his brain.

A terrible drama is now being enacted in the Far East. The Chinese race is engaged in a fight to a finish with a drug – and the odds are on the drug.

II

THE GOLDEN OPIUM DAYS

In the splendid, golden days of the East India Company, the great Warren Hastings put himself on record in these frank words:

“Opium is a pernicious article of luxury, which ought not to be permitted but for the purpose of foreign commerce only.” The new traffic promised to solve the Indian fiscal problem, if skillfully managed; accordingly, the production and manufacture of opium was made a government monopoly. China, after all, was a long way off – and Chinamen were only Chinamen. That the East India Company might be loosing an uncontrollable monster not only on China but on the world hardly occurred to the great Warren Hastings – the British chickens might, a century later, come home to roost in Australia and South Africa was too remote a possibility even for speculative inquiry.

Now trade supports us, governs us, controls our dependencies, represents us at foreign courts, carries on our wars, signs our treaties of peace. Trade, like its symbol the dollar, is neither good nor bad; it has no patriotism, no morals, no humanity. Its logic applies with the same relentless force and precision to corn, cotton, rice, wheat, human slaves, oil, votes, opium. It is the power that drives human affairs; and its law is the law of the balance sheet. So long as any commodity remains in the currents of trade the law of trade must reign, the balance sheet must balance. It is difficult to get a commodity into these currents, but once you have got the commodity in, you will find it next to impossible to get it out. There has been more than one prime minister, I fancy, more than one secretary of state for India, who has wished the opium question in Jericho. It is not pleasant to answer the moral indignation of the British empire with the cynical statement that the India government cannot exist without that opium revenue. Why, oh, why, did not the great Warren Hastings develop the cotton rather than the opium industry! But the interesting fact is that he did not. He chose opium, and opium it is.

The India Government Opium Monopoly is an import factor in this extraordinary story of a debauchery of a third of the human race by the most nearly Christian among Christian nations. We must understand what it is and how it works before we can understand the narrative of that greed, with its attendant smuggling, bribery and bloodshed which has brought the Chinese empire to its knees. In speaking of it as a “monopoly,” I am not employing a cant word for effect. I am not making a case. That is what it is officially styled in a certain blue book on my table which bears the title, “Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress of India during the year 1905-6,” and which was ordered by the House of Commons, to be printed, May 10th, 1907.

It is easy, with or without evidence, to charge a great corporation or a great government with inhuman crimes. If the charge be unjust it is difficult for the corporation or the government to set itself right before the people. Six truths cannot overtake one lie. That is why, in this day of popular rule, the really irresponsible power that makes and unmakes history lies in the hands of the journalist. As the charge I am bringing is so serious as to be almost unthinkable, and as I wish to leave no loophole for the counter-charge that I am colouring this statement, I think I can do no better than to lift my description of the Opium Monopoly bodily from that rather ponderous blue book.

There is nothing new in this charge, nothing new in the condition which invites it. It is rather a commonplace old condition. Millions of men, for more than a hundred years, have taken it for granted, just as men once took piracy for granted, just as men once took the African slave-trade for granted, just as men to-day take the highly organized traffic in unfortunate women and girls for granted. Ask a Tory political leader of to-day – Mr. Balfour say – for his opinion on the opium question, and if he thinks it worth his while to answer you at all he will probably deal shortly with you for dragging up an absurd bit of fanaticism. For a century or more, about all the missionaries, and

goodness knows how many other observers, have protested against this monstrous traffic in poison. Sixty-five years ago Lord Ashley (afterwards Earl of Shaftesbury) agitated the question in Parliament. Fifty years ago he obtained from the Law Officers of the Crown the opinion that the opium trade was “at variance” with the “spirit and intention” of the treaty between England and China. In 1891, the House of Commons decided by a good majority that “the system by which the Indian opium revenue is raised is morally indefensible.” And yet, I will venture to believe that to most of my readers, British as well as American, the bald statement that the British Indian government actually manufactures opium on a huge scale in its own factories to suit the Chinese taste comes with the force of a shock. It is not the sort of a thing we like to think of as among the activities of an Anglo-Saxon government. It would seem to be government ownership with a vengeance.

Now, to get down to cases, just what this Government Opium Monopoly is, and just how does it work? An excerpt from the rather ponderous blue book will tell us. It may be dry, but it is official and unassailable. It is also short.

“The opium revenue” – thus the blue book – “is partly raised by a monopoly of the production of the drug in Bengal and the United Provinces, and partly by the levy of a duty on all opium imported from native states... In these two provinces, the crop is grown under the control of a government department, which arranges the total area which is to be placed under the crop, with a view to the amount of opium required.”

So much for the broader outline. Now for a few of the details:

“The cultivator of opium in these monopoly districts receives a license, and is granted advances to enable him to prepare the land for the crop, and he is required to deliver the whole of the product at a fixed price to opium agents, by whom it is dispatched to the government factories at Patna and Ghazipur.”

This money advanced to the cultivator bears no interest. The British Indian government lends money without interest in no other cases. Producers of crops other than opium are obliged to get along without free money.

When it has been manufactured, the opium must be disposed of in one way and another; accordingly:

“The supply of prepared opium required for consumption in India is made over to the Excise Department... The chests of ‘provision’ opium, for export, are sold by auction at monthly sales, which take place at Calcutta.” For the meaning of the curious term, “provision opium,” we have only to read on a little further. “The opium is received and prepared at the government factories, where the out-turn for the year included 8,774 chests of opium for the Excise Department, about 300 pounds of various opium alkaloids, thirty maunds of medical opium, and 51,770 chests of provision opium for the Chinese market.” There are about 140 pounds in a chest. Four grains of opium, administered in one dose to a person unaccustomed to its use, is apt to prove fatal.

Last year the government had under poppy cultivation 654,928 acres. And the revenue to the treasury, including returns from auction sales, duties, and license fees, and deducting all “opium expenditures,” was nearly \$22,000,000 (£4,486,562).

The best grade of opium-poppy bears a white blossom. One sees mauve and pink tints in a field, at blossom-time, but only the seeds from the white flowers are replanted. The opium of commerce is made from the gum obtained by gashing the green seed pod with a four-bladed knife. After the first gathering, the pod is gashed a second time, and the gum that exudes makes an inferior quality of opium. The raw opium from the country districts is sent down to the government factories in earthenware jars, worked up in mixing vats, and made into balls about six or eight inches in diameter. The balls, after a thorough drying on wooden racks, are packed in chests and sent down to the auction.

The men who buy in the opium at these monthly auctions and afterwards dispose of it at the Chinese ports are a curious crowd of Parsees, Mohammedans, Hindoos, and Asiatic Jews. Few British names appear in the opium trade to-day. British dignity prefers not to stoop beneath the taking in of

profits; it leaves the details of a dirty business to dirty hands. This is as it has been from the first. The directors of the East India Company, years and years before that splendid corporation relinquished the actual government of India, forbade the sending of its specially-prepared opium direct to China, and advised a trading station on the coast whence the drug might find its way, “without the company being exposed to the disgrace of being engaged in an illicit commerce.”

So clean hands and dirty hands went into partnership. They are in partnership still, save that the most nearly Christian of governments has officially succeeded the company as party of the first part. And sixty-five tons of Indian opium go to China every week.

As soon as the shipments of opium have reached Hongkong and Shanghai (I am quoting now in part from a straightforward account by the Rev. T. G. Selby), they are broken up and pass in the ordinary courses of trade into the hands of retail dealers. The opium balls are stripped of the dried leaves in which they have been packed, torn like paste dumplings into fragments, put into an iron pan filled with water and boiled over a slow fire. Various kinds of opium are mixed with each other, and some shops acquire a reputation for their ingenious and tasteful blends. After the opium has been boiled to about the consistency of coal tar or molasses, it is put into jars and sold for daily consumption in quantities ranging from the fiftieth part of an ounce to four or five ounces. “I am sorry to say,” observes Mr. Selby, “that the colonial governments of Hongkong and Singapore, not content with the revenue drawn from this article by the Anglo-Indian government, have made opium boiling a monopoly of the Crown, and a large slice of the revenue of these two Eastern dependencies is secured by selling the exclusive rights to farm this industry to the highest bidder.”

The most Mr. Clean Hands has been able to say for himself is that, “Opium is a fiscal, not a moral question;” or this, that “In the present state of the revenue of India, it does not appear advisable to abandon so important a source of revenue.” After all, China is a long way off. So much for Mr. Clean Hands! His partner, Dirty Hands, is more interesting. It is he who has “built up the trade.” It is he who has carried on the smuggling and the bribing and knifing and shooting and all-round, strong-arm work which has made the trade what it is. To be sure, as we get on in this narrative we shall not always find the distinction between Clean and Dirty so clear as we would like. Through the dust and smoke and red flame of all that dirty business along “the Coast” we shall glimpse for an instant or so, now and then, a face that looks distressingly like the face of old Respectability himself. I have found myself in momentary bewilderment when walking through the splendid masonry-lined streets of Hongkong, when sitting beneath the frescoed ceiling of that pinnacled structure that houses the most nearly Christian of parliaments, trying to believe that this opium drama can be real. And I have wondered, and puzzled, until a smell like the smell of China has come floating to the nostrils of memory; until a picture of want and disease and misery – of crawling, swarming human misery unlike anything which the untravelled Western mind can conceive – has appeared before the eyes of memory. I have thought of those starving thousands from the famine districts creeping into Chinkiang to die, of those gaunt, seemed faces along the highroad that runs southwestward from Peking to Sian-fu; I have thought of a land that knows no dentistry, no surgery, no hygiene, no scientific medicine, no sanitation; of a land where the smallpox is a lesser menace beside the leprosy, plague, tuberculosis, that rage simply at will, and beside famines so colossal in their sweep, that the overtaxed Western mind simply refuses to comprehend them. And De Quincey’s words have come to me: “What was it that drove me into the habitual use of opium? Misery – blank desolation – settled and abiding darkness – ?” These words help to clear it up. China was a wonderful field, ready prepared for the ravages of opium – none better. The mighty currents of trade did the rest. The balance sheet reigned supreme as by right. The balance sheet reigns to-day.

But we must get on with our narrative. I will try to pass it along in the form in which it has presented itself to me. If Clean and Dirty appear in closer and more puzzling alliance than we like to see them, I cannot help that.

It was not easy getting opium, the commodity, into the currents of trade. There was an obstacle. The Chinese were not an opium-consuming race. They did not use opium, they did not want opium, they steadily resisted the inroads of opium. But the rulers of the company were far-seeing men. Tempt misery long enough and it will take to opium. Two centuries ago when small quantities of the drug were brought in from Java, the Chinese government objected. In 1729 the importation was prohibited. As late as 1765, this importation, carried on by energetic traders in spite of official resistance, had never exceeded two hundred chests a year. But with the advent of the company in 1773, the trade grew. In spite of a second Chinese prohibition in 1796, half-heartedly enforced by corrupt mandarins, the total for 1820 was 4,000 chests. The Chinese government was faced not only with the possibility of a race debauchery but also with an immediate and alarming drain of silver from the country. The balance of the trade was against them. Either as an economic or moral problem, the situation was grave.

The smoking of opium began in China and is peculiar to the Chinese. The Hindoos and Malays eat it. Complicated and wide-spread as the smoking habit is to-day, it is a modern custom as time runs in China. There seems to be little doubt in the minds of those Sinologues who have traced the opium thread back to the tangle of early missionary reports and imperial edicts, that the habit started either in Formosa or on the mainland across the Straits, where malaria is common. Opium had been used, generations before, as a remedy for malaria; and these first smokers seem to have mixed a little opium with their tobacco, which had been introduced by the Portuguese in the early seventeenth century. From this beginning, it would appear, was developed the rather elaborate outfit which the opium-smoker of to-day considers necessary to his pleasure.

Nothing but solid Anglo-Saxon persistence had enabled the company to build up the trade. Seven years after their first small adventure, or in 1780, a depot of two small receiving hulks was established in Lark's Bay, south of Macao. A year later the company freighted a ship to Canton, but finding no demand were obliged to sell the lot of 1,600 chests at a loss to Siqua, a Canton "Hong-merchant," who, not being able to dispose of it to advantage, reshipped it. The price in that year was \$550 (Mexican) a chest; Siqua had paid the company only \$200, but even at a bargain he found no market. Meantime, in the words of a "memorandum," prepared by Joshua Rowntree for the debate in parliament last year, "British merchants spread the habit up and down the coast; opium store-ships armed as fortresses were moored at the mouth of the Canton River."

In 1782, the company's supercargoes at Canton wrote to Calcutta: "The importation of opium being strongly prohibited by the Chinese government, and a business altogether new to us, it was necessary for us to take our measures (for disposing of a cargo) with the utmost caution."

This "business altogether new to us" was, of course, plain smuggling. From the first it had been necessary to arm the smuggling vessels; and as these grew in number the Chinese sent out an increasing number of armed revenue junks or cruisers. The traders usually found it possible to buy off the commanders of the revenue junks, but as this could not be done in every case it was inevitable that there should be encounters now and then, with occasional loss of life. These affrays soon became too frequent to be ignored.

Meantime the British government had succeeded the company in the rule of India and the control of the far Eastern trade. As this trade was from two thirds to four-fifths opium, a prohibited article, and as the whole question of trade was complicated by the fact that China was ignorant of the greatness and power of the Western nations and did not care to treat or deal with them in any event, a government trade agent had been sent out to Canton to look after British interests and in general to fill the position of a combined consul and unaccredited minister. In the late 1830's this agent, Captain Charles Elliot (successor to Lord Napier, the first agent), found himself in the delicate position of protecting English smugglers, who were steadily drawing their country towards war because the Chinese government was making strong efforts to drive them out of business. From what Captain Elliot has left on record it is plain that he was having a bad time of it. In 1837, he wrote to Lord

Palmerston of “the wide-spreading public mischief” arising from “the steady continuance of a vast, prohibited traffic in an article of vicious luxury,” and suggested that “a gradual check to our own growth and imports would be salutary.” Two years later he wrote that “the Chinese government have a just ground for harsh measures towards the lawful trade, upon the plea that there is no distinction between the right and the wrong.”

He even said: “No man entertains a deeper detestation of the disgrace and sin of this forced traffic;” and, “I see little to choose between it and piracy.” But when the war cloud broke, and responsibility for the welfare of Britain’s subjects and trade interests in China devolved upon him, he compromised. “It does not consort with my station,” he wrote, “to sanction measures of general and undistinguishing violence against His Majesty’s officers and subjects.”

It will be interesting before we consider the opium war and its immense significance in history, to glance over the attitude of the company and later of its successor, the government, towards the whole miserable business. The company’s board of directors, in 1817, had sent this dispatch from Calcutta in answer to a question, “Were it possible to prevent the using of the drug altogether, except strictly for the purpose of medicine, we would gladly do it in compassion to mankind.”

It would be pleasant to believe that the East India Company was sincere in this ineffective if well-phrased expression of “compassion.” The spectacle of a great corporation in any century giving up a lucrative traffic on merely human and moral grounds would be illuminating and uplifting. But unfortunate business corporations are, in their very nature, slaves of the balance sheet, organized representatives of the mighty laws of trade. I have already quoted enough evidence to show that the company was not only awake to the dangers of opium, but that it had deliberately and painstakingly worked up the traffic. Had there been, then, a change of heart in the directorate? I fear not. Among the East Indian correspondence of 1830, this word from the company’s governor-general came to light: “We are taking measures for extending the cultivation of the poppy, with a view to a larger increase in the supply of opium.” And in this same year, 1830, a House of Commons committee reported that “The trade, which is altogether contraband, has been largely extended of late years.”

G. H. M. Batten, a formal official of the Indian Civil Service, who contributed the chapter on opium in Sir John Strachey’s work on “India, its Administration and Progress,” has been regarded of late years as one of the ablest defenders of the whole opium policy. He believes that “The daily use of opium in moderation is not only harmless but of positive benefit, and frequently even a necessity of life.” This man, seeing little but good in opium, doubts “if it ever entered into the conception of the court of directors to suppress in the interests of morality the cultivation of the poppy.”

Perhaps the most striking testimony bearing against the policy of the company was that given by Robert Inglis, of Canton, a partner in the large opium-trading firm of Dent & Co., to the Select Committee on China Trade (House of Commons, 1840). Here it is:

Mr. Inglis. – “I told him (Captain Elliot) that I was sure the thing could not go on.”

Mr. Gladstone. – “How long ago have you told him that you were sure the thing could not go on?”

Mr. Inglis. – “For four or five years past.”

Chairman. – “What gave you that impression?”

Mr. Inglis. – “An immense quantity of opium being forced upon the Chinese every year, and that in its turn forcing it up the coast in our vessels.”

Chairman. – “When you use the words ‘forcing it upon them,’ do you mean that they were not voluntary purchasers?”

Mr. Inglis. – “No, but the East India Company were increasing the quantity of opium almost every year, without reference to the demand in China; that is to say, there was always an immense supply of opium in China, and the company still kept increasing the quantity at lower prices.”

Three years later, just after the war, Sir George Staunton, speaking from experience as a British official in the East, said in the House of Commons, “I never denied the fact that if there had been no opium smuggling there would have been no war.

“Even if the opium habit had been permitted to run its natural course, if it had not received an extraordinary impulse from the measures taken by the East India Company to promote its growth, which almost quadrupled the supply, I believe it would never have created that extraordinary alarm in the Chinese authorities which betrayed them into the adoption of a sort of *coup d’ état* for its suppression.”

Sir William Muir, some time lieutenant-governor of the Northwest Provinces of India, is on record thus: “By increasing its supply of ‘provision’ opium, it (the Bengal government) has repeatedly caused a glut in the Chinese market, a collapse of prices in India, an extensive bankruptcy and misery in Malwa.”

The most interesting summing-up of the whole question I have seen is from the pen of Sir Arthur Cotton, who wrote after sixty years’ experience in Indian affairs, protesting against “continuing this trading upon the sins and miseries of the greatest nation in the world in respect of population, on the ground of our needing the money.”

What was China doing to protect herself from these aggressions? The British merchants and the British trade agent had by this time worked into the good-will of the Chinese merchants and the corrupt mandarins, and had finally established their residence at Canton and their depot of store-ships at Whampoa, a short journey down the river. In 1839 there were about 20,000 chests of opium stored in these hulks. In that same year the Chinese emperor sent a powerful and able official named Lin Tse-hsu from Peking to Canton with orders to put down the traffic at any cost. Commissioner Lin was a man of unusual force. He perfectly understood the situation in so far as it concerned China. He had his orders. He knew what they meant. He proposed to put them into effect. There was only one important consideration which he seems to have overlooked – it was that India “needed the money.” His proposal that the foreign agents deliver up their stores of “the prohibited article” did not meet with an immediate response. The traders had not the slightest notion of yielding up 20,000 chests of opium, worth, at that time, \$300 a chest. Lin’s appeals to the most nearly Christian of queens, were no more successful. He did not seem to understand that China was a long way off; it was very close to him. Here is a translation of what he had to say. To our eyes to-day, it seems fairly intelligent, even reasonable:

“Though not making use of it one’s self, to venture on the manufacture and sale of it (opium) and with it to seduce the simple folk of this land is to seek one’s own livelihood by the exposure of others to death. Such acts are bitterly abhorrent to the nature of man and are utterly opposed to the ways of heaven. We would now then concert with your ‘Hon. Sovereignty’ means to bring a perpetual end to this opium traffic so hurtful to mankind, we in this land forbidding the use of it and you in the nations under your dominion forbidding its manufacture.”

Her “Hon. Sovereignty,” if she ever saw this appeal (which may be doubted), neglected to reply. Meeting with small consideration from the traders, as from their sovereign, Commissioner Lin set about carrying out his orders. There was an admirable thoroughness in his methods. He surrounded the residence of the traders, Captain Elliot’s among them, with an army of howling, drum-beating Chinese soldiers, and again proposed that they deliver up those 20,000 chests. Now, the avenues of trade do not lead to martyrdom. Traders rarely die for their principles – they prefer living for them. The 20,000 chests were delivered up, with a rapidity that was almost haste; and the merchants, under the leadership of the agent, withdrew to the doubtful shelter of their own guns, down the river. Commissioner Lin, still with that exasperatingly thorough air, mixed the masses of opium with lime and emptied it into the sea. England, her dignity outraged, hurt at her tenderest point, sent out ships, men and money. She seized port after port; bombarded and took Canton; swept victoriously up the Yangtse, and by blocking the Grand Canal at Chinkiang interrupted the procession of tribute junks

sailing up the Peking and thus cut off an important source of the Chinese imperial revenue. This resulted in the treaty of Nanking, in 1843, which was negotiated by the British government by Sir Henry Pottinger.

Sir Henry, like Commissioner Lin, had his orders. His methods, like Lin's, were admirable in their thoroughness. He secured the following terms from the crestfallen Chinese government: 1. There was to be a "lasting peace" between the two nations. 2. Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai were to be open as "treaty ports." 3. The Island of Hongkong was to be ceded to Great Britain. 4. An indemnity of \$21,000,000 was to be paid, \$6,000,000 as the value of the opium destroyed, \$3,000,000 for the destruction of the property of British subjects, and \$12,000,000 for the expenses of the war. It was further understood that the British were to hold the places they had seized until these and a number of other humiliating conditions were to be fulfilled. Thus was the energy and persistence of the opium smugglers rewarded. Thus began that partition of China which has been going on ever since. It is difficult to be a Christian when far from home.

It is difficult to get an admission even to-day, from a thorough-going British trader, that opium had anything to do with the war of 1840-43. He is likely to insist either that the war was caused by the refusal of Chinese officials to admit English representatives on terms of equality, or that it was caused by "the stopping of trade." There was, indeed, a touch of the naively Oriental in the attitude of China. To the Chinese official mind, China was the greatest of nations, occupying something like five-sixths of the huge flat disc called the world. England, Holland, Spain, France, Portugal, and Japan were small islands crowded in between the edge of China and the rim of the disc. That these small nations should wish to trade with "the Middle Kingdom" and to bring tribute to the "Son of Heaven," was not unnatural. But that the "Son of Heaven" must admit them whether he liked or not, and as equals, was preposterous. Stripping these notions of their quaint Orientalism, they boiled down to the simple principle that China recognized no law of earth or heaven which could force her to admit foreign traders, foreign ministers, or foreign religions if she preferred to live by herself and mind her own business. That China has minded her own business and does mind her own business is, I think, indisputable.

The notions which animated the English were equally simple. Stripped of their quaint Occidental shell of religion and respectability and theories of personal liberty, they seem to boil down to about this – that China was a great and undeveloped market and therefore the trading nations had a right to trade with her willy-nilly, and any effective attempt to stop this trade was, in some vague way, an infringement of their rights as trading nations. In maintaining this theory, it is necessary for us to forget that opium, though a "commodity," was an admittedly vicious and contraband commodity, to be used "for purposes of foreign commerce only."

In providing that there should be a "lasting peace" between the two nations, it was probably the idea to insure British traders against attack, or rather to provide a technical excuse for reprisals in case of such attacks. But for some reason nothing whatever was said about opium in the treaty. Now opium was more than ever the chief of the trade. England had not the slightest notion of giving it up; on the contrary, opium shipments were increased and the smuggling was developed to an extraordinary extent. How a "lasting peace" was to be maintained while opium, the cause of all the trouble, was still unrecognized by either government as a legitimate commodity, while, indeed, the Chinese, however chastened and humiliated, were still making desperate if indirect efforts to keep it out of the country and the English were making strong efforts to get it into the country, is a problem I leave to subtler minds. The upshot was, of course, that the "lasting peace" did not last. Within fifteen years there was another war. By the second treaty (that of Tientsin, 1858) Britain secured 4,000,000 taels of indemnity money (about \$3,000,000), the opening of five more treaty ports, toleration for the Christian religion, and the admission of opium under a specified tariff. The Tientsin Treaty legalized Christianity and opium. China had defied the laws of trade, and had learned her lesson. It had been a costly lesson – \$24,000,000 in money, thousands of lives, the fixing on the race of a soul-blighting

vice, the loss of some of her best seaports, more, the loss of her independence as a nation – but she had learned it. And therefore, except for a crazy outburst now and then as the foreign grip grew tighter, she was to submit.

But China's trouble was not over. If she was to be debauched whether or no, must she also be ruined financially? There were the indemnity payments to meet, with interest; and no way of meeting them other than to squeeze tighter a poverty-stricken nation which was growing more poverty-stricken as her silver drained steadily off to the foreigners. There was a solution to the problem – a simple one. It was to permit the growth of opium in China itself, supplant the Indian trade, keep the silver at home. But China was slow to adopt this solution. It might solve the fiscal problem; but incidentally it might wreck China. She sounded England on the subject, – once, twice. There seemed to have been some idea that England, convinced that China had her own possibility of crowding out the Indian drug, might, after all, give up the trade, stop the production in India, and make the great step unnecessary. But England could not see it in that light. China wavered, then took the great step. The restrictions on opium-growing were removed. This was probably a mistake, though opinions still differ about that. To the men who stood responsible for a solution of Chinese fiscal problem it doubtless seemed necessary. At all events, the last barrier between China and ruin was removed by the Chinese themselves. And within less than half a century after the native growth of the poppy began, the white and pink and mauve blossoms have spread across the great empire, north and south, east and west, until to-day, in blossom-time almost every part of every province has its white and mauve patches. You may see them in Manchuria, on the edge of the great desert of Gobi, within a dozen miles of Peking; you may see them from the headwaters of the mighty Yangtse to its mouth, up and down the coast for two thousand miles, on the distant borders of Thibet.

No one knows how much opium was grown in China last year. There are estimates – official, missionary, consular; and they disagree by thousands and tens of thousands of tons. But it is known that where the delicate poppy is reared, it demands and receives the best land. It thrives in the rich river-bottoms. It has crowded out grain and vegetables wherever it has spread, and has thus become a contributing factor to famines. Its product, opium, has run over China like a black wave, leaving behind it a misery, a darkness, a desolation that has struck even the Chinese, even its victims, with horror. China has passed from misery to disaster. And as if the laws of trade had chosen to turn capriciously from their inexorable business and wreak a grim joke on a prostrate race, the solution, the great step, has failed in its purpose. The trade in Indian opium has been hurt, to be sure, but not supplanted. It will never be supplanted until the British government deliberately puts it down. For the Chinese cannot raise opium which competes in quality with the Indian drug. Indian opium is in steady demand for the purpose of mixing with Chinese opium. No duties can keep it out; duties simply increase the cost to the Chinese consumer, simply ruin him a bit more rapidly. So authoritative an expert as Sir Robert Hart, director of the Chinese imperial customs, had hoped that the great step would prove effective. In “These from the Land of Sinim” he has expressed his hope:

“Your legalized opium has been a cure in every province it penetrates, and your refusal to limit or decrease the import has forced us to attempt a dangerous remedy – legalized native opium – not because we approve of it, but to compete with and drive out the foreign drug; and it is expelling it, and when we have only the native production to deal with, and thus have the business in our own hands, we hope to stop the habit in our own way.”

The great step has failed. Indian opium has not been expelled. For the Chinese to put down the native drug without stopping the import is impossible as well as useless. The Chinese seem determined, in one way or another, to put down both. Once, again, after a weary century of struggle, they have approached the British government. Once again the British government has been driven from the Scylla of healthy Anglo-Saxon moral indignation to the Charybdis behind that illuminating phrase – “India needs the money.” Twenty million dollars is a good deal of money. The balance sheet

reigns; and the balance sheet is an exacting ruler, even if it has triumphed over common decency, over common morality, over common humanity.

Will you ride with me (by rickshaw) along the International Bund at Shanghai – beyond the German Club and the Hongkong Bank – over the little bridge that leads to Frenchtown – past a half mile of warehouses and chanting coolies and big yellow Hankow steamers – until we turn out on the French Bund? It is a raw, cloudy, March morning; the vendors of queer edibles who line the curbing find it warmer to keep their hands inside their quilted sleeves.

It is a lively day on the river. Admiral Brownson's fleet of white cruisers lie at anchor in midstream. A lead-gray British cruiser swings below them, an anachronistic Chinese gunboat lower still. Big black merchantmen fill in the view – a P. and O. ship is taking on coal – a two-hundred-ton junk with red sails moves by. Nearer at hand, from the stone quay outward, the river front is crowded close with sampans and junks, rows on rows of them, each with its round little house of yellow matting, each with its swarm of brown children, each with its own pungent contribution to the all-pervasive odour. Gaze out through the forests of masts, if you please, and you will see two old hulks, roofed with what looks suspiciously like shingles, at anchor beyond. They might be ancient men-of-war, pensioned off to honourable decay. You can see the square outline of what once were portholes, boarded up now. The carved, wooden figure-heads at the prow of each are chipped and blackened with age and weather. What are they and why do they lie here in mid-channel, where commerce surges about them?

These are the opium hulks of Shanghai. In them is stored the opium which the government of British India has grown and manufactured for consumption in China. They symbolize China's degradation.

III

A GLIMPSE INTO AN OPIUM PROVINCE

The opium provinces of China – that is, the provinces which have been most nearly completely ruined by opium – lie well back in the interior. They cover, roughly, an area 1,200 miles long by half as wide, say about one-third the area of the United States; and they support, after a fashion, a population of about 160,000,000. There had been plenty of evidence obtainable at Shanghai, Hankow, Peking, and Tientsin, of the terrible ravages of opium in these regions, but it seemed advisable to make a journey into one of these unfortunate provinces and view the problem at short range. The nearest and most accessible was Shansi Province. It lies to the west and southwest of Peking, behind the blue mountains which one sees from the Hankow-Peking Railroad. There seemed to be no doubt that the opium curse could there be seen at its worst. Everybody said so – legation officials, attachés, merchants, missionaries. Dr. Piell, of the London Mission hospital at Peking, estimated that ninety per cent. of the men, women, and children in Shansi smoke opium. He called in one of his native medical assistants, who happened to be a Shansi man, and the assistant observed, with a smile, that ninety per cent. seemed pretty low as an estimate. Another point in Shansi's favour was that the railroads were pushing rapidly through to T'ai Tuan-fu, the capital (and one of the oldest cities in oldest China). So I picked up an interpreter at the *Grand Hotel des Wagon-lits*, and went out there.

The new Shansi railroad was not completed through to Tai-Yuan-fu, the provincial capital, and it was necessary to journey for several days by cart and mule-litter. While this sort of travelling is not the most comfortable in the world, it has the advantage of bringing one close to the life that swarms along the highroad, and of making it easier to gather facts and impressions.

Every hour or so, as the cart crawls slowly along, you come upon a dusty gray village nestling in a hollow or clinging to the hillside. And nearly every village is a little more than a heap of ruins. I was prepared to find ruins, but not to such an extent. When I first drew John, the interpreter's, attention to them, he said, "Too much years." As an explanation this was not satisfactory, because many of the ruined buildings were comparatively new – certainly, too new to fall to pieces. At the second village John made another guess at the cause of such complete disaster. "Poor – too poor," he said, and then traced it back to the last famine, about which, he found, the peasants were still talking. "Whole lot o' mens die," he explained. It was later on that I got at the main contributing cause of the wreck and ruin which one finds almost everywhere in Shansi Province, after I had picked up, through John and his cook, the roadside gossip of many days during two or three hundred miles of travel, after I had talked with missionaries of life-long experience, with physicians who are devoting their lives to work among these misery-ridden people, with merchants, travellers, and Chinese and Manchu officials.

Before we take up in detail the ravages of opium throughout this and other provinces, I wish to say a word about one source of information, which every observer of conditions in China finds, sooner or later, that he is forced to employ. Along the China coast one hears a good deal of talk about the "missionary question." Many of the foreign merchants abuse the missionaries. I will confess that the "anti-missionary" side had been so often and so forcibly presented to me that before I got away from the coast I unconsciously shared the prejudice. But now, brushing aside the exceptional men on both sides of the controversy, and ignoring for the moment the deeper significance of it, let me give the situation as it presented itself to me before I left China.

There are many foreign merchants who study the language, travel extensively, and speak with authority on things Chinese. But the typical merchant of the treaty port, that is, the merchant whom one hears so loudly abusing the missionaries, does not speak the language. He transacts most of his business through his Chinese "*Compradore*," and apparently divides the chief of his time between the club, the race-track, and various other places of amusement. This sort of merchant is the kind

most in evidence, and it is he who contributes most largely to the anti-missionary feeling “back home.” The missionaries, on the other hand, almost to a man, speak, read, and write one or more native dialects. They live among the Chinese, and, in order to carry on their work at all, they must be continually studying the traditions, customs, and prejudices of their neighbours. In almost every instance the missionaries who supplied me with information were more conservative than the British and American diplomatic, consular, military, and medical observers who have travelled in the opium provinces. I have since come to the conclusion that the missionaries are over-conservative on the opium question, probably because, being constantly under fire as “fanatics” and “enthusiasts,” they unconsciously lean too far towards the side of under-statement. The published estimates of Dr. Du Bose, of Soochow, president of the Anti-opium League, are much more conservative than those of Mr. Alex Hosie, the British commercial *attaché* and former consul-general. Dr. Parker, of Shanghai, the gentlemen of the London Mission, the American Board, and the American Presbyterian Missions at Peking, scores of other missionaries whom I saw in their homes in the interior or at the missionary conference at Shanghai, and Messrs. Gaily, Robertson, and Lewis, of the International Young Men’s Christian Association, all impressed me as men whose opinions were based on information and not on prejudice. Dr. Morrison, the able Peking correspondent of the London *Times*, said to me when I arrived at the capital, “You ought to talk with the missionaries.” I did talk with them, and among many different sources of information I found them worthy of the most serious consideration.

The phrase, “opium province,” means, in China, that an entire province (which, in extent and in political outline, may be roughly compared to one of the United States) has been ravaged and desolated by opium. It means that all classes, all ages, both sexes, are sodden with the drug; that all the richer soil, which in such densely-populated regions, is absolutely needed for the production of food, is given over to the poppy; that the manufacture of opium, of pipes, of lamps, and of the various other accessories, has become a dominating industry; that families are wrecked, that merchants lose their acumen, and labourers their energy; that after a period of wide-spread debauchery and enervation, economic, as well as moral and physical disaster, settles down over the entire region. The population of these opium provinces ranges from fifteen or twenty million to eighty million.

“In Shansi,” I have quoted an official as saying, “everybody smokes opium.” Another cynical observer has said that “eleven out of ten Shansi men are opium-smokers.” In one village an English traveller asked some natives how many of the inhabitants smoked opium, and one replied, indicating a twelve-year-old child, “That boy doesn’t.” Still another observer, an English scientist, who was born in Shansi, who speaks the dialect as well as he speaks English, and who travels widely through the remoter regions in search of rare birds and animals, puts the proportion of smokers as low as seventy-five per cent. of the total population. I had some talks with this man at T’ai Yuan-fu, and later at Tientsin, and I found his information so precise and so interesting that I asked him one day to dictate to a stenographer some random observations on the opium problem in Shansi. These few paragraphs make up a very small part of what I have heard him and others say, but they are so grimly picturesque, and they give so accurately the sense of the mass of notes and interviews which fill my journal of the Shansi trip, that it has seemed to me I could do no better than to print them just as he talked them off on that particular day at Tientsin.

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