

HOW OPIUM IS PRODUCED IN INDIA.

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Owing to the ever poverty-stricken state of the Indian *raiat*, or husbandman, the government advances the means whereby he can engage in poppy cultivation. The nature of their engagements is about as follows: The cultivator undertakes to sow a *bigka*, or about one-twentieth of an acre, with poppy seed. For this he is given the requisite amount of seed. If a well has to be dug, he is not only given a sum on loan, sufficient to carry out his purpose, but also money enough to buy bullocks in order to enable him to draw water from the well when it is finished. This is termed the first advance, and is simply given to prepare his land for the sowing of poppy seed. The second advance is given when the plant begins to shoot above the earth's surface, and the third, when the plant is about to mature. In January or February the plant comes to maturity; in that state the pods are lanced in the afternoon. The opium is allowed to exude till next morning, when it is carefully taken off by an iron scraper. At the same time precaution is exercised to close the incisions by running the finger over the cuts. About five to six incisions suffice for the drawing of the juice.

The opium is placed in brass vessels, slightly tilted, so as to drain off the dew or any other watery substance. It is then manipulated and placed in new earthen vessels, and is thus kept till it is brought to the weighing station. The cultivator of poppies does not employ labor. His holdings are mere garden patches; so all the aid he requires, from the sowing of the seed to the maturing of the plant and the gathering of the opium, can be had from the members of his family. The whole of this work is done by himself, his wife, and his little ones. Many of these opium garden plots, worked by the man and family, amount to only one-sixth or one-twelfth of an acre, perhaps; in a few isolated instances one man is wealthy enough to own half an acre.

There are many reasons which conduce to this. First and foremost is that the native does not like to lease more land than he himself can plow and work. Even with the growth of opium, where so many untold advantages are offered for extended enterprise, the Indian husbandman prefers to give his attention to a tiny garden rather than to be put to the expense of working, with paid help, a few acres. His outlay is nothing, and thus he is enabled, at tremendous profit, to grow opium for sale to the government. He does not pay for help; manure is always handy, as human excrement only is used, and nothing is cheaper and more effective. Irrigation is equally simple. A rude well is sunk; two posts and a cross beam, over which is placed a wheel, form the only apparatus for the drawing of water. A rope is passed over the wheel and attached to it a huge leathern bucket, which is let down and drawn up by bullocks. The water is emptied into a reservoir; running from this are numerous drains, which carry off the water and flush the lands requiring moisture. The stronger members of the family are engaged in this toil, while the children, who in other lands would be deemed infants, make themselves generally useful in picking weeds and many other duties necessitating light labor.

Before the sun gilds the horizon, and while the dew is yet fresh on the grass, the family are astir, and from early morning till evening their entire attention is bestowed upon their crop, either in weeding, watering, or picking during the day; and sometimes at night, in keeping wild animals from intruding and destroying in a single hour the labor of years.

The wants of the husbandman are but few. Four mud walls and a thatched roof compose the family mansion; and in such a hovel will he live for generations. A scant cloth tied round his loins serves for coat and pantaloons. When he desires to appear to advantage a huge cotton sheet, thrown in graceful folds around his body, serves as gala costume on occasions of great festivity. His little children are in a state of utter nudity, even in the coldest weather; and when it is borne in mind that from October till February the weather is a great deal colder than it is in San Francisco, some idea of the hardy nature of native children can be formed. The women are somewhat better clothed; a simple petticoat and a gray colored sheet has for the last three thousand years formed their attire. But, whatever, money the husbandman gains, he converts into jewelry, which forms the real wealth of the native landowner, and is regarded by natives much in the same way as a European looks upon a bank account. In times of acute distress he can always part, even at a premium, with his wife's ornaments. The Hindoo religion demands that certain ornaments must be worn by married women. When the contracting parties are poor they make them of lead, but directly

fortune smiles favorably they are exchanged for gold and silver. The small farmer lives with but three objects, that is, to load his wife with ornaments, to eat off brass platters, and to be able, on the marriage of his son, to make a grand display. To attain this end he will suffer years of deprivation and inconvenience, and his many years' savings will be wasted in a single week of jollification.

We can imagine how glad must be the *raiat* when the poppy plant has begun to exude opium, and when his opium has all been gathered he waits patiently for the order to march, with the fruits of his labor, to the weighing station. It depends entirely upon the season as to when the cultivators can bring their opium to the government stations to be weighed.

DISPOSING OF THE CROP.

As a general rule, the month of April is the commencement of the weighing season. Intimation is then given to the opium cultivators that they must present themselves on a certain day with their opium, in order to have it tested and weighed. In the districts where the poppy plant is cultivated all are astir, and grand preparations are made for a general exodus. The opium is collected safely in red earthen pots, which are put in wicker crates, and the whole family, with burdens on their heads, make for the weighing stations. The picturesque Indian lanes are crowded with these men, marching like sheep to their destination. They only travel during the night. The sultry heat of midday forces them to seek the grateful shelter of the gardens and groves so liberally planted along the dusty highways. Directly a halt is called, and preparations are made for the daily meal. After this is finished some lively spirit starts a story, recounting the savage doings of the stranger who rules the land. With terrified countenances and anxious ears they listen to these fabulous tales; but inwardly they bless the "white face" as they think of the money he is soon to disburse.

Many of these ignorant cultivators have never seen, in their life, a European; and accept with easy credulity anything detrimental to the character of their governors. No wonder it is then that the native approaches the *sahib* or gentleman with the most abject fear painted on every limb. He holds his breath when he hears him speak, and is ready to faint at the slightest display of anger or impatience. These sensational stories are generally propagated by rascally natives, who profit by the credulity of their countrymen in order to extort money. These men represent that nothing can be done without the *bakishish* or blackmail present, and they are the agents for the *sahib*, sent by him to collect toll. If the ignorant wretch demurs, his torturer paints a picture to which the torments of hell are but a trifle. The poor fellow, anxious to escape such calamities as he is threatened, pays the demand, and further presents his friend with a trifle in order that nothing should go wrong.

WEIGHING AND TESTING.

Early in the morning the weighing and tests commence. Notice is given to the cultivators, and they proceed to the factory, ranging themselves in a long line before the examining officer. Some men connected with the department then mix up the opium and take out a small quantity for examination. The officer, after inspection, marks the quality on the side of the earthen basin in chalk. The samples are again mixed up and tested with a solution of tincture of iodine. If it happens that the cultivator has been attempting to adulterate his opium with farinaceous matter the solution will discover the deceit. Experienced officers are alone trusted with this important duty, and it is expected of them to be able to distinguish the class of the opium as much by the feel and sight as by a chemical analysis. The consistency of the opium is easily told by a man who has been long at the work by simply turning the opium over with his hand or with the aid of a knife. If the opium is of a first-class quality the color is a rich brown, and it is so stiff that there is some difficulty experienced in turning. The poorer the quality the blacker the color and the thinner the consistency.

After the opium has been weighed and filled into separate jars according to its quality, they are sealed up and dispatched to the factory, where all the opium is again mixed up to a certain consistency and made into balls ready for exportation and sale at Calcutta. After the opium has once been delivered into the hands of the government officer, the cultivator has nothing more to do. He is paid so much by the pound; his former advances are deducted, and the connection between the *raiat* and government closes. When the balls are made they are packed into boxes called "opium chests," and sent down to Calcutta.