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## The Presbyterian Review.

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Toronto, August 2, 1894.

### The Opium Curse.

THE visit of Mr. Joseph C. Alexander, secretary of the society for the suppression of the opium trade, to Toronto a few days ago, has drawn public attention to what has been characterized as "England's greatest contribution to the world's wretchedness." It will be remembered that in the year 1891, the anti-opium spirit in the House of Commons was sufficiently strong to carry a resolution declaring the opium trade to be "a morally indefensible source of Indian Revenue." Owing to some technicalities that resolution was ineffective. The friends of the trade adopted their usual tactics, resorting to any measures that were likely to perpetuate that evil. The *London Times* stated that "The House of Commons was simply having one of its too familiar spasms of cheap puritanism." Even ministers of the Gospel are found to stand up for the trade as in the past they were found to stand up for slavery, and now for the trade in intoxicating drinks. They find in England as in America, however, that moral reformers are not easily frightened by threat or ridicule. The result has been that a Royal Commission has been appointed to visit India and report on the conditions and effects of the trade generally. It is, of course, expected that the report will be favorable to the Government's policy. Unwilling Governments can give what complexion they please to a Royal Commission and secure beforehand the desired report. But there will also be a minority report which will unmask, the cold-blooded conspiracy to debauch and destroy bodies and souls for the sake of a revenue. When British officers were trying to induce the Chinese Viceroy to legalize the trade for the profit that would accrue, he replied "I will never consent to draw revenue from the misery of my people." Ought not every British subject to blush at the thought that Britain took up and defended the cause of smugglers, who were stealthily introducing what Chinese law so regarded, and compelled China at the point of the bayonet to allow a traffic which she believed would be the destruction of her subjects. China has since that adopted a different and less worthy policy. In self-

defence she has encouraged the cultivation of poppy in her own territories in order to destroy the Indian trade, which England has forced upon her, intending afterwards to destroy her own trade and save her people. A roundabout and questionable policy, but one infinitely more worthy than the utterly selfish one pursued by England. The fears of the Chinese have been amply realized. It is said that in some opium producing provinces such as Shansi and Szechuen, 80 or 90 per cent. of the male population over twenty years of age and 50 or 60 per cent. of the women use opium. In these agricultural districts in which it is cultivated, and in which the people live in villages, it is the village populations that are affected. In provinces on the other hand in which the cultivation is not extended the agricultural populations escape, and only the cities seriously suffer. The practice varies so much in different localities, that it is not possible to speak of the extent of the evil with any degree of certainty. It has apparently permeated the whole community from the coolies to the inmates of the Imperial Palace. In Canton it is said seven tenths of the officials smoke, whilst in the province of Honan that is probably not true of one-tenth of that class. But everywhere the evil is spreading. A few years ago it was looked upon as a shameful practice—the windows of opium shops were curtained and the houses guarded lest publicity should be given to the names of those who practiced the vice. But now it is no longer under cover. In the City of Hangchow, there are over 8000 licensed shops for the sale of opium, and in the City of Fochow 1,000, more numerous than the shops for the sale of rice and tea. It is believed that 80,000,000 opium victims is a safe estimate for the whole of China, and Hudson Taylor, who has had forty years experience in the different provinces of the great Empire, said at the Shanghai Convention, that 150,000,000 is not too high an estimate for all who are injured by it directly or indirectly. The ruin wrought by it is complete, physical, mental and moral. It destroys utterly—wrecking the whole nervous system, causing poverty, untold misery, and numberless suicides. Wherever European hospitals are accessible, relief is sought, but these are within reach of a comparatively small number, and the cure is seldom permanent. The appetite once created, is insatiable and only ends with death.

What does England get in return for this terrible crime? There are sent into China annually about 6000 tons of opium from India, on which she reaps a profit of about \$32,000,000. That is her present reward in money. But is it after all clear gain? Read the following. "The first opium war secured a revenue, but the first Afghan War immediately followed, and the entire army with the exception of one man who came back to tell the tale, was massacred, the Indian Mutiny broke