

EDITORIAL SECTION.

LIVING ISSUES FOR PULPIT TREATMENT.

The Opium Traffic in India.

By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God.—Ezek. xxviii. 16.

THE opium traffic in India is again open for discussion, through two reports recently submitted by a British Royal Commission, appointed by the House of Commons, September 2, 1893. A majority report was offered, signed by all but one of the members of the Commission, in which the position was taken that the British government should not further interfere with the growth of the poppy, nor with the manufacture and sale of opium in British India. The chief reasons given for this opinion were: that opium is commonly regarded in India as an ordinary domestic remedy of which the people should not be deprived; that there are a large number of people in India in the habit of eating just a little opium every day without apparent injury, and according to some observers, even with benefit; and that in the great mass of instances the habit does not so grow upon them as to lead to excess. The report holds that the use of opium in India is looked upon in much the same light as the use of alcohol in England.

From this majority report Mr. Henry P. Wilson, M.P., also a member of the commission, and present at the investigations, makes a vigorous dissent. Of the character of the witnesses examined he says, that the anti-opiumists, such as were natives of India, were not the equals in wealth and social position of the pro-opiumists, but not the less able to present the views of the people. Among them were a majority of the native journalists, lawyers, teachers, and professors.

"Of qualified, non-official, native medical practitioners, a considerable majority were either anti-opiumists or somewhat undecided in their views. An enormous majority of the medical and other Christians missionaries who appeared before the commission gave anti opium evidence.

"The pro-opiumists, on the other hand, represented the great majority of the official class, both European and native, including military medical officers, together with many titled personages, landowners, and persons who consider their financial interests at stake."

Mr. Wilson says that about 98 per cent. of the opium in India is produced under the "Bengal Monopoly System;" which restricts cultivation to those who have received government license to grow poppy. Under this system these were on the average during the last three years 473,179 acres annually under cultivation by 1,247,941 licensed cultivators. These delivered to the officials 78,944 maunds, or about 5,799,500 pounds of opium, for which they received 15,774,607 rupees (about \$4,158,000). Each cultivator thus produced about 5½ pounds, for which he received 12½ rupees, or about \$3.34.

Of the opium crop 90.5 per cent. went to China and the Straits Settlements nearly all being used in China, where it is smoked—a method generally conceded to be most injurious.

There was much conflicting testimony as to the moral and physical effects of the opium used in India. Many prominent officials and others asserted its extended use, while many natives testified to the contrary. Mr. Wilson throws light upon this point by showing that the amount of opium consumed is much too small to permit of such general use as is implied.

As to the general use of opium as a remedy, Mr. Wilson shows that while there is much conflicting testimony, it was clearly shown that in many parts