

## THE GREAT HINDRANCE IN THE EAST.

What is the greatest obstacle in the way of the missionary enterprise among the six hundred millions of the immense Empires of India and China, more especially the latter. If any particular sin or vice be singled out in reply to that question, probably the correct answer would be summed up in the one word "opium." This is the intoxicant which degrades, brutalizes, enslaves its victims in a bondage far more hopeless and terrible than that of any other appetite, and blights and ruins them, physically and mentally, more quickly and irrevocably than any other, and by some authorities it is estimated that twenty millions of the Chinese are more or less addicted to its use. The blame for this traffic rests, not so much with the avarice of the individual dealer, as is the case so largely with the drink traffic in our land, but with the government of India, i.e. (practically the government of Great Britain), which not only permits, but encourages, yea forces its growth in India, and forced China to admit it into that country when she was most unwilling to do so, and when it only yielded to superior force, the opium war and consequences has been one of the darkest, foulest wrongs that the world has ever seen.

For years a few have protested, but now the Christian sentiment of the country seems to be awakening on the subject as never before. A great anti-opium demonstration was held in Exeter Hall some weeks since. It was called more especially to welcome a Chinese gentleman and an East Indian lady, who have come to protest on behalf of their fellow-countrymen against the British opium traffic. The gentleman,

MR. CHEOK HONG CHEONG,

superintendent of Church Mission at Melbourne, Victoria, told how, in his youth, a father's faithful warning had saved him from contracting the degrading opium habit of his countrymen. He early entered upon the work of missionary visitation, and, standing by the couches of the victims of this terrible poison, he has often been moved to the tenderest sympathy for men self-convicted of sin against the clearest light, with a yearning desire to rid themselves of the injurious practice, yet bound by cravings which have made them abject slaves.

Dr. Cheong showed the reactive influence of the drug in the case of a medical man who used it to soothe his cough, and, after a frightful struggle with the strong desire for continuous indulgence, brought a strong will and antidotes to bear upon the habit, and so escaped; but, said the speaker, "I could tell of many other instances in which men have utterly failed."

MISS SOONDERBAI POWAR,

an Indian Christian lady in Bombay, said that in her native land the drug is readily obtained by the poorest persons, and it is a fruitful cause of infanticide and suicide. Many families have to suffer privation and ruin because husbands and fathers spend the greater part of their scanty earnings in the indulgence of their depraved appetite for opium. Some of the women said, "Tell the English people that, if they help us in this time of difficulty, we should be so thankful that we would take the skin off our bodies to make shoes for them."

In India, with its thirty-three millions of gods, the female idol-worshippers said, "Tell the English people and Government that, if they will stop this trade, we will regard them as our gods." When missionaries go to the zenanas, to preach, they are told, "Go and convert your Christian Government first, and then come and tell us about Christ." It is useless to spend money on

missionaries, and to pray daily for the coming of Christ's kingdom, while the promotion of the opium traffic is delaying that kingdom.

MR. DYER.

An English gentleman, who spoke next, said: We have listened to the representatives of Eastern countries containing a population of more than six hundred million souls. Adjacent to these are other lands suffering from the curse of the British Indian opium traffic, of whose inhabitants your guests are also in a sense the representatives. The plea for justice which they have made to-night in the presence of God and of this assembly, and through this assembly and the press, to the British nation, is therefore a plea in the interests of peoples comprising half the population of the globe.

Considering the numbers who are affected or threatened by the opium scourge, there has never been a subject of greater magnitude before the British public. May God burn it into the hearts of the people of this land, that the British nation is responsible for the greatest attack upon humanity that history records, or that the world has known. When I first went to India, rather more than four years ago, I had no idea that the British Government in that country were propagating the opium vice among our fellow subjects there, in addition to exporting the poisonous drug to curse the Chinese nation. The facts in reference to the consumption of opium in India have come upon me as an awful revelation through a careful and patient investigation.

After showing, on the basis of official reports, that the consumption of the poison (opium) had increased in the Bombay Presidency 549 per cent. since 1876, while in other provinces it has also sadly increased, the speaker asked,

HOW WAS THIS INCREASE BROUGHT ABOUT?

Let me give you illustrations. The license to sell opium in any city or district is put up to public auction by the Government, or disposed of by tender to the highest bidder, the Government having previously fixed the minimum sale—that is to say, the lowest quantity which the successful bidder must sell during the term of his contract.

The form of license in use in the Bombay Presidency, where I reside, provides that if the holder of the license should fail to sell the stipulated minimum amount of the poison he must pay (I quote the words of the license) "*penalty at the rate of Rs. 5 per pound on the quantity of opium required to make up the said minimum.*" ("Shame, shame.")

What with the high price he usually has had to pay for license, the penalty which hangs over his head, and his desire for gain, I need not say that the licensee spares no effort to push the sale of the devastating drug among the populace.

In the North-West Provinces and Oudh the license issued to the opium contractor provides that if he fails to buy of the Government the minimum quantity officially fixed to be retailed by him in each month (again I quote the license) "and the collector considers his explanation of his failure to buy the required amount to be unsatisfactory, the collector may resume the lease at once, and confiscate the instalments paid in advance by the lessee as security."

During the last three years the number of opium shops in India, instead of diminishing, increased, according to official statements, by 1486.

Another man of high reputation when he found himself powerless to break the habit sought relief for his misery in suicide.

In the course of his work, Mr. Cheong has seen numberless cases were not only men's desire but