

BRITISH OPIUM IN CHINA.

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BRITISH Christians lead the world in beneficence. Their home charities are multiform, their foreign missions are everywhere. But the British Government, for the sake of revenue in India, persists in a course against a weaker nation which Canon Wilberforce pronounces "simply dastardly from beginning to end." John Bright and many other distinguished men express the same view. Christian opinion in China is fairly represented by a conservative Englishman, Archdeacon Monle of Shanghai, who says: "British authorities in India, fully knowing the attitude of the Chinese Government, deliberately engaged in the preparation of opium for China, with only two years intermission, continuously for sixty years." Americans, too, blush at sight of the Chinese caricature of an Englishman with a whiskey bottle in one hand and an opium ball in the other. In many ways so closely linked to Great Britain, and especially so in evangelization, it behooves American Christians also to know the facts and to labor and pray for the removal of this tremendous hindrance to missions and to honorable commerce and international good-will—a professed Christian government engaging in a trade which is a blighting curse to millions.

Since many may not have access to information, the following outline of events has been compiled, from personal study of the Chinese maritime customs' reports, from files of the *Chinese Repository*, and from other trustworthy sources. As partisan statements have been made in books and newspapers, "that opium-smoking is as harmless as twiddling one's fingers," and that "Great Britain has not coerced China on account of opium," it may be well to remark that the writer is prepared to cite authority for every statement in this sketch.*

Some hold that opium was first brought to China by the Arabs toward the close of the thirteenth century. But it was in small quantities, and "commonly used as a medicine before the trade with India commenced" in the eighteenth century. Previous to 1767 the trade was in the hands of Portuguese, but with an import of only about 200 chests a year, a chest being about 140 pounds. The habit of smoking was scarcely known. Even as late as 1830 large inland cities like Hangchow had no opium smoking-shops. Now that city has, approximately, 2,000. The very rapid growth of the habit and of the trade began when the East India Company regularly engaged in the business in 1773. In 1790 the importation reached 4,054 chests, twenty times the amount imported yearly previous to 1767. In 1799 it was 5,000 chests; in 1826, 9,969; about 1830, a yearly average of 16,800. In less than ten years just preceding the first Opium War the trade more than doubled, reaching 34,000 chests in 1836. In 1834 the East India Company closed its career, but other British officials continued the traffic, which has grown to 52,925 piculs in 1850 and 75,308 in 1880, a picul being 133½ pounds.

Smuggling is the proper term for this trade previous to 1860. In 1780 the British established a depot near Macao on two vessels, a plan continued in later years, when armed vessels lay outside the ports, and delivered the opium to Chinese smugglers who had previously negotiated with American or British merchants living at the ports under consular protection. The East India Company entered upon the trade knowing it to be contraband.

* Besides the authorities named, any one desiring further information should see the *Friend of China*, London: Morgan & Scott; a small monthly. Also *The Truth About Opium*, London: Holder & Stoughton.