

The Country Homemakers

CONDUCTED BY FRANCIS MARION BEYNON

CHINA AND THE OPIUM TRAFFIC

It has been a weakness of our race that we have always assumed, without stopping to ask why, that the Anglo-Saxon was superior to all other people. It was a little shock to this innate sense of superiority when Russia, early in the war, wiped out vodka, while Great Britain clung tenaciously to her beer. It was only a little shock, however, for Russia is an autocracy. It was more of a shock when democratic France, as a war measure, gave up absinthe. But the greatest achievement of this kind belongs to a nation which constitutes a large part of that vague and mysterious thing generally described as "the yellow peril."

Nathaniel Pfeffer, an American journalist, recently returned from a study of commercial problems in the Far East, tells in the Independent, of January 22, the remarkable story of the abolition of the opium trade in China, not as a war measure but as a matter of national decency. Mr. Pfeffer says:

"The last wisps of smoke are curling from the opium pipes of China. On March 31 the last ounce of the poppy will be sold, on June 30 the last pipe will be lit, and China will be free of opium. In ten years it will have thrown off the most terrible bondage that has ever enslaved a nation and at the same time will have consummated one of the finest achievements in the history of any people."

"The last effort to prolong the life of the drug has been frustrated under circumstances that provide a fitting climax to the sweeping surge of idealism that has characterized the fight of a decade. For the last three years all China has been closed to the traffic in opium except the three provinces in which, ironically enough, the foreign interests have dominated; Kiangsu, in which is Shanghai; Kuantung, in which is Canton, and Kiangsi, in which is Kiukiang. While the Chinese themselves have sacrificed whatever property interests they had in the traffic, the British importers who make up the Shanghai opium combine, forced an agreement three years ago allowing them to sell the drug in those three provinces until they disposed of their accumulated stocks. The expiration of that agreement was fixed at March 31, 1917, the date originally set by the Chinese government for the end of the evil thruout the country."

"A few months ago the combine, finding it could not dispose of its stock by that time, asked the government for an extension of that agreement until January 1, 1918, offering \$10,000,000 for the privilege. That offer the government has refused. In financial straits as it is, its treasury depleted by revolution, forced even for a time to suspend specie payments, and negotiating—almost begging—for \$5,000,000 loans in America, it has refused. Strong political pressure has been brought to bear; the combine has even threatened to withhold \$5,000,000 of the duty on its last months of operation. Still it has stood firm, a magnificent stand for a principle. Backward, material China! How many of the "civilized" powers, similarly situated, would have done the same? How many governments, hanging by so tenuous a thread, would have balked at so small a compromise for so large a stake? For remember, chiefly on its ability to raise money will the new republican government of Li Yuan-Hung stand or fall."

"It has been with just that splendid disregard for the pressure of the pocket nerve that the whole war on the drug has been carried on. To realize what this has meant, financially at least, to China, you must compare it with the effect on the United States if the government were suddenly to forbid the cultivation of wheat and corn. Then imagine the people of those states not only submitting, but burning with elaborate ceremonies all agricultural implements."

"Opium has been for nearly a century the largest vested interest in China, an interest in which thousands had their entire wealth and from which millions drew their living. There were provinces in which there was virtually no other crop, for opium always commanded a much higher price than any other product. In addition, the customs revenue on the poppy imported from India and the internal tax on the native product have represented a large proportion of the entire revenue of the country, more than \$30,000,000. And on the personal side at least half the 400,000,000 people of the country have been addicted to the drug."

It is characteristic of the western type of mind that there was general incredulity concerning the sincerity of China's determination to rid herself of this curse in the brief space of ten years. We

are at once so reluctant ourselves to sacrifice any vested interest to moral well-being and so sure of being more highly civilized than the eastern nations that it did not seem possible that China really meant it. The writer goes on to say:

"Is it any wonder then that when, in 1906, the Empress Dowager promulgated her decree ordering the suppression of the drug within ten years, the world looked for the tongue in her cheek? Or that when the Chinese asked Great Britain to stop the opium imports from India and urged the opium merchants in China to curtail their sales, a British official publicly said: 'It is impossible not to be skeptical of the intentions of the Chinese government with regard to this matter.'"

"It was not possible to be skeptical long. Two months after the Empress' decree the government council had framed a definite program for its execution—the immediate closing of the dens for smoking and the reduction of the area under poppy cultivation by one-tenth each year. With savage, relentless strokes, without any regard for financial loss, that program was carried out. In six months the closing of the dens had begun. After three years American consuls reported that the production of the poppy had been reduced fifty per cent."

UNSPOKEN

On all the evenings when the moon was full,
Out toward the mountain turned our aimless steps—
Aimless for all our wandering held in view,
But filled with the purpose of my love for you.

Where are you turning now, when shine the stars
Out of a sky a thousand leagues from home?
When all the lesser things of day are thru,
Does such another love come seeking you?

How shall you wait for one who never spoke?
Whose tongue was hesitant with fearful love
That stayed the words because the dream was true,
And speaking might have robbed the world of you.

Come back; come back: Here in the silver night
The constant mountain waits beneath the stars:
Oh, let me mock this silent, palling moon
With all the vows I feared to speak too soon!

—D. G. A., in the Delineator

and that two million dens had been shut. In 1912 five of the eighteen provinces had been closed to the traffic and in 1913 five more. By 1914 fifteen were free from the drug.

"The amazing feature of the whole fight has been its overwhelming popular support. Seldom have there been such spectacles as the public burning of huge quantities of opium worth thousands of dollars, rich furnishings of dens, pipes and all the paraphernalia of smoking. These have been held from time to time in various parts of the country with official and religious ceremonies."

One imagines that the work of the Christian missionaries to China must have been greatly complicated by the cheerful willingness of the Chinese to abandon this terrible vice with its enormous vested interests, while its passing was opposed to the last ditch by Christian foreigners who found their pocket books pinched thereby. Apparently the contrast aroused comment, since Mr. Pfeffer concludes:

"The one ugly fact has been the part played by foreigners, as it has been thru the whole history of opium in China. Forcing it originally on the Chinese, at the point of guns, they have resisted to the last its passing. Officially China has been given co-operation, the not ungrudgingly, in its efforts to free itself from the curse."

"But the attitude of the foreigners living in China who have had an interest in the traffic has been an ugly commentary on western morals. So far from making any sacrifice, they have made capital out of the suppression of the drug. In cities like Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow, where the foreigners have concessions or the privilege of extra-territoriality, opium dens have been open years after they were closed in the adjoining districts under native jurisdiction."

The only places in the country where a Chinese can get the drug that has been the curse of his people are those ruled by the civilized white man. And even to the last the opium merchants have made their abortive effort, by bribe and threat, to

prolong the life of those shops. But it has been abortive, and before the snow falls again China will have won its liberty from the sinister tyranny that bound it to decay."

SHOULD KEEP OPEN MIND

Dear Miss Beynon:—I wish to congratulate you on your letter on "Toleration," in The Guide of January 17. It is the most sensible letter I have read on this question for many a day. Unfortunately the standpatters are exceedingly numerous, and especially is this true on religious questions. Unflinching belief being taught as the first of duties, and all doubt being usually stigmatized as criminal or damnable, a state of mind is formed to which we find no parallel in other fields. Many men, and most women, tho completely ignorant of Biblical criticism, historical research or scientific discoveries, tho they have never read a single page, or understood a single proposition, of the writings of those whom they condemn and have absolutely no rational knowledge either of the arguments by which their faith is defended or by those by which it has been impugned—will nevertheless adjudicate with the utmost confidence upon every polemical question; assume, as a matter beyond the faintest possibility of doubt, that the opinions they have received without enquiry must be true, and the opinions which others have arrived at by enquiry must be false, and make it a main object of their lives to assail what they call heresy in every way in their power, except by examining the ground on which it rests. They think they can by mere assertion overthrow results arrived at by the life-long inquiries of the ablest student, while they have not given a day's serious or impartial study to them. They fancy that even the ignorant, if only they be what is called orthodox, are justified in strong denunciation of men quite as truthful and often incomparably more able than themselves. Such people whose minds have become stereotyped in foregone conclusions are simply incapable of grasping new truths and are of all others the most hopeless to deal with. Moreover, they form a very large proportion of the population. Let us hope that the time is soon coming when our children shall be taught that the search for truth is a virtue and not a crime, and when religious dogmas known to be false by educated people shall not be taught as truth to innocent children who are unable to judge for themselves and are thereby at the mercy of their teachers.—A. E. RANDALL.

UNDERMINING THE CHILD'S COURAGE

This is begun by the mother when she tells him the great big bow-wow will get him if he cries, and if it should happen to thunder at the time of one of these little domestic storms, and she exclaims, "There! what did I tell you? Now will you be a good boy?" the result is, the child is afraid of dogs and afraid of thunder.

Then she keeps him in constant fear of death by, disease, or mishap of some sort; if he gets his feet wet, he will get sick and die; if he climbs a tree, he will fall and get killed; and so it goes on and on, until one wonders if she has a single pleasant thing left to say to the unfortunate child. To make a child fear death is wicked; he does not understand it, and the fear of it is horrible.

To make remarks, such as these, in the presence of a child has a lasting effect on that child's courage: "I hate this gloomy old house, it is positively spooky!" "I don't dare go out after dark alone!" "I am afraid to go thru the woods, I have a horrible fear of wild beasts!" "Don't go near that cow; she'll hook you with those great big horns."

Instead of helping the child to be strong and brave, she makes him afraid of everything. He cannot go upstairs alone after dark, or go to sleep without a light, and if left alone in a dark room, is convulsed with fear and sees things in every corner.

I have heard parents complain because their children appeared dull, bashful, and hung back when other children went about fearlessly and seemed bright and smart. The difference was of their own making, they had undermined their child's courage and soon made a hopeless coward of him.—By Anne H. Quill, in The Mother's Magazine.

JUST AS GOOD

Max, a primary student, was given instructions to write a sentence containing the word "chicken." Not being quite sure of the way to spell the word, he wrote the following:

"A jiken is a small hen (I can spell hen)."

—Nellie Clark.