

**THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF BRITISH
OPIUM SMUGGLING: THE ILLEGALITY OF
THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S
MONOPOLY OF THE DRUG; AND ITS
INJURIOUS EFFECTS UPON INDIA, CHINA,
AND THE COMMERCE OF GREAT BRITAIN**

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The Rise and Progress of British Opium Smuggling: The Illegality of the East India Company's Monopoly of the Drug; And Its Injurious Effects Upon India, China, and the Commerce of Great Britain by R. Alexander

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R. ALEXANDER

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Six Letters

ADDRESSED TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE
EARL OF SHAFTESBURY.

BY
MAJOR-GENERAL R. ALEXANDER,

MADRAS ARMY.

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LETTER I.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE OPIUM MONOPOLY, AND ITS
EFFECTS UPON INDIA.

MY LORD,

More than a year has elapsed since a few gentlemen met in your Lordship's presence, to consider the representations which have been so frequently and forcibly made, regarding the progress, extent, and evils of the contraband trade in opium carried on by British subjects at the principal ports and along the sea-coast of China.

Many facts were then stated and authenticated; but it was felt that information on the subject must be collected and presented to the public in a manner as concise as is compatible with a full apprehension of the injury that is inflicted by means of this illegal traffic on the population of China, on the commerce of Great Britain, on the morality and prosperity of the subjects of both nations, and—though last mentioned, what is first in importance and paramount to all—on the spread of true religion and the blessings of civilization that follow in its train.

My Lord, I have no higher ambition in now venturing to address you, than to collate these facts and

information, with the hope that in so doing, I may be permitted to submit an humble foundation for measures which the statesmen and philanthropists of our country will see fit to adopt, in justice to our national character, and in compassion to a people comprising one-third of the family of man. I shall use the privilege of quoting freely, with or without acknowledgment, and generally *verbatim et literatim*, whatever I may find necessary to my purpose of presenting a clear narrative of facts in the plain language of truth.

Beginning with India, I find that previous to the year 1767, the quantity of opium exported from thence did not exceed 200 chests yearly—the trade was carried on by the Portuguese in a legal manner, and the drug, imported from Turkey, was admitted as a medicine through the Custom-house in China by payment of a duty equal to 13s. English money on the 100lbs. In the year 1773, the East India Company, acting upon the suggestion of a member of their Council in Calcutta, entered upon this traffic and established a depot for opium in vessels anchored in a bay to the south-west of Macao. The trade so conducted does not appear to have been profitable, nor did opium become a source of revenue to the Company until, as well as I can trace, about the year 1798, or 1800; it seems that about that period they ceased to be exporters, and had by fiscal measures secured a rigidly guarded monopoly of production in India; they thus not only relieved themselves from the risks of commerce, but were better prepared to steer a devious course through the political embarrassments,

which it may be presumed, were foreseen as an inevitable consequence of forcing upon the unwilling government of China an importation, against which remonstrances, or resistance by force of arms, have since proved equally unavailing. It was part of the astute policy of the Company, strictly to prohibit the captains and officers of their own ships from trading in the drug, or allowing it to be received on board their vessels; they were not to be caught *flagrante delicto*, and it devolved upon diplomacy to answer "Not guilty," to nullify the evidence of complicity, and screen its principal from the responsibility of being an accessory before the fact: while on the other hand, in the licenses granted for private ships trading to China, there is a provision with penalty attached, that no opium except that which the East India Company monopolizes shall be taken on board.*

A reference to the code of Regulations for the Bengal Presidency shows that the first legislative enactment for restraining illicit trade in opium was passed in the year 1795, and by its preamble, proves that as the government grasped at monopoly, an antagonistic principle devolved itself in the smuggling, which had come into existence since the year 1767, when the commerce, openly carried on by the Portuguese, was legal both in India and China.

From the year 1795 until the year 1816, successive laws were enacted by the government in Bengal, prohibiting the importation of the drug from the sur-

* *Vide* Appendix to Report of a Committee of the House of Common on the trade with China. 1840. Pp. 176—177.