

**THE POPPY-PLAGUE
AND
ENGLAND'S CRIME**

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The Poppy-Plague and England's Crime by J. F. B. Tinning

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J. F. B. TINLING, B.A.



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INTRODUCTION.

BRITISH opium policy affords an example of the possibility of a subject of great national importance remaining comparatively unknown to the public in a time of unparalleled knowledge, inquiry, and activity; and also of the freest, and, as we are accustomed to think, the most moral, legislative assemblies in the world, hesitating and even refusing to touch an institution which, in the judgment of many sober and judicious writers of their own and foreign nations, and thousands of other witnesses, is the greatest blot on the history and character of their country. We cannot wonder that the public is ignorant and apathetic regarding the affairs of India when we consider the small amount of interest which Indian questions awaken even in the councils of Parliament. There are a few members in the House of Commons who give a full share of attention to all questions which seem to them to affect the well-being of that country; but even when their efforts are made in favour of what dispassionate onlookers would agree to be the cause of justice or morality, the most they can usually do is to obtain a civil hearing from a very thin house and a decent minority. The *laissez faire* policy has its favourite stronghold in evils that are at once profitable and far removed from home. Moreover, the mode of governing India by a Secretary of State, who (aided by the Council of India) is invested with all the authority formerly possessed by the East India Company and the Board of Control, naturally tends to the continuance of this state of things. Members of the Legislature, unless

they sit on the Opposition benches, naturally shrink from interfering with that which belongs to a department of the State created for the special purpose of administrating in such matters; while the expression of an opinion and a wish by the most authoritative assembly in the nation, unsupported by a demand and by an indication of the means whereby that demand can be conceded, may well be avoided as exposing the majesty of Government to contempt. These are the most respectable reasons we know, there are others which we shall consider hereafter, for the neglect of evils the continuance of which is a wrong done by England to India. It is true very much has been done since the dissolution of the East India Company in 1858. The *régime* of development, which involves an average annual outlay of some eight millions on public works alone, has fairly set in; and in connection with this, great changes have been effected in the mental culture of a large section of the people, in the machine of government, and in the collection of taxes. But while these changes have been generally beneficial, they have left untouched evils more serious than those they have removed. We have failed to keep our twice-given promise to place the natives of British India on the same footing as our own countrymen in respect to competition for Government service, and bitter disappointment and distrust are the result. Our monopolies, too, continue in an age with which they are altogether out of keeping, supposing them at any other time to have been justifiable. Of these, one is the grasp of mere power upon a necessary of life, respecting which Mr. St. George Tucker, late Chairman of the East India Company's Board of Directors, writes, that "the weight of our salt taxation has killed millions of cattle and greatly injured the breed throughout India, and has caused the extension of many terrible diseases among tens of millions" of human beings;* and the other is the subject of the following Essay.

* Private Letter.

We must needs be supported by strong facts and arguments when we dare to assert that there is at this moment existing on the earth, protected by British power, an evil so gigantic as to be a rival to slavery in its days of undisturbed establishment; a upas tree, owned and preserved and fostered by the nation which is supposed to be foremost in works of international beneficence, whose deadly shade is spreading over countries containing half the population of the globe, and which seems likely to defy the efforts of religion, philanthropy, and commercial foresight, not only to cut it down, but even to check its further development.

It is no grateful task to bring the faults of one's own country to the light, but, in truth, they are well known already, except amongst ourselves. The world is not so blind as to be dependent on confessions for its knowledge of national or individual faults. The pride that refuses to acknowledge error saves the wrong-doer little, while it is a moral disease against which true friendship will raise the earliest warning. In so far as the continuance of wrong results from such pride or from a lack of moral sense, we would gladly become a supplementary conscience to the nation, and where the want of interest is only consequent on the want of knowledge, we wish nothing more than to be one of the voices conveying the needed information.

We know that at best nations must contain a large number of persons who, practically without conscience themselves, are proof against those suggestions from without which would in any degree stimulate or supplement it. These act with a *vis inertia* against every effort towards reform which involves self-sacrifice, if, indeed, they do not assume towards such efforts a positively hostile attitude. There is nothing so evil but some arguments may be forged to support it. Englishmen living in our own day have been able, without a blush, to advocate slavery in the halls of Parliament, as their blood relations of America have done even from the pulpit. There are many in this class of whom we

have no hope. To seek to influence them by appeals to reason or feeling is a waste of time. What they are they will be, and we can only hope that they are a minority, and that they may be outnumbered and outweighed by juster and more generous minds. If it is so, the diffusion of knowledge is our business, and will suffice to bring about the desired result. If it is otherwise, we may be excused if we despair of our country, or turn from man to God, who, while He has power to arouse nations as well as individuals from self-complacent sin, is likely to do so only by the instrumentality of national judgment.

We must not, however, hastily conclude that our cause is desperate; the history of noble causes is a history of trial and apparent failure. All nature proclaims that death may be the way to a better and brighter life; and the causes which can bear most failures are those which most nobly succeed. Defeats in Parliament, and the apathy of ignorance without, may be succeeded by intelligent interest and the victory of an awakened nation's will.

In 1838 an exposure of the opium monopoly and its effects was made by a member of the House of Commons without evoking any sympathy or support from that assembly. Similarly, about the same period, a well-known merchant and philanthropist—Mr. Thos. Thompson—proposed in Exeter Hall that a movement should be made for testimony against the evils of the opium trade; but even in that place of comparatively irresponsible utterances and religious enthusiasm, the proposer found himself in a minority of one.

The present Lord Shaftesbury, in 1848, sought to arouse the House of Commons to a sense of the national guilt; but the Government escaped the unwelcome subject by persuading the noble mover to withdraw his motion on the ground that it clashed with the negotiations with the Chinese then pending. The effort of the same nobleman in the House of Lords, fourteen years later, had no better success; but Sir Wilfrid Lawson's protest in 1870 met with a better hearing, and im-

portant acknowledgments from the Government, such as, we think, if carried out to their logical consequences by the treatment of the question as a moral one and the acknowledgment of the responsibilities of England in regard to the pecuniary difficulties of India, would involve the concession of the reform demanded. It is true the motion in this instance had the support of no more than forty-six votes, but this and truth does not, we think, represent a hopeless cause. The very temperate proposal of Mr. Mark Stewart in June 1875, "that the Imperial policy regulating the opium traffic between India and China should be carefully considered by her Majesty's Government, with a view to the gradual withdrawal of the Government of India from the cultivation and manufacture of opium" was supported by fifty-seven votes against ninety-four, an apparent indication of progress towards reform. Whatever be the sins and errors of England, Christianity is rooted in her heart. Not even the discovery of an enormous wrong, done for a century, and done to the present day, affords a sufficient reason for despairing of her conscience or her power. There are thousands of good men and women in England, who, if they knew the evil which their country is doing to China by her opium trade, would weep, and pray, and labour till the wrong was redressed. There are millions of honest men in England, who, if they had but knowledge of the facts, would bring such a pressure to bear upon the British Parliament and British Ministers as no consideration of supposed interest, or adhesion to conventional policy, or blind want of principle, would enable them to set at naught. Public opinion is the river which must be turned upon the Angean stable which has so long defiled our name in the far East; and it is plainly the duty of those who see our opium system to involve a crime against God and man, to lay it in its real character, as facts will declare it, before their countrymen, and to expect the concurrent voice of Christians, philanthropists, patriots, and all persons of common self-respect and honesty, to demand the abolition of our opium monopoly,

though it should involve the sacrifice of millions of British wealth.

We fear there is no reason to expect reform in the opium trade to be initiated by Government. The people of England, and especially the leaders of public opinion outside the halls of Westminster, must determine what is to be done, and bring the force of their will to bear unmistakably upon their representatives in Parliament. But for this the subject must be generally understood. At present the knowledge of it is chiefly with those who suppose themselves interested, or obliged to maintain the existing state of things; consequently, the result of an impartial judgment of facts has been hitherto wanting. Let the respectable classes of Great Britain become generally acquainted with the system by which £7,000,000 of the revenue of India are annually acquired, and especially with the means by which that system has been built up, and we believe its condemnation will be immediately pronounced. The end we set before ourselves in writing the following Essay is the diffusion of knowledge, persuaded that knowledge will furnish at once the will and power to work the necessary reform.