

**THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC IN
BRITISH INDIA: OR, HAS
THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT
DONE ITS DUTY?**

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The Liquor Traffic in British India: Or, Has the British Government Done Its duty? by Robert Needham Cust

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ROBERT NEEDHAM CUST

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THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC
IN
BRITISH INDIA;
OR
HAS THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT DONE
ITS DUTY?

AN ANSWER TO
VENERABLE ARCHDEACON FARRAR
AND
MR. SAMUEL SMITH, M.P.

BY
ROBERT NEEDHAM CUST, LL.D.

LATE MEMBER OF H.M. INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE, MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEES OF THE
BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY AND THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY,
HONORARY SECRETARY OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY, AND J.P. FOR
THE COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX AND LIBERTY OF WESTMINSTER.

Μεγάλη ἡ ἀλήθεια, καὶ ὑπερισχύει,

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OR

HAS THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT DONE ITS DUTY?

“DOEST thou well to be angry for the gourd?” And he said, “I do well to be angry even unto death.” Such were the words of the Prophet Jonah, 800 B.C. : it is well even in this age of hasty judgment, and rash words, to be angry, when statements are made by public men in public places, which are wholly unwarrantable, and the Government of a great Dependency, the greatest that History ever knew, is held up to scorn for having initiated, and continued for more than a Century, a policy of the damnable nature of deliberately destroying the morals of two hundred Millions, placed in their charge, and at their mercy, for the sake of realising a paltry Revenue. As one of the chief speakers put it, “The wants of the Indian Exchequer are so urgent, and it is so easy to bring in Revenue from the increased sale of drink, that the temptation is irresistible to go on licensing more drink-shops.” There is no getting out of the difficulty: the charge is not made on this occasion against the British people, the great shipping and commercial and manufacturing interests of Great Britain, but against the Government of India.

How did it come about? For more than twenty-five years there has existed in England an association called the “Church of England Temperance Society,” which by its numerous branches has done an infinity of good to the people of this island, who are notoriously a thirsty race, and, in addition to many excellent qualities, which have placed them in the front rank of Nations past and present, do not possess, and never have possessed, the great grace of Temperance. Total Abstinence is the miserable and desperate remedy of the dipsomaniac, the weak-hearted, and coward, while Temperance in all

things lawful is the glory of the Christian Man, using the good gifts of his Creator, as they were intended to be used. Happy are those, who from their youth up, not under the influence of a pledge, or a command, or a craze, have of their own free will and inclination learnt to dispense with the use of stimulants and tobacco: but this grace is not given to all, although the number is annually increasing. The above-mentioned Association determined in 1886 to make a new departure, and to carry the war all over the world. A letter was addressed to the Primate of England by the Chairman of the Society, enunciating this new policy, and stating with regard to British India that "a nation of abstainers was gradually becoming a nation of drunkards": "that drunkenness had disappeared, but was reintroduced by the British": that "nothing was done to check the evil by legislative measures": that "nearly every village had its liquor shop, and the natives believed that they were *conferring a favour on the Government* by buying the liquor." We are not told in the Pamphlet, to whom we are indebted for the last sentiment, but it looks, as if the writer had had a rise taken out of him by some astute Bábu from a Presidency College, who had acquired bad habits; but Archdeacon Farrar is credited with the following dictum, which no doubt drew down rounds of discriminating and temperate applause:

"We have girdled the world with a zone of drink."

The selection of authorities in the appendix to the Pamphlet contains no single name, which carries any authority whatever: one person suggests, that total abstinence should be a condition precedent to Baptism, for which there is no warrant in Holy Scripture: another person translates "sharáb" as "shame water": this rendering may deceive excited hearers in a public meeting, but will not hold water in Asia, and has no warrant in the Dictionary. Another person cannot see any other explanation for the increase of income, than the encouragement by the State of the sale, forgetting that a higher rate of taxation, only limited by the margin of profit of the smuggler, would have the same result. A great increase in the amount of Police fines in the Metropolitan area in a given period would imply not that the Magistrates had encouraged intemperance, and wife-beating, but had punished it by heavier fines. The

late King of Oudh is credited with the merit of not making a revenue out of the sale of spirits: it is true, for he allowed distilleries to be worked without any check whatsoever! This would hardly seem a wise policy either in India or Westminster. Another person states, and no doubt correctly, that the educated classes betake themselves to imported liquors, and infers, that the Government is entirely responsible for this state of things. Has that person considered, whether in a country, of which Free Trade is the glory, any import can be excluded without raising difficult complications with British and Foreign Producers? The same person remarks, that the heathen regard the use of intoxicating liquors as a sign of a Christian. I shall show below, that this person must have imperfectly studied the literature of India to arrive at such a conclusion. Nanda Lal Ghose, a Barrister, undertakes to state, that the Demon of Drink was introduced by a Christian Government. I must refer him to a closer study of the esteemed writings of his own countrymen. Another person states (as the result of six months' tour in India) that the natives, if left to themselves, would not have *licensed* shops for the sale of the vile alcoholic compounds, which come from Europe. No doubt, that, if the State-control and tax were removed, there would be an unlimited amount of *unlicensed* shops. And, with all deference to the same person's opinion, formed in the Railway-train, or the Hotel, or Rest-houses, and unassisted by the least knowledge of the Vernacular, I do not think, that in matters of morality the Government of India falls behind the Ethical Code of the people, as unquestionably the slaughter of kine was prohibited, while the slaughter of widows, female children, aged relations, and lepers, was considered to be a religious duty, and the practice has been only abandoned, or checked, under the pressure of severe penalties, without any assistance from the moral consciousness of the Nation. During the Mutinies the Emperor Napoleon III. received a petition from India praying for assistance to drive out the British, who had forbidden their time-honoured customs, among which these amiable customs were enumerated!

But another movement had been made, with less sound of the trumpet, perhaps with more soberness of statement, by Missionary Societies to stem, if possible, the stream of liquor, which was flowing from European ports into the Rivers of West

Africa. In December, 1884, while the Berlin Conference was sitting to arrange the affairs of the Dominion of the Kongo, at my suggestion a Deputation of the Church Missionary Society was received by the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to lay before him the state of the case, and urge the introduction into the Treaty of some clause, restricting by a system of Excise the importation of European liquor into the Basin of the Niger. The Bishop of Sierra Leone made an impressive speech, and I was permitted to follow him, and I ventured to remark, that the Missionaries were not seeking their own personal interests, but those of the people, who could not speak for themselves, and that they did not ask for impossibilities, such as the absolute prohibition of the import of spirits, but only for the regulation by means of Excise, and licences of Liquor Shops. Great credit should be given to the representatives of Great Britain and of the United States, for their gallant attempt to introduce a clause, but it was necessary to make a compromise with Germany and France, and the clause was abandoned. In October, 1885, the German Missionaries, assembled at Bremen in North Germany, brought to notice the lamentable consequences to the people of Africa of the uncontrolled import of spirituous liquors, chiefly from Hamburg, and Dr. Zahn, the Inspector of the North German Missionary Society, published a powerful German pamphlet on the subject, and was good enough to make communications to me, which enabled me on the 20th January, 1886, to bring before an assembly of representatives of all the great Missionary Societies at the Wesleyan Mission House, Bishopgate Street, the following resolutions:

“ A. That the Protestant Missionary Societies of Great Britain
 “ and Ireland should send a Deputation to the Foreign Office
 “ to point out the ruin, which threatens the Negro populations
 “ of West Africa generally, and of the Basin of the Niger in
 “ particular, by the unrestricted importation of spirituous liquors
 “ from Northern Europe, and to inform the Foreign Secretary,
 “ that the German and German Swiss Missionary Societies,
 “ assembled at Bremen, last October, have brought the subject
 “ before the notice of the Imperial Government at Berlin with
 “ the same object, admitting frankly that the town of Hamburg
 “ is one of the greatest offenders in this matter.

“ B. The Deputation should impress upon Her Majesty's
 “ Government, that the present state of affairs will not only pre-

“vent the development of legitimate trade in the Manufactures
“and Products of Europe, but will destroy, physically as well as
“morally, the population of a country, rescued from the Slave
“Trade by the expenditure of British lives and resources.

“C. The remedies, suggested as feasible, in which the
“German Societies agree, are

“(I.) The imposition of a substantial Import-duty, fixed at a
“scale just low enough as not to make smuggling profitable.

“(II.) The introduction of a system of Licences, by which
“the sale would be restricted to certain shops, maintained by
“responsible parties. A substantial Fee to be levied for each
“licence.

“(III.) The forbidding of any British person, or British
“Company, remunerating labour, or bartering for natural pro-
“duce, in spirituous liquors.

“(IV.) The discontinuance on the part of the British
“Authorities of making presents of cases and bottles of spirits
“to Natives, or offering, or receiving, entertainment in spirits
“on the occasion of public ceremonies.

“The Revenue collected from the Import-Duty and Licence-
“Fee will suffice to maintain ample Government Establishments
“for the purpose of enforcing the Regulation of Customs and
“Excise now proposed.

“D. The leading secular organs of Public Opinion should
“be invited to bring home to the public conscience the lament-
“able consequence of the neglect of remedial measures *before*
“*the evil exceeds the possibility of control and remedy.* A promis-
“ing market, both of Export of Native Produce, and the
“Import of European Manufactures, will be destroyed by the
“short-sightedness of the first generation of Merchants, who
“would literally kill the goose to get at the golden eggs: this
“point of view concerns the Manufacturer and Merchant; but
“the Missionary Societies have their thoughts ever solely
“fixed upon the awful crime of ruining Millions of a race in
“a low state of culture, and unable to protect themselves, by
“the introduction of Rum, Gin, and Alcohol, *of the very exist-*
“*ence of which the Negroes never heard before, and with which they*
“*could not supply themselves except by the Agency of European*
“*Merchants.*”

It was agreed, after discussion, that the subject should be referred to a Committee delegated by each Society, who should

confer, and make a collective Report to their several Committees, and that final action should then be taken. This eventuated in an able and comprehensive Pamphlet, entitled "Trafficking in Liquor with the Natives of Africa," from the pen of the Rev. Horace Waller, so well known as the companion of Livingstone, stating the whole case, and published in the beginning of the year 1887. I have alluded to these proceedings in detail, as no doubt those, who disagree with me in my argument, defending the Government of India against the unjust aspersions thrown upon it, may be tempted to cry out, that I am a kind of Philistine, and one who cares little for the welfare of native races: on the contrary, it is the leading object of my life, and I was up in arms for the people of West Africa long before the Church of England Temperance Society unfortunately lent an ear to the exaggerations and downright falsehoods, which have for the present arrested its useful and benevolent career.

On the 30th of March of the year 1887 a Meeting was held in Prince's Hall, Piccadilly, of all persons interested in this great subject, "The Demoralization of Native Races by the Drink Traffic." The Bishop of London was in the Chair. The practical object of the Meeting was to appoint a Committee to collect information, and I among others was requested to attend, and to allow my name to be placed on the General Committee, to which I gladly assented, believing, in the innocence of my heart, that the term "Native Races" was meant to include those unfortunate races of Africa, and Oceania, which, being under no settled form of Government able to protect them, were at the mercy of the unprincipled European importers of European spirituous liquors, as described in Mr. Horace Waller's pamphlet.

The Bishop of London made an admirable opening address, carrying every one with him. He was followed by Archdeacon Farrar, who proposed the first Resolution, and astonished many of his hearers (and among them most particularly myself) by stating, that his portion of the task related to British India. Now India is a great dependency of the British Crown, with a Constitution of its own, a Budget of its own, owing nothing to Great Britain, and paying no tribute to Great Britain, governed under a system of law by able and high-minded men, sent out from time to time by both of the great parties of the State, who are assisted in the subordinate administration, political, fiscal, and judicial, by the great Civil Service of India,