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BRITISH OPIUM POLICY

AND ITS RESULTS TO

INDIA AND CHINA.

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PREFACE.

THESE chapters were written in the earlier months of 1874, in response to an advertisement inserted in several newspapers inviting competitive essays upon "British Opium Policy, and its Results to India and China." The author did not see the advertisement until some time after its appearance, and the brief interval allowed for the composition of the book was for him abbreviated by the necessity of simultaneously carrying on other labours. Marks of haste were inevitable ; these have been, as far as possible, removed in the process of revision for the press ; but he fears that the following pages still bear some traces of the circumstances of their production.

Several months after the book was completed a society, of which the author had the honour to be appointed secretary, was formed to diffuse information upon the subject, and to appeal to the conscience of our Government and people against the trade. This society now publishes the present work, hoping that it will do service by promoting a

discussion of the real merits of the question. The particular statements and opinions herein contained, however, are put forth on the author's sole responsibility; and the society he has the honour to serve must not be held accountable for more than a general approval of the design of the book.

Nearly two years have elapsed since the book was written, during which time the opium question has been debated in Parliament and the press. The author has taken advantage of the process of revision to alter statistics to the latest dates, to add a few foot-notes and introduce some new matter into the appendix, and to excise or qualify a few hasty expressions. But the substance of the book remains the same, and the chief result of two years' farther study of the subject, and of interchange of thought with many minds upon it, has been to intensify the writer's conviction that England is verily guilty in this matter. If only the nation could be aroused to feel the absolute necessity of some change for the better, the writer's chief end will be gained; and he would not repine though the spirit of reformation should work in other modes than he has indicated. In the meantime he has seen no cause to alter his opinion that the right course would be to abandon the opium monopoly, and to relieve China from the treaty obligation to admit opium, promising her, in lieu thereof, our honest and hearty aid in every effort put

forth by the Chinese authorities to prohibit the trade on their own coasts.

A word or two may be permitted here in explanation of the author's dislike to the opium monopoly. An able writer in the *Contemporary Review* (Feb., 1876) urges that the wickedness lies, not in raising money from opium by monopoly rather than by tax, but in encouraging the production of opium, and in compelling the Chinese to admit the opium thus produced. The author admits that the monopoly powers now possessed by the Indian Government might conceivably be used for exactly the contrary purpose to that for which they have been and are used, viz. to prevent, instead of to provide for export to China. It is also possible, on the other hand, that the Indian Government, if dispossessed of the monopoly, might encourage the production of opium by private individuals for the sake of revenue. Therefore, if such a change should ever be proposed by the Government, it will be needful to watch the process, for the purpose of preventing the public being deceived by a sham reform. Nor will it be wise to expect from any such change a substantial and permanent relief of the Chinese. The Chinese themselves must put down the opium trade in China. Our business is to remove the obstacles we have placed in the way of their doing so, and to encourage and assist them in contending against the vice to the best of our ability.

While so far agreeing with the *Contemporary*, the author nevertheless cannot recant his profession of political faith. To his mind, promotion of an evil and permission of an evil are not the same thing, either in the case of an individual or of that collection of individuals called a Government. There are evils which we cannot wisely interfere with, but which it would be shame for us to encourage. Besides this theoretical objection, there is a very grave practical objection to the monopoly. As the Marquis of Salisbury pointed out to the deputation the other day, by means of the monopoly the Government secures for itself the merchants' profit as well as the tax. The trade never having been in private hands from time immemorial, there is no class of persons deprived of an advantage which they miss through the prohibition of private trade. Hence it has happened that the Government of India has been able to extract millions from China without their own subjects feeling the pressure at all. The temptation has been irresistible, and the writer fears it will be irresistible unto the end. So long as that monopoly endures the Indian Government will work it, as they have hitherto worked it, to enrich their treasury, regardless of the consequences to China.

The author, therefore, cannot withdraw his protest against the Indian Government's direct

participation in the opium trade. Nevertheless, as this book will show, he always regarded the iniquity of forcing the drug into China as incomparably greater than that of having a Governmental connexion with it in India. If insisting upon the removal of the lesser evil has diverted attention from the more serious one, nobody more sincerely regrets the error in policy than himself. A new session of Parliament is before us, and events have drawn the public attention to China. It is to be hoped that we shall prove we have learned wisdom by experience, and shall not fail to make good use of future opportunities.

Canada Building, King Street, Westminster,
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