THE

BISHOP OF DURHAM

(Harrison, Herbert Henry)

ON THE

OPIUM QUESTION

An Address, delivered at a meeting held under the auspices of the Society of Friends, in Exeter Hall, London, on Friday, 9th December 1904.

Second Edition
Completing 25,000.

LONDON: MORGAN AND SCOTT
12 PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS, E.C.
1905

PRICE ONE PENNY
A few days ago, in view of this meeting, and not being perfectly certain of the facts, I thought I could not do better than write direct to the Embassy of Japan in London, and ask what was the precise position of opium legislation in Japan, and the answer came very courteously to my request and very decisively, that the importation, manufacture, and use of opium are strictly prohibited in Japan.

The Bishop of Durham.
THE BISHOP OF DURHAM ON THE OPIUM QUESTION

My Christian Friends—If an occasion is to be measured by the greatness of the cause and the purpose, we may assuredly call this a great occasion. We are thankful for this goodly gathering, under many difficulties, and in response to many devoted efforts; it is a large meeting of earnest, devoted, and attentive students of the matter which brings us together. But far greater than a greatness to be measured by numbers is the moral significance of an occasion like this, if indeed we are in the spirit of it, and indeed shall act upon it.

It is great with the greatness of a great problem—a problem which involves the supreme moral interests of great communities and nations. It has to do with a long and distressful past, with a present which fills us with concern and shame, and with a future filled with incalculable possibilities of evil or of good.

It is an occasion great, too, by its entire detachment from the spirit, too often debasing, of mere political strife and partisanship. It is on a higher and nobler level.

We are here to reaffirm to ourselves and to one another, and, so far as we can, indirectly to multitudes besides, great facts which are meant to come home,
not to a section, but to the universal conscience of the nation.

However, I must not dilate on the abstract aspect of the matter. Time is precious, and several whom we are anxious to hear are to address us. For myself, I have felt the occasion to be so important that it has seemed to me to be a good reason why, in the midst of a life out of which leisure has long been banished, time should be made, at a singularly busy season, for a visit to London expressly for this meeting. But I will not forget that I have come here as chairman, and that a chairman's first duty is not to get in the way of the meeting, but to set it going, to introduce the subject and leave the ground clear for the speakers that are to follow. So I will confine myself as closely as possible to the time allotted to me, and I will devote my words to the barest reaffirmation of what, on careful thought and inquiry, by no means merely recent, seem to me to be the great outstanding facts of the question that brings us together to-night.

First, then, it is a fact that there is a drug called opium, which is an excellent servant in the doctor's work, but a most dangerous and murderous master when it is misused. It is a fact that this opium is a thing calling for such caution in its use that it is against the law to sell it in this country, except with a warning that it is a poison. I have been reading lately again, after many previous readings, a remarkable pronouncement upon the dangers of this drug when it is used outside its proper sphere. It is a pronouncement signed by more than 5000 members of the medical profession, all of them doctors with accrediting degrees, many of them men of fame, and of the greatest authority of position; and the terms they use amount to this—(I abbreviate but certainly
do not accentuate)—that eating opium and smoking opium are practices which are morally and physically debasing. Those are the very words of the manifesto, which goes on to say that it is desirable that, as in England, so everywhere, where it can be effected, it should be sold and circulated only as a medicine and through the chemical trade;—and to anticipate somewhat—for this is a detail, though a vast detail, and I am keeping just now to the general matter—that it is the bounden duty of the Government of India to prohibit the cultivation and sale of opium except for its medicinal uses.

But now the second fact is that the illicit use of opium—the "luxury-use" of it, the use in which it becomes, as I have said, a formidable and murderous master, the master of the human will, attacking the will with peculiar thoroughness and aggressiveness when it is once allowed in the slightest degree to get beyond its servant-character and to assert its power—I say that this use of opium for pleasure and indulgence, its use as a narcotic taken for delight—is the vice of China.

Remember the momentous import of those words. China is a great factor in the human world. Not far short, if short at all—(for of course no census of China is exact)—of one-fourth of the human race lives within the borders of China proper; and that any vice should have become the vice of China puts that vice into a formidable prominence. But that is the position of the vice of opium-smoking. Years ago it was not so. A hundred years ago China was apparently an enviably exempt country with regard to all narcotic luxury, and the dangers which attend excess in that direction. A very mild tobacco appears to have been all that was used in China,
with insignificant exceptions, till some 110 or 120 years ago. But now, somehow or other, what has come to be the difference of the case? Not to deal with generalities, let me quote two quite recent bits of evidence from quarters which are neither fanatical nor religious. Let us hear what has been said by our Consul in the great province of Si-chuen. Si-chuen is a vast and magnificent district of China, midway down the remote western frontier; a province which contains, at a very moderate estimate, 40,000,000 of people; some have reckoned the figures as high as 70,000,000. It is magnificent in its resources, and until recently it has been a great land for the growing of grain. It is now the fact, reports Consul Hosie, that the area devoted to grain has been largely invaded by the growth of the opium poppy. He calculates, with regard to those 40,000,000 of people (for so, to avoid exaggeration, he gives as the number) that about 16,000,000 will be adults; and of those 16,000,000 (he says that he is well within the mark in saying this) fully one-third of the adults in the cities of that country of 40,000,000 people are opium-smokers; according to Consul Hosie\(^1\) quite 2,800,000 of the adults in this province have taken to this indulgence, which is medically “debasing and degrading” in its directest tendencies.

Then there is another province, south of Si-chuen, the province of Yunnan. There a responsible investigator, Colonel Manifold, reported on the state

\(^1\) Consul Hosie says:—“After careful inquiries, I have come to the conclusion that of the population of Si-chuen three-tenths are urban and seven-tenths rural, so that of the 16,000,000, equally divided between males and females, 2,400,000 males and 2,400,000 females inhabit cities, and 5,600,000 males and 5,600,000 females live in the country.”

Now, I am well within the mark when I say that in cities 50 per cent
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of affairs, just a year ago, in sternly simple terms. After speaking of the splendid capabilities of the province and what it might be made by an industrious population, he says that the people of Yunnan “will make little” of the splendid resources of their country, “for opium has sapped their energies.” He is careful to confine himself, like a wise man, within the limits of his knowledge; he appears disposed to think that there is great exaggeration about the opium habit elsewhere, and that intemperate things are said about it in England. Possibly he might think our meeting intemperate to-night. But he has put it upon record that, in at least this one great province of China, the people “will make little” of the capacity of their land, “for opium is sapping their energies.”

I happened this morning, quite accidentally as we say, to have arranged an interview with a gentleman who is seeking, probably in the near future, to take holy orders in the diocese where I reside; and casually, in the course of conversation, it came out (what I

of the males and 20 per cent of the females smoke opium, and that in the country the percentage is not less than 15 and 5 per cent respectively.

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had not previously understood but was deeply interested to learn) that he had been resident for several years in China, in the vast city of the Yangtze, Hankow. I casually mentioned that I was to be here, please God, to-night, to speak about the opium traffic. "Ah," he said, with the quiet manner of a man who is simply speaking of a notorious fact, "opium is indeed eating out the heart of China."

Now, all this is a formidable state of things which surely no one, conscious of the claims of common humanity, and looking steadily at it, can contemplate with indifference and equanimity. But we must remember more than this. In face of this tremendous advance of a great vice amongst a vast and unspeakably interesting people, capable of noble development in the future, after an immemorial and wonderful past, we must remember that for this state of things, alas! alas! Englishmen are, and in a grave measure England is, most seriously responsible. I hold that to be my third main fact. Opium is a terrible master. Multitudinous people in China are under the tyranny and masterhood of opium, with all its frightful effects upon the human will. Englishmen, and in a great measure England, are responsible for this state of things.

Do I say this lightly? I do not envy the man who can lightly say a word against his country. I love England with a lover's passion. If it were lawful to say so, I worship the great idea—England. I thank God that He has permitted me to have part and lot in England as mother and as country. I shrink to an intense degree from terms of condemnation of England, sweeping and unqualified, and which forget the glorious other side. But then, the deeper one's love, the more devout one's honour, for an object
of affection such as a relative, or such as one's country, the more keen is the anguish of the conviction that the person or the land has not acted up to itself, and has been untrue to its ideal. Now history sorrowfully convinces me that this has been the case. It is a sad story of 120 years or so since first in any serious degree, putting unimportant precedent circumstances aside, opium from India under English auspices was brought to the doors of China and offered and pressed for sale. And this grew, and more and more lucrative became the venture: and then the temptation came, more or less forcibly, to expand the market; the demand was promoted, and the supply was sent in increasing quantities to meet the growing demand. And this was done directly against the intense will of the responsible rulers of China. That is one of the most pathetic incidents in the story. In 1844 there is recorded a passionate protest by the aged Emperor. It is said that he was himself a rescued victim of opium. It is said that he had two sons who died of the opium vice. Facts like that within the circle of a man's own experience can tremendously revolutionise his view of an abstract question. So the monarch then, in the course of a determined effort against the resolve, apparently, of English trade and politics to make a way for this fatal luxury into China, said that he would "consent to any sacrifice rather than make a revenue of the vice and misery of his people."

Nevertheless, there came effort after effort, there came war after war. In two conspicuous cases, from the year 1839 to the year 1842, and again (I well remember it) about the years 1857 and 1858, there were two main conflicts; alas! in some cases scarcely conflicts, but rather massacres, so overwhelmingly stronger was the one side than the other. These wars
resulted in treaties with China in which it was practically engaged that China should not be free, however much she might wish it, to prohibit the "luxury-use" of opium within her own borders; she should not be allowed to prevent the introduction of the drug for open sale.

You are aware—not to go into details, for time forbids—of a great outstanding fact, which, as it seems to me (unless the whole history of the human past is to be thrown into the most complete uncertainty), is historically certain, namely, that England is the only power of the first order which has treaties with China which protect the influx of opium into China. With the other powers it is not so. It is with England, alas! that this compact holds, that with regard to English commerce coming over from India—this commerce in opium—China shall hold the door open, whatever she does with the thing imported when it is once within her borders. It is claimed that, because she has accepted the fact, and imposed an excise, in her own interest, upon the opium when introduced, she has connived and consented to the trade. Even if that were literally true, I do not think we could use it as an excuse for our own ill-doing. But I do not think that it at all implies connivance or consent. It is an acceptance of the inevitable; it is an attempt to make the best of it that can be made.

My fourth fact is that this vice is not only a vice, but is fully recognised as such in China. There is no real parallel to it even in our drink problem. Every one who knows China really and intimately will say that there is no real parallel between this opium vice and alcoholism. I am a sufficiently old and hardened teetotaller, but I do not look upon my friend who has
not seen his way to take that line, and who drinks his glass of wine, as doing an act which deserves to be classed with impurity and gambling. Well, but *that* is the way in which the opium habit is looked upon by the common conscience of China.

I speak as one who knows intimately many sober and trustworthy men who know the Chinese life and the Chinese character in many parts of the empire. Their evidence is distinct that the very victims of the vice—even those who indulge or who wink at the indulgence—nevertheless look upon it with shame, just as a man convicted of immoral courses, though he might heartily desire to continue in his downward path, would be ashamed if dragged into the light. It is not merely an indulgence, lawful, and capable of being kept within strictly temperate limits, under normal circumstances. It is a thing to be ashamed of. So speaks the common conscience of China. And if this be so, think of what the effect must be when this vice is regarded in the eyes of China as one which owes its introduction and its active development to the agency of a Christian country. Is it any wonder that our missionaries tell us how, again and again, that fact is thrown in their teeth? Is it any wonder that we are asked to believe that, infinitely more than appears in cases of definite opposition, there is a sullen undercurrent of dislike of the religion of England because of the distrust of the race which is responsible so largely for the presence of this mischief in China?

Remember that in the common thought of China opium is indelibly associated with the foreigner. Let me give you one illustration. An intimate friend of mine, a missionary at his own cost, Mr. Montagu Beauchamp, a missionary in the remotest west of the
empire—a noble Christian gentleman, a typical English university man, whose word is absolutely to be trusted—has assured me that in his peregrinations as a missionary, for years, in the remotest parts of the empire, it is his common experience in the fairs and markets of the little towns towards the western border—where we are sometimes told that foreign opium has never got at all—to see the announcement over booths in the markets, "Here is sold a remedy for foreign smoke." That is the opium. Note the words. It is recognised as a disease, for which a "remedy" is required. And it is felt to be "foreign," for it first came from outside; and, alas! it was we that had to do with its coming.

I must not stay to speak to you long upon other points that were much upon my heart. I would only just remind you of the important facts of the Royal Commission upon Opium, which now some nine or ten years ago was ordered to report upon the Indian manufacture, and incidentally upon the trade and its results in China. We all know that, with one important exception, the Commissioners concurred in a recommendation that nothing should be done in the way of restricting the Indian growth and exportation. It is a serious thing to impugn the deliberate verdict of the Royal Commission, held by responsible men. But we have lately been reminded in another sphere of life that even the most serious pronouncement of a judicial tribunal inflicting a penalty of years upon, as it proved, an innocent man, was a matter for fresh investigation; it proved possible, in spite of the magnificent traditions of the English judicial bench, that the process and the result would need to be publicly criticised and positively reversed. It is
therefore no treason to say that the report of a Royal Commission may need to be pronounced upon again. And I take it that this has been done, in a way which deserves the closest, most respectful, and most sober attention of every student of the subject, by my honoured and admirable friend the Rev. Arnold Foster, of Hankow. He, in his masterly book, *An Examination and Appeal*, which must be known to many of you, has made an analysis of the report of the Opium Commission. He has, as it seems to me, conclusively shown that, whatever may have been the reason at the back, *the evidence recorded by the Commissioners (in view of which alone he bases his judgment) does not bear out the Commissioners' conclusions*. He has done this in a way conspicuous and startling. He shows that the conclusions upon the evidence look as if they were drawn up by the accused party rather than by the judge. I take it that in Mr. Foster's *Examination and Appeal* we have cogent reasons given us—not fanatical, not partisan, and not wishing to blink any side of the matter, whether favourable to opium or against it—for taking with the utmost reserve and suspicion the published conclusions of the Royal Commission.

I have spoken, as I said at the beginning—and you will believe that it has been so—with the keenest pain and filial grief about our glorious country, whose action has been inglorious in this respect. I mourn, I grieve, that we should have to think of such actions as those for which England has in some degree, directly or indirectly, made herself responsible. But while I mourn for it, and reluctantly speak of it, we must put, even before our beloved country, the sacred cause of righteousness, without which England would not be England. We must think of China.
I must think of China. I have for now forty-seven years been linked with China by dear lives close to my own. I have two brothers labouring at this moment with the energy and hope of the youngest missionary in China. Their residence upon the soil of China, putting aside their furloughs in England, amounts collectively, the two brothers together, to fully seventy years; and with their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, there is a group of labourers for the Lord in China, fourteen or fifteen altogether, near to me in blood and deep affection. They have literally given themselves up for China, and therefore I have the strongest reasons of the heart for feeling drawn to the contemplation of that wonderful country. And who, that has once been so drawn, but feels how grand, how impressive, how magnificent are its claims upon our goodwill, upon our expectation, and upon our hope?

China, of course, has its faults. It has often been guilty of a grotesque arrogance. The way in which it can speak of the most cultivated races of another type of civilisation, as if they were barbarous, is hard to listen to with patience. China has again and again acted with an insensate contempt towards the outer world. But nevertheless I dare to say that, under a higher and better influence than the great agnostic morality of Confucius could ever teach her, China is capable, as a race, of coming out into the front rank of all that is great and good in humanity. Think what it would be if she did so—that one homogeneous quarter of the human race!

But it is, after all, for the sake of righteousness, and of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of righteousness, that we are most moved about this matter. It seems to me that this great question,
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whilst complicated in a thousand details, is singularly simple in its main issue—more simply arguable than even the great problem of slavery of seventy years ago. It seems to me that it is reduced, so far as I can study the facts of the matter, to the question whether righteousness must be sacrificed to revenue or revenue must be sacrificed to righteousness. And can anything be more awfully solemn than the question, Which side of that dilemma will our beloved, our glorious, our God-used England take? If deliberately and finally, after the fullest appeal of loving, filial warnings that can be made, the answer is for materialism and not for the spiritual law, what can the future be? God is a Retributor still. Some of us think that in the great conflict in the East which is going on now, we see something of that retribution as to which even Gibbon said that he felt his studies inclined him to believe that it held good through history. It has been pointed out—and is it superstition to think it?—that the disaster in the Khyber followed our first China opium war, and that the Indian Mutiny synchronised with our second opium war. If we persist, if we forget, if we repent not, the retribution will come. It may come with the slow step of national decay—the decay of ideals, the decay of the home, the decay of reverence, an awful decay of faith within the Church. Or it may come by sharper and sterner means. Not very many years ago, it was as if the imperial fabric, in the crisis of the African war, were trembling in the balance. It may easily be so again. The Lord, the Arbiter of nations, has not abdicated. "The Prince of the Kings of the earth" is the title of Jesus Christ to-day; and if we forget, He may think it His necessity to strike where He has blessed so long.
Resolution adopted at the Exeter Hall Meeting, 9th December 1904:

"That this meeting desires to put on record its sense of the incalculable evils, physical, moral, and social, which continue to be wrought in China through the opium trade;"

"That it deeply deplores the position occupied by Great Britain, through its Indian administration, in the manufacture of the drug, and in the promotion of a traffic which is one huge ministry to vice;

"That it recognises clearly that nothing short of the entire suppression of the opium trade between India and China can meet the claims of the case;

"And that it now appeals to the Christians of Great Britain and Ireland, after acquainting themselves with the facts, to plead earnestly with God and to give themselves no rest until this great evil is entirely removed."

The following were also speakers at the above meeting:

HENRY LLOYD WILSON, Esq.
REV. PREBENDARY WEBB-PEPLOE, M.A.
REV. CHARLES WENYON, M.D.
REV. F. B. MEYER, B.A.

A full report of the speeches is given in National Righteousness (January 1905).

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