

# AMERICA AND THE OPIUM TRADE

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## I

IN a recent issue, one of the great London newspapers contained a long article on the question of the Irish settlement, expressing satisfaction on the removal of a cause of friction between England and the United States. 'But the greatest cause of all for relief is that now America can have ordinary and natural relations with Great Britain. Whatever it is natural for the two nations to do in relation to each other can now be done. No longer will there be the embarrassment of something that cannot be talked about openly and freely. There will be no uneasy self-consciousness in their relations. If any among us ever again try, as some have tried in the past, to prevent the consum-

mation of treaties or agreements of generous understanding, by taking an anti-British point of view, they will be asked what justifies their position, and they can no longer justify it by allusion to Ireland. That allusion, on more than one occasion in the past, has been enough to prevent the relations of normal friendliness between the two nations.'

There is another allusion, however, to one of Great Britain's policies, which cannot be talked about freely and openly, without uneasy embarrassment, and which at any moment may be used to arouse anti-British feeling, to create political capital or political trouble. That allusion is to Great Britain's opium trade, established by law in many of

her Crown Colonies and Dependencies in the Far East, and to the immense output of Indian opium, which is sold once a month by the Government at public auction at Calcutta and is chiefly responsible for the spread of the drug habit throughout the world. At the present moment, Great Britain is rather sensitive to such allusions; and as time goes on, and the facts regarding this traffic become more and more widely known in America, it may prove even more embarrassing than the Irish question.

In America, all matters relating to public health receive careful attention. No other country gives such careful study to questions that affect it, or makes such determined efforts to improve it and raise it to a higher level. In the last few years our attention has been drawn to a condition which has now become a grave menace to our national welfare, something which is extraneous, artificial, and wholly uncalled for, yet which is assuming such proportions that we must recognize it as a threatening danger. This is the great increase of the drug habit. To meet this danger, most drastic laws regulating the sale and distribution of drugs have been in force for a number of years; yet we see these laws, theoretically perfect, totally unable to cope with the situation. They deal adequately with the legal sales of habit-forming drugs, but leave us quite at the mercy of an organized ring of drug smugglers and peddlers, whose agents are at work in every city of the country, creating a market for their wares. This ring of international drug-dealers is also at work in every capital of Europe; their machinations extend throughout the world. America, however, is particularly exposed to their attentions, by reason of our long, unprotected Canadian and Mexican borders, which make smuggling easy.

In June, 1919, a pamphlet was issued

by the United States Treasury Department, Public-Health Service, showing that at that time the United States was the greatest opium-consuming country on record, our *per capita* consumption being 36 grains, as compared with one for Italy, two for Germany, and three for France. A clinic for the treatment of drug addicts, opened in the spring of 1919 by the New York Health Department, gave some interesting statistics. Of the several thousand patients under treatment, it was found that one third contracted the drug habit while under the age of twenty, and one half while under the age of twenty-five. This should prove of interest to those who contend that the increase in drug-taking is due to prohibition. This Treasury Report, 'The Traffic in Narcotic Drugs,' was compiled and issued one year before the Prohibition Amendment, and it can hardly be believed that these young boys and girls, under twenty or under twenty-five, took to drugs because their alcohol supplies were cut off. These two problems, drink and drugs, have run parallel for a number of years, but are otherwise unrelated.

Another fact of importance was brought out during the few weeks that the New York Drug Clinic remained open. That was the difficulty of effecting cures. All those who wished it, and there were many, were sent to a hospital on North Brother Island, where they remained a few weeks, until the drug was thoroughly eliminated from their systems. When their general health had been built up, they were finally returned to Manhattan as cured. Ninety per cent relapsed within twenty-four hours, and the rest a short time afterward.

Why? Because, as soon as they reached the dock, there were agents of the drug ring waiting to trace their movements and to tempt them at the first possible opportunity. In other words,

they were back again in an environment where drugs were freely procurable; and it is no part of the system to let a good customer escape. When one considers that the medical dose of morphia, as given after operations, accidents, or acute illness, is one eighth, one sixth, one quarter, and occasionally one half of a grain, and contrasts it with the daily doses of drug addicts, who consume fifteen, thirty, sixty, and, in one instance at the Clinic, one hundred and twenty-five grains in twenty-four hours, it is easy to realize why the peddler wishes to create and maintain his customers.

These smuggling gangs are powerful and well organized; and the profits are so enormous that the trade is well worth the risks involved. The conditions that exist in New York could be duplicated in other cities, both in Europe and America. At present, the London and Paris papers contain almost daily accounts of raids on these peddlers and smugglers; and the reason that these cities are not as alive to the danger as ourselves is because matters of public health are of less interest to Europeans than to Americans.

The cause of this immense supply of drugs is the immense overproduction of opium, for which Great Britain is chiefly responsible. The great output of the world's supply of opium comes from India, where every step of its production, manufacture, and sale is regulated by a special department, the Opium Department, and is conducted as a government monopoly. The planter who wishes to raise poppies must first obtain a government license, specifying the number of acres to be sowed. If necessary, the Government advances him money, *free of interest*, the only crop so subsidized. When ripe, a government agent collects the crop and takes it to the government factory at Ghazipur, where it is manufactured into opium of two classes: provision opium,

destined for export, and excise opium, which is for consumption in India, the Straits Settlements, Hongkong, and other British Crown Colonies and Dependencies, where the opium trade is established by law.

Once a month, at public auction in Calcutta, the British-India Government sells its chests of provision opium to the highest bidder. Thus it passes into the hands of private firms and individuals, is shipped to Europe or America or elsewhere, made into morphia or other alkaloids, and so distributed throughout the world, by fair means or foul. It is estimated that the amount of opium required to satisfy the medical needs of 'all the Americas, from Alaska to Patagonia,' is one ton. This is the amount needed for illness or accident, as given in doses of a fraction of a grain of morphia. On this basis, let us allow one ton for Europe and the same for Asia — three tons would suffice for the relief of pain and suffering, the legitimate and proper use for drugs of this kind. Yet last year at Calcutta 741 tons of provision opium were sold. This excessive amount, therefore, is obviously produced for but one purpose, to supply the needs of drug-takers.

So much for provision opium, sold for export. Let us now consider the other form, manufactured at the government factory at Ghazipur, known as excise opium, destined for consumption in India and other dependencies of the British Empire, where it is sold frankly and openly, to supply the wants of drug-users. In these remote colonies the British Government sells opium through the medium of drug shops, where it is purchased as freely as cigarettes. The Government also licenses smoking-rooms, where it may be smoked on the premises. In India, there are 17,000 licensed shops.

The sales of opium, together with fees and excise duties, form a considerable

part of the Indian revenue. During the ten years ending with 1918-19, the receipts from opium (consumed in India, not exported) increased at the rate of 63 per cent.

The opium trade is also legally established in the Straits Settlements, where the local government makes nearly one half of its revenue from opium sales and excise duties. In British North Borneo and Sarawak there is also an opium revenue. In certain of the unfederated Malay States under British protection, the opium revenue forms 45 per cent of the total. In all these countries this business is a government monopoly.

In Hongkong a slightly different system prevails, the Government not conducting the business directly, but selling off the privilege once a year, at public auction. The privilege thus farmed out is known as the Opium Farm, and the syndicate buying it has the right to establish as many shops and smoking-rooms as the traffic will bear. The latest available report, for the year 1918-19, shows that 532 tons of excise opium were produced for consumption in India and elsewhere. These 741 tons of provision opium and 532 tons of excise opium, a total of 1273 tons, may be reckoned as overproduction, when compared with the world's actual needs for medical purposes, estimated at three tons. Roughly speaking, it takes seven tons of opium to make one ton of morphia.

## II

Recently a film was shown in London, illustrating Sir Ross Smith's flight by aeroplane from England to Australia. One of the pictures was taken in Basra, Mesopotamia, one of the places where he alighted en route. This picture showed a native sitting at a stall selling opium; and overhead was a crude sign, 'Licensed by the British Government.'

Mesopotamia has not long been in possession of the British, being one of the mandated territories acquired since the war; and, as the *Telegraph* said in a leader on June 15, 'In Mesopotamia and in Palestine we are in possession, we are the only organized authority.' No time is lost, at all events in Mesopotamia, in establishing the opium trade on a paying basis.

This makes us pause and wonder what is happening in those other mandated territories, in those great German colonies in Africa, acquired by Great Britain since the war. Is the opium trade being established there likewise? It is not a pleasant reflection to think that, by our assistance in winning the war, we have placed something like one million square miles at the disposal of the British Empire, consisting largely of primitive peoples, unfit for self-government, yet fit to become customers of the British opium monopoly. Unfortunately, there is nothing in Great Britain's past or present history to make such an assumption unlikely.

Let us remember that, in these remote, half-civilized countries, over which Great Britain holds sway, the people have little or no voice in the management of their own affairs. Contrast this with the fact that in Great Britain's self-governing dominions, — Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, — the opium trade is not established by law. These self-governing colonies contain no licensed drug shops or smoking-rooms. In fact, as in the British Isles themselves, the greatest care is exerted to exclude harmful drugs and to prevent people from having access to them.

This double standard of ethics is striking. When we in America see the pitiful plight of those who have become addicted to the drug habit; when we realize what it means in the way of moral, physical, and economic deterioration, it is difficult for us to realize that

Great Britain deliberately, and for the sake of revenue, brings about this condition among those helpless peoples whose welfare she professes to have at heart.

The excuse given is that the Oriental is not hurt by opium. This is palpably untrue. The Chinese were enormously injured by it. China protested against the importation of British opium, and fought and lost two wars in a vain endeavor to protect herself. It was at the conclusion of the second war, that China, defeated, was obliged to sign the Treaty of Tientsin in 1856, by the terms of which treaty she was obliged to receive as much opium as the English traders chose to bring in. It was after 1856 that China began to raise poppies on her own account, and on a large scale, in order to compete with Indian opium, and to keep her money from being drained out of the country.

The Japanese fear opium as much as Europeans and Americans, and protect their own people as sedulously as we attempt to protect ours. When America acquired the Philippines, we found the opium trade established by our Spanish predecessors, and at once abolished it. Ever since, however, we have been fighting against the smuggling from Hongkong. There is probably no one, outside the India Office, who can truthfully say that drugs are discriminating in their action, and are harmless, if not actually beneficial, to the Oriental races.

As to China's situation. From 1856 until 1907 that country was deluged with opium, imported under treaty terms. In 1907, however, as a result of the pressure of public opinion, in which American opinion played no small part, China and Great Britain entered into an agreement. By the terms of this agreement, covering a period of ten years, the Chinese agreed to reduce the area under poppy cultivation ten per cent each year, and Great

Britain agreed to reduce her imports of opium ten per cent each year. No one believed it possible that drug-sodden China could live up to her share of the bargain, yet she did so, admirably. Great Britain also kept the faith, and by April, 1917, the bargain ended, and China was officially free.

Then what happened? This bargain showed a sincere desire on the part of the Chinese to rid themselves of opium, but it involved no such moral turnover on the part of the British-India Government. The China market must be given up, since public opinion so willed it; but other markets must be found for the opium output. There was no intention to abolish it. Thus it came about in the latter years preceding 1917, when the trade with China was dwindling, that another outlet presented itself. The opium business suddenly underwent a change. The direct, simple route to China was closed, officially, but at that time the immense possibilities of morphia were discovered. Therefore, shipments of opium were made to England, manufactured into morphia in London and Edinburgh, and, as morphia, exported to Japan. Japan became the willing cat's-paw, the go-between, and has since been smuggling immense quantities of British morphia into China. To our shame, be it said, America has also taken a hand in this traffic, and certain of our large wholesale drug manufacturers are now busy making morphia for Japan to ship into China. It is also certain that a portion of this British and American morphia is finding its way back into the United States.

The result of this giant smuggling trade, twenty-eight tons of morphia being sent last year into China in this manner, is that the Chinese are again growing opium. This time they are not raising it in competition with opium legally imported, as under the Tientsin Treaty terms, but in competition with

this immense smuggling trade, which again threatens to drain the resources of the country. A bill is pending before the United States Senate, making such shipments of morphia from America illegal; but so far, nearly a year since its introduction, Congress has not seen fit to pass this bill. But suppose it were passed, what then? It would be easy for an American or British firm to establish a morphia factory in Mexico or some other complaisant country, and carry on the trade from there. There is always this immense output of opium to be disposed of; and while the supply continues unabated, an outlet for distribution will be found.

The possibility of making morphia, however, in a remote country, secure from observation, has already been appreciated by the British-India Government. The latest report on the operations of the Opium Department for the year ending October 31, 1920, shows that the difficulty of making alkaloids in the Tropics has been overcome, and that already the government opium factory at Ghazipur is experimenting with morphia production.

The significance of this new departure must be recognized. The opium monopoly is now not only making provision opium, for export, and excise opium for domestic consumption, but is manufacturing morphia as well. According to this most recent Blue Book, just off the press, we find that 'under the first assistant chemist in the factory, the manufacture of alkaloids was continued with skill and enterprise; but, unfortunately, in August, 1920, all shipments of alkaloids were stopped under telegraphic orders from the Government of India, and it is necessary to find other markets.' We may be sure, however, that 'other markets' will be found.

Appendix IX of this Blue Book reads as follows: 'Showing the Opium Alka-

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loids manufactured at and issued from the Ghazipur Opium Factory for the season of 1919-20: —

	lbs.	oz.
Crude codeia . . . . .	100	
Morphine pure . . . . .	8	11
Morphine hydrochlorate . . . . .	1012	11
Morphine acetate . . . . .	1	15
Morphine sulphate . . . . .	33	9
Morphine tartrate . . . . .	9	4
Codeia . . . . .	81	7
Narcotine . . . . .	16	1

'This, of course, is a very small output of alkaloids, but it is a beginning, and will doubtless be developed. At present it is handicapped. The rate of exchange, the restrictions placed on the import, manufacture, and export of opium alkaloids in Great Britain by the introduction of the Dangerous Drugs Bill, and the acceptance of the Hague Convention by the signatories of the Peace Treaty, have caused a serious fall in the market for drugs. The question of finding other markets for our alkaloids is under consideration. . . . One hundred and twenty-five pounds of morphia and sixteen pounds of codeine were sold in India and realized Rupees 21,761. . . . By advertising our laboratory products, a large demand for medical opium in cake and powder and for alkaloids is arising.'

This suggestion is full of sinister possibilities. Morphia manufacture in England and the United States is a paying enterprise, but the profits go to private firms, not to the Government. And if twenty-eight tons of British and American morphia can be sent to Japan in a single year, for re-export to China, why should not Indian Government morphia compete for this market? Especially since 'the ice-making machine referred to last year has arrived, and will, it is hoped, be in full working order by the beginning of next summer.' One wonders whether one of the 'other markets' for this morphia will not be Russia?

## III

In the spring of 1922, the League of Nations, meeting at Geneva, will take up this opium traffic and try to abate or abolish it. The Opium Section of the League is a reiteration of the principles agreed to at the Hague Opium Convention of 1914, by which most of the great countries of the world agreed to restrict the importation, sale, and distribution of drugs, by uniform and comprehensive legislation. America signed the Hague Convention in 1914, and is prepared to act in this matter of uniform legislation, which will be in line with the action taken by those countries which are members of the League. By means of this concerted action by the great nations of the world, it is hoped that the drug traffic will be controlled. Each country will agree to import sufficient opium for its own medical requirements, to be disposed of within its own borders, subject to such legal safeguards as may be necessary. There will be no reshipments, no exporting in bond, such as now make possible the morphia traffic with China, via Japan.

This should do much to lessen the demand for opium at the monthly auctions at Calcutta. However, if certain countries are omitted, or fail to make adequate laws, this will destroy the whole scheme. If Patagonia, for example, refuses to limit her imports, and its Government certifies that it requires a hundred tons 'for medical purposes,' the necessary loophole will be afforded. The entire output of Indian or other opium can go to Patagonia, to be smuggled out again as best it can. However, let us hope for the best; let us hope that no one 'fixes' Patagonia.

There is another point of supreme importance in connection with this action of the Opium Section of the League of Nations, which is the fact that the Crown Colonies and Dependencies of Great Britain do not come under the

jurisdiction of the League. Their affairs constitute a domestic question, to be regulated by Great Britain alone. India, the Straits Settlements, and Hong-kong, where the opium trade is legally established, can continue as usual. India can produce heavy crops of poppies, and, thanks to the skill and enterprise of the chemists at the government opium factory at Ghazipur, and the arrival of the ice machine, this opium can be made into morphia equal to the best British or American. With such bases as the Straits Settlements and Hong-kong, and those great areas in Africa, ready to be utilized at any moment either as markets or points of departure for smugglers, what will have been accomplished? The coming meeting at Geneva will hinge, its success or failure will depend, upon how this question is settled.

There is one ray of hope. The India Office cannot make this fight to retain its perquisites, to keep India and the Crown Colonies outside the provisions of the Hague Convention, reëxpressed in the League of Nations, in the face of strong public opinion — a public opinion, American and English, which will not tolerate double-dealing; a public opinion which will not witness, without protest, an England joining in this concerted world-effort to abolish the opium evil, and passing Dangerous Drugs acts for the protection of her people at home, yet maintaining the opium traffic in her colonies: maintaining, for purposes of revenue, these excellent bases, able to absorb the whole output of India, which may become smuggling headquarters of first-class importance, and so nullify this world-attempt to curb the opium menace.

This public opinion, however, must come from America. Never before were we in a better position to make our opinions felt, our desires known; for in the last few years America has become

the dominant nation of the world, and Europe is looking to us for help and guidance. The European peoples are tired. They are weary and despondent. Now, when the countries of the world are seeking our assistance, our coöperation and good-will, now is our time to express an opinion on this matter. The great mass of the people of England are ignorant of this opium trade, wholly unaware of what their Government is doing in their name. They are not allowed to become conversant with the facts, and the press is closed to all information concerning them. Now and then one hears of an occasional protest, a sporadic outburst on the part of some individual; but it is never followed up, never given publicity, and nothing comes of it.

The governing classes, however, know all about the opium policy, and these represent influential England and direct her affairs at home and abroad. In addition, there are vested interests, manufacturers and importers, who naturally see nothing wrong with a policy of this kind. They probably constitute a large, though hidden influence, and the combination is formidable. But, roughly speaking, it may be said that ninety per cent of the English people are ignorant of what their Government is doing in their name, and would gladly and wholeheartedly join us in protest against it. However, they are not, like ourselves, of a crusading spirit. Therefore, if America chooses to express herself, we need only deal with a small body of influential statesmen, those who direct British policy. At present, they are rather sensitive to criticism of this opium trade, and are sufficiently keen politicians to realize the immense political capital that can be made out of widespread resentment on this subject in America.

The time has now come for us to express our opinion on this matter, in no uncertain voice. In a few weeks the Opium Section of the League of Nations meets in Geneva, and its success or failure depends upon whether or not certain British possessions are to be included, and shall be allowed to take the same steps to abolish dangerous drugs that the rest of the world proposes to take. If they are included, all will be well. But if Great Britain insists upon keeping them out of this common action, maintaining them as centres of production and distribution, the whole value of this world action will be nullified. And there is good reason to believe that Great Britain will try to keep them outside the League, on the excuse that this question of opium is a domestic question; and she will probably succeed in this effort unless public opinion is aroused and is cognizant of what is likely to occur. For our own sakes, we should see that this does not take place. We want the drug evil abolished, and at its source. And we must also feel sympathy for those helpless peoples who are being exploited in this manner.

If America speaks, England will listen. No great power can pursue a policy of this kind without coming into contact with the moral forces of the world, and having these forces call a halt. America is a potent factor in the world to-day, and the statue of George Washington does not stand in Trafalgar Square for nothing. It represents appreciation of, and admiration for, those great qualities which our two nations have in common, and our desire to unite and march forward together in mutual understanding and good-will. We cannot afford to take opposite sides on the question of opium — that must never be the rock upon which we split.

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