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## CHINA'S FUTURE OPIUM EVIL PROBLEM

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ALBERT J. WEBER<sup>1</sup>

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[Since this article was sent to the printer there has appeared in the public press a news item what purports to be a cablegram to the Chinese legation at Washington, D. C., from the Chinese Government dated Peking, as follows:

“Fourteen million dollars worth of opium purchased by the Chinese Government from foreign opium merchants at Shanghai is to be totally destroyed by fire by government order.”

As far as our knowledge extends no verification of this item has been received.—EDS.]

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It may be desirable at the outset to remind the clientele of the Journal of Criminal Law of the magnanimous spirit of our American government, in setting a most excellent example to civilized nations in endeavoring to save men from narcotic drug addiction.

Because we realized the magnitude of the problem, and that a sacred duty was absolutely imperative to carry out American ideals of humanity, and because we were confronted by the pathetic struggle and most lamentable suffering of the Chinese multitude, the American government, solely on its own initiative, caused to be convened an International Opium Commission which met for serious deliberation at Shanghai, China, from February 1st to February 26th, 1909. This action our government took on the strength of its sincere determination to eliminate the oriental opium evil.

This commission did some preliminary good work, but the American government later on, after its review, found it necessary as a wholesome movement and further consecrated to a holy zeal, to initiate another International Opium Conference which was held at the Hague, Holland, from December 1, 1911, to January 23, 1912.

At both these important conferences, representative delegates were appointed by their respective governments representing Great Britain, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Japan, China, Persia, Russia, Siam and Portugal.

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<sup>1</sup>The Foreman of Grand Jurors, United States of America, for the Southern District of New York and New York County Grand Jurors, who has for many years officially investigated illicit opium and heroin traffic, and an authority on opium, morphine and its alkaloids.

The President of the United States appointed the Very Right Reverend Charles H. Brent, D. D., Bishop of the Philippine Islands, as the American plenipotentiary delegate to both conferences. He was at both conferences unanimously elected by the delegates as its president and presiding officer.

The Hague conference was to give force of law and international agreement to the proposals contained in the resolutions of the International Opium Commission which assembled at Shanghai, China, 1899. That government accordingly put forward the following tentative program for discussion by the conference: The advisability of effective national and international laws and regulations to control the production, manufacture and distribution of opium, its derivatives, and preparations, and advisability of the restriction and control of the cultivation of the poppy.

On September 20, 1906, an imperial Chinese edict, signed by the Emperor, was issued prohibiting the cultivation of the poppy and the further use of opium throughout China for a stated period of ten years. Also it positively prohibited the importation of opium from British India for a term of ten years.

Now, however, comes the astounding and most startling news as contained in recent cablegrams from Peking, Shanghai and London, as chronicled in the public press spelling China's resurrection of the opium trade, in that the Government of the Republic of China had bought outright in British India all of the opium that was obtainable for the beneficent sum of £3,000,000, or \$15,000,000, payable in Chinese Government bonds to be liquidated at the expiration of ten years.

In further connection therewith it is cabled that certain high government officials thereupon formed an extensive syndicate for the exclusive control and disposition of this British Indian opium so purchased. A clever bit of astute mongolian camouflage was resorted to by this syndicate in that it was solely organized to operate under a mask as an anti-opium society which was infinitely spurious. Whereas in former years during the existence of the Chinese Empire, these legitimate anti-opium societies composed of high class Europeans and Chinese citizens, did heroic work in that they continuously waged vigorous crusades and their titanic opposition towards the opium evil was most remarkable, in force and effect. It is authoritatively agreed and ordained that this new modern "society" shall sell opium to all patients suffering from narcotic drug addiction, that distressing disease. The Government of the Chinese Republic has bound itself by the recent articles of agreement entered into and subscribed to at

Shanghai, to sell all the purchased British opium, viz: at 6,200 taels per chest to this new officially formed syndicate at 8,000 taels per chest. The general public will, of course, be charged stiff opium syndicate prices that will permit enormous profits to accrue to the esteemed uniformed gold-laced officials.

The Chinese tael is a unit of weight and equals 583.3 grains of one and one-third ounce avoirdupois. The tael is not a coin. The customs unit is the Haikwan tael as circulated in the Chinese Haikwan Province, and its intrinsic value in terms of the United States money is \$1.20. The value of other Chinese taels are based on their relations to the value of the Haikwan tael. The Shanghai tael in United States money is \$1.03. Silver is the legal Chinese standard and the Yuan Chinese silver dollar of hundred cents is the monetary unit of the Chinese Republic; it is equivalent to 0.644—of the Haikwan tael.

Now what China had agreed through its authorized delegates. at these opium conferences, binding itself to abolish the cultivation of the poppy, its production, distribution and control of opium as well as the stoppage of the importations from British India of all opium, is apparently negatived.

I want to warn, however, against too hasty adverse criticism and judgment of the action on part of the Chinese Government, for I realize that perhaps there may be motives and reasons underlying this action which are the result of practical Chinese experiences and revelations in attempting to control narcotic drug addiction solely by certain legislation and official administration.

It is now recognized that our own experience, State and Federal, in the attempted control of narcotic drugs and their use, purely by extremely restricted laws, has failed in great measure for the purposes for which these laws were enacted, and that some of the worst evils of narcotic drug usage have grown very rapidly and thrived more than ever since our laws went into effect. It is also rapidly being recognized that our laws and their administration must be modified, in view of the newer conceptions of narcotic drug addiction advanced during recent years by such authorities as Doctor Ernest S. Bishop, clinical professor of medicine, New York Polyclinic, and Doctor George E. Petty and other scientific and clinical men who have given their undivided attention to the subject matter.

My personal perusal for an extensive period of such authoritative papers as those written by Professor Bishop on Narcotic Drug Addiction and Fundamental Considerations of the Problem, have absolutely demonstrated to me that we are now only in our infancy of under-

standing of the narcotic drug addiction problems, and that many considerations and newly discovered scientific facts, unknown and unsuspected at the time of the Opium Conference in 1912, will have to be recognized and dealt with in any future comprehensive and intelligent handling of the narcotic drug matter.

The wide scope and various character of the voluminous testimony adduced upon all sides of the narcotic drug problem by the Whitney Joint Legislative Committee of New York State in New York City in January, 1918, has given us great food for consideration and many conditions and facts which must be further discussed, debated and applied practically in the handling of the narcotic drug conditions confronting us, and the value of Christian wisdom in solving it.