

OPIUM ECSTASY

OPIUM smoking is a perfectly legal habit in Iran, and opium is rationed out to the army, as to some Indian regiments like the Sikhs. In roadside and frontier posts it is smoked by the police and *gendarmerie*.

It provides the Iran government with a considerable revenue, and its export to China, although decreasing, is a source of income to poppy farmers in about two-thirds of Iran's twenty-six provinces. The only restriction is an official seal, in some districts attached to pipes for purposes of taxation and to prevent addicts who open the bowl from taking out the opium to chew.

Sitting on a rickety old stool I watched an olive-skinned Iranian of aquiline features puffing at his pipe with dreamy solicitude. He sat cross-legged on a wooden bench, wide enough for a man to sprawl in sleep, or for two or three to form a little party round a charcoal brazier, essential to the Persian style of smoking.

The fumes spread across the room, so strong that one knew it must be true, as is said in Iran, that cats and dogs living in this drugged atmosphere themselves

become victims. The pipe was about ten inches long. Its straight stem was made to pull apart, a small circular mouth-piece on the narrower half.

The bowl was short, cylindrical, and hollow, its only aperture a tiny one in the round porcelain wall. Hard-wood stem and delicately patterned bowl were bound together with a ring of polished copper.

There was a well-worn look about this pipe, and the silver pin, which hung by a tiny chain from the black stem, was bent. The bowl, a fragile pink, had broken into a network of superficial cracks.

The smoker took the pin, cleared the hole of its sticky black residue, then cut a fresh piece of opium from a brown stick which exactly resembled a length of modelling plasticine. He pressed the opium into his pipe and warmed it over the glowing charcoals. Pierced a hole in the plastic substance, then blew. Took up a tiny pair of tongs, picked a lump of glowing charcoal from the ornamental brazier, and held it close to the pipe bowl.

As he blew down the stem and out through the tiny jet the

brown opium began to boil; a black viscous fluid formed, its smoke pouring up the nozzle of the pipe into the man's mouth and lungs.

Good opium has a high morphine content, as much as 12 per cent, and its first noticeable effect upon the addict is to make him hungry for more. Remoulding this treachery drug with the little pin, the smoker repeatedly applied hot charcoal.

The opium bubbled up, and the fumes, inhaled as easily as tobacco smoke, passed into the lungs and out through the nose. I watched him cut another piece, smoke another pipe, and then throw back his head, the

nerve controls of the brain relaxed.

His lips flickered into a smile before the defiant attack of fantasy which raced in his mind. He sprang to his feet, stimulated to fresh effort in a fallow world where now grew vineyards, lush melons, cucumbers, and the white and purple poppy flowers. He strode out into the bazaar with a light step, leaving his companions to go on smoking with that half-paralyzed look upon their faces.

I, too, left them to a dream-life among unwhitewashed walls and tumble-down tables, presided over by the hollow-eyed proprietor and his elephantine samovar.—*Michael Langley, in The Spectator (London).*

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When Japan Was China's Pupil

THE lords of Japan asked St. Francis in 1551 how it was, if the Christian religion was true, that the Chinese knew nothing about it.

The Japanese had derived all their culture from China. They revered China as modern Europeans reverence Greece. Xavier noted this, and decided that the best way to win vigorous Japan would be to capture the greater country first.

He began to learn the Chinese script—that dreadful writing which has several hundred characters instead of twenty-six with which we write our language.

But before 1552 was out, he was in his grave on the island of Sancian.

What different history would be written of China and Japan if the missionary from Spain had lived twenty years more and had achieved then his tremendous purpose!—*Irish Press, Dublin.*