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OPIOPHAGISM

OR

PSYCHOLOGY OF OPIUM EATING

BY

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from the author

ART. III.—OPIOPHAGISM.

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“This wonderful drug.”—*Sir Robert Christison.*

THERE is ground for wonder that opium never found a place in Mythology. The source of light and heat, the cold chaste moon, fountains and groves, loathsome animals and insects, abstractions and sensations, have all become objects of worship, but not this drug, nor the flower which yielded the drug, nor the ecstasies or euthanasia which sprang from its use. Were we to accept without qualification the description of these gratifications, of the enlargement of intellect, the sublimation of emotion, given by certain of its votaries, in days when deification had ceased to be a creed or a custom, we might be led to imagine that inspiration has been imparted, and the glories and delights of immortality anticipated. Even the grossest, the most degraded, passions and practices have been raised to the rank of gods, and had their rites and worship. It may be true that the poppy was intertwined with ivy and vine leaves of the coronal of Bacchus; but we are not entitled to believe that its juice had mingled with the wine which empurpled and bloated his cheeks. Even in the land where the poppy grew in every field, and where every field and flower and object was consecrated to, or peopled by, divinities or nymphs or naiads, there is no evidence that the divine essence, which for a season either elevates or obliterates man's consciousness, was ever raised to a higher rank than that of a sleeping-draught. In the same region and climate the thebaic elixir was prized for its medicinal virtue, and is, perhaps, the earliest example of a formula for laudanum, if it be not the nepenthe of Homer. It is certain that the substance was employed medicinally by the Greek physicians centuries before the Christian era, and Dioscorides and others describe the mode in which it was obtained from the capsules of the plant; and all know that its name and properties occur in the works of Pliny and Celsus. In the earlier ages of the Christian era, which form a very remote and misty antiquity in the history of the precious drugs, the allusions to opium are rare, but in 1288 it is mentioned by the physician to Pope Nicolas IV. Somewhat subsequently it appears to have been sent, with camphor &c., as a present to royal personages, and in 1516 it had become an article of merchandise, and is

described by Pyres in a letter to the king of Portugal as in great demand among the nobles and the rich in Egypt, Cambay, &c., where the consumption seems to have been limited solely by the price.* All authorities are agreed that the use of opium as a luxury was communicated by the Arabs, who have likewise been the greatest patrons of hachisch, to the other Eastern nations, and that the rapid and almost universal recourse to some form of the narcotic, especially as a substitute for stimulants, was commensurate and contemporaneous with the spread of Islamism. Absence from one species of intoxicant thus became provocative and a pretext for excess in another more fatal and formidable. From the East it would appear that we have derived, with many nobler gifts and secrets, our knowledge of the powers and virtues and abuses, as well as our supplies, of opium. It is, however, only in recent times that the traffic in this commodity has assumed almost gigantic importance in commerce. Known in China as a cure for dysentery from the ninth century, it has latterly become a means of sensual indulgence, a scourge to millions, and constituting a distinct and lucrative department of trade. It is supposed that 3,000,000 Chinese, and that 94,000 out of 9,000,000 natives of Java, smoke opium. Importation into the Flowery Land seems to have been begun by the Portuguese in 1767, but was continued on a much grander scale by the East India Company from 1793, the amount swelling up to 40,000 chests in 1837, certainly with the connivance of the local authorities, although the import was ostensibly regarded as contraband, and its use sanctimoniously denounced in public edicts as immoral and injurious. And it is suggestive that a similar illicit traffic in this substance has been introduced by the Chinese emigrants to California. The quantities received in this country are enormous and startling. These amounted in 1872 to 356,211 lb., valued at £361,503.† Were the appetite for indulgence in this narcotic or the number of opium-eaters measured by this standard, the decline and fall of our social system might be confidently predicted; but it must be remembered that a portion of this raw material must be utilised in the preparation of morphia and the other alkaloids for exportation, that a large portion enters into one-half of the prescriptions, placeboes, and pick-me-ups made by vendors for medical and domestic use, and that an unascertained and unascertainable portion is applied in the adulteration of beer and spirits, in

* *Pharmacographia: a History of Drugs.* By F. A. Flüchtyer and D. Hanbury. London, 1874. *Passim.*

† Flüchtyer and Hanbury, *ut supra.*

the composition of those hard ales and hoccusing draughts which, taken wittingly or given nefariously, produce sudden insensibility and impulsive madness. There is a wide-spread but ill-defined suspicion that laudanum is secretly consumed by very large numbers of the upper and lower classes as a substitute for or in conjunction with alcohol; that it is a favourite dram with the overworked, underfed, and exhausted artisan; that it is given by mothers and nurses as a soothing quietus to their children and charges, and tends directly to the increase of infant mortality, or indirectly by the production of convulsions and other nervous affections to the impairment of health; but the evidence on these points is vague and imperfect, and an impenetrable veil is drawn over, not the existence, but the proportions of this hideous vice. It is perhaps a tribute to virtue and propriety that the literature upon the subject is almost barren, and that the concealment of the indulgence is so successful as to defeat enquiry. In a celebrated trial in Edinburgh, which took place about forty years ago, when an insurance on the life of the Earl of Mar was disputed on the ground that he was an opium-eater and intemperate for thirty years, all the distinguished medical men of the Northern Metropolis confessed that their experience was too limited to justify them in asserting that the practice was calculated to shorten life, although they could speak to its evil effects upon the constitution. Although this nobleman for some time purchased solid opium to the extent of forty-nine grains, and laudanum to that of one, two, or three ounces, and was supposed to swallow that quantity daily, the jury decided in favour of his trustees. It is probable that at present the prevalence and patency of such a habit, and the supervention of physical and moral consequences on its long continuance, may have furnished medical observers with more ample information; but, unless the indulgence be pursued to excess, or has become complicated with grave maladies and infirmities, it rarely attracts attention. Through the instrumentality of friends, physicians, clergymen, and parochial officials, searching enquiries have been made as to the beverages of the population of manufacturing towns; in certain of these there is declared to be a clean bill of moral health, opium being unknown as a means of excitement; in others it may be sparingly resorted to; but in general the inhabitants of agricultural districts are boldly accused of being wholesale consumers. In one country town, containing a population of about 17,000, ten regular opium-eaters were traced by their weekly application to the apothecaries for supplies of this drug; such persons, however, representing one, and that only the lowest, class. But it is assumed that the persons thus marked

purchased *large* quantities. Of the recourse to narcotics, when taken in what may be sarcastically called moderation, little or nothing is known. I am acquainted with a lady who took laudanum in drachm or ounce doses for twenty years, in the bosom of a large family, without the slightest suspicion having been excited; and with another, whose husband was so shamefully ignorant of the baneful effects of the poison, that he laid in a store of gallons, and administered to his wife twice a day a wineglassful as an important article of diet. Small doses, or doses to which the system has become habituated, are supposed merely to stimulate, but not to disturb the mind; to soothe irritability, to induce placidity, pleasurable feelings, gentle and friendly relations, to restore the strength and activity enfeebled by previous indulgence, and to render the partaker himself capable of discharging his duties and occupations by imparting the artificial and temporary health which at once deceives the victim and baffles the keenest scrutiny. As yet we are ignorant of the minor mental phenomena attending the use of opium in small quantities, or when swallowed at the same time with spirits, wine, &c.; stupid, soporose drunkenness may follow, but it would be rash to assign such symptoms either to the one agent or to the other. De Quincey enters into an animated and eloquent disquisition in order to prove that the phenomena which succeed even excess in the drug are not those characteristic of intoxication; and although we might hesitate to admit the evidence of one who, although a skilled, must be regarded as an interested witness, this distinction must be recognised. Many years ago I was visited by a distinguished scientific friend, known to me to depend, according to his own fallacious convictions, upon morphia for his vivacity and brilliancy. On his arrival his figure was bent, his step slow, his hand tremulous, his features pale and haggard, his eyes sunken and lustreless, and he seemed an old man tottering on the extreme verge of age and life. While dinner was preparing he retired to his room; in the course of about an hour he joined my family. The transformation was complete. His gait was firm and assured; his muscular system was restrung, and had grown in roundness and fulness; his face presented the aspect of youth, with something of the flush of that period; his eye was clear, sparkling, restless; his conversation clever, cheerful, fascinating. In a brief space, and in spite of one or two glasses of wine, the rejuvenescence gradually faded away from my eyes into the spectre I had so recently seen and bemoaned. Twice during the same evening did the same events follow each other in the same succession. A wan and withered phantom retired from our presence, and a bold and buoyant man

returned. My friend's wife revealed that during each absence the solution of morphia was taken; but had I been unfamiliar with his habits, I should undoubtedly and justifiably have referred these alternations to caprices of tone and temper, to the vagaries of genius, or to bodily decrepitude. Notwithstanding the doubt and darkness which shroud this as well as all the other tragedies of our life-drama which close in self-destruction, partial glimpses are obtained behind the proscenium which suggest the revolting extent of this evil. Dr. Lyon Playfair, M.P., in examining a medical witness from America, before Mr. Dalrymple's Committee on Habitual Drunkards, put the following case and question:—"Let me quote this case as occurring in a particular street in Manchester, where three druggists supply between them 600 families of the poorer classes weekly with opiates; are you likely to have any such cases in Philadelphia?" In answer to which it is stated: "There is no doubt that it is done to some extent. There are druggists who keep the ordinary laudanum, what is called officinal laudanum, of a given strength, for medical purposes purely, and who make at the same time a diluted or more inefficient laudanum, for the purposes of drink. I know of cases where persons are in the habit of purchasing a milder form of laudanum by the pint or quart, and using it instead of alcoholic liquors." But it is added that "inebriation by opium is not known to the people as alcoholic excess is."* In a recent letter from this distinguished philanthropist to a friend, now in our possession, he states that the quotation used by him was extracted from his report on the "State of Large Towns in Lancashire, II. Report of Health of Town Commissioners," where is likewise to be found evidence to the effect that in Preston 1,600, or about one-third of the working population, are known to be in the habitual use of narcotic drugs for children, allowing half an ounce per week for each family. It has been estimated that in Amoy from 15 to 20 per cent. of the inhabitants are opium-smokers, while in China generally the proportion is from 5 to 10 per cent.; a calculation which, although perhaps only approximative, would indicate that millions have become infected with this ruinous propensity. Upon more trustworthy data, it would appear that in the island of Singapore 15,000, out of a population of 70,000, are similarly addicted.† While this is the rarest, and perhaps most deleterious, form in which the delights of opium are sought in Europe, it must not be regarded as entirely exotic. I do not here allude to the dens in London, where the Lascars and other Orientals seek their

* *Minutes of Evidence before Committee on Habitual Drunkards*, 1872, p. 160.

† "On the Habitual Use of Opium." By Robert Little, Esq., Surgeon, Singapore. *The Journal of the Eastern Archipelago* for January 1848.

national gratification, which have recently been described and delineated in an illustrated periodical,* and shadowed forth in the fragmentary novel of "Edwin Drood"; but to instances where our countrymen have sought for solace and somnolency from smoking opium or opiatized tobacco. A still more infrequent mode of securing the anodyne effects of the drug is by hypodermic injection. I have known two ladies who adopted this method. In both the pretext was to allay the pangs of neuralgia; but in one, whatever the origin might have been, the craving became morbid, and the self-conducted operation had been so repeatedly and clumsily performed by the sufferer, that 300 wounds or thrombi could be traced upon the abdomen and thighs, when, either from the local irritation arising from them or from the poison, insanity supervened, and she came under medical examination. A somewhat similar case is given in the *American Journal of Insanity*,† where a woman, labouring under peritonitis, consumed one to two drachms of morphia weekly, by imitating the surgical operation so frequently and awkwardly as to have pushed the needles perpendicularly through the integuments, 300 of these having been voided during life or found in the viscera or superficial abscesses after death, which followed abstinence for three months during an attack of insanity. In a large number of individuals the solid substance is taken as a quid, gradually dissolved in the mouth and swallowed with the saliva; but by far the largest number resort to laudanum. Although so popularly known and so constantly ordered therapeutically, morphia does not appear to be so great a favourite as crude opium; although the facility with which the alkaloid and its salts can be concealed may lead to error in this respect. I have known a case in which the preference of the muriate was evidently determined by the ease with which it was conveyed by letter, and another in which a cough and lozenges served to mystify all around as to the practice, which was pushed, however, to utter unconsciousness of very long duration. In many such examples, the salt has been administered as a medicine, and has been subsequently furtively obtained to assuage pain, as in cancer, neuralgia, &c., or to enhance the pleasures of society. It would be impossible to determine the amount required to satisfy the longings of any class of opiophages; perhaps each individual begins with small doses, gradually, insidiously, almost unconsciously, even experimentally, increased; but my own experience, and that of others, point to two, three, or four ounces per day as the average quantity taken by confirmed and

* *The Illustrated London News*, August 1, 1874.

† *American Journal of Insanity*, July 1872.

chronic consumers. A patient under my care placed one drachm of the solid substance in his cheek, and replaced it when necessary. Sir R. Christison mentions a similar case, and speaks, though not upon his own authority, of persons who swallowed nine ounces, eighteen ounces of the tincture, with impunity.* It is recorded that, calculating the consumption of 299 smokers in Singapore, each individual used 30 grains of an extract, equivalent to 50 grains of crude opium, per day. By another estimate of 603 smokers, the same proportion is obtained; but, when carried to excess, 116 grains have been used, and, in fact, the amount seems to have been limited by the inability to procure the drug. One hundred and forty pounds are said to have been the monthly supply demanded by the inebriates of the island. These quantities, however, sink into utter insignificance when compared with the indulgence of certain amateur visionaries of our own island. Coleridge (we quote the statement of his friend Cottle†) took from two quarts of laudanum per week to a pint a day, and, upon one occasion, a quart in twenty-four hours. De Quincey—we quote his own words: “I descended suddenly from 320 grains of opium, that is, 8,000 drops of laudanum, to 40 grains, or one-eighth part;” and again, “In about four years, without any further efforts, my daily ration had fallen spontaneously from a varying quantity of eight, ten, or twelve thousand drops of laudanum, equal to 480 grains of opium, to about three hundred.”‡ It should be understood that those who seek the extinction of life and suffering—in other words, dying made easy—effect the object by much smaller doses. These statistics naturally suggest an enquiry into the causes and circumstances under which such an indulgence is voluntarily initiated. Headed by De Quincey, the majority of victims assert that refuge from the pangs of toothache led to the adoption of this cure. Coleridge, who blamed rheumatism, and the misinterpreted or misapplied advice of a medical journal, is the representative of another class; but pain, in some place or form, sleeplessness, malaise, are often referred to as its origin; while the habit is engrafted and engrained by the suffering, the sinking, the wretchedness, the restlessness, which attend abstinence, or by the positive physical pleasure, and the imaginary mental exaltation and expansion, which are supposed to be secured during its earlier stages. I have the confession of an eminent literary celebrity that, overtaxed by toil in com-

* *Edinburgh Dispensatory*, 1848, p. 682.

† *Early Recollections, chiefly relating to the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge during his long residence in Bristol*. By Joseph Cottle, vol. ii. p. 149.

‡ De Quincey, *Selections, Grave and Gay*: “The Confessions” &c. pp. 220, 240.

position, recourse to opium was accompanied, not merely by disappointment, but by a disastrous interference with the elimination of thought. Even in De Quincey, who boasted of the restorative, even creative power of the stimulant, his publishers could invariably detect, by his mode of writing, and the hazy vague style of expression which he adopted, the point at which his natural genius was obscured or ceased to act, and when the influence of the drug came into operation. It has been asserted that much of our poetry has flowed from fountains of gin and water, and it would be of passing interest could it be discovered whether the sleep in which "Kubla Khan" was written was natural or comatose, and which of the inspirations of De Quincey were diluted by his laudanum negus.

In reference to the pain which is so frequently pleaded as an apology for opium-taking, it should be remarked that if a dossil of lint be steeped in thirty drops of laudanum, and the pledget thus soaked laid on the course of a nerve proceeding from a whitlow, for example, and throbbing and thrilling in exquisite pain, the suffering is mitigated; if placed in contact with a convulsed muscular fibre, the movement ceases. If the same quantity be swallowed, the carkings of care are blunted, the tears of grief are dried, even the tremor of the terror-stricken is calmed, and the clamorous conscience is lulled to that sleep which the wearied covet. Are the processes, by which these different physical and psychical conditions, so widely separated by their nature and origin, interfered with, the same, or in what manner are they allied to each other? How does this vegetable juice triumph equally, though temporarily, over a toothache and a heartache? In no case can the pain-queller be detected in the circulation, although in cases of poisoning its alkaloid &c. have been so; but we are in no degree assisted in our attempt to answer this question, or to trace a connection between the effects enumerated, by supposing that the liquid or solid opium acts directly upon the nerve tissue. The difficulties as to the operation of the drug are even augmented when we follow it in systems where there is no pain to assuage, and into the realms of partial unconsciousness, or where it saps the foundations of the moral nature. The delirium of the opium-eater or smoker, and the dreams which follow its legitimate use, are not merely pleasurable, but are generally alleged to impart exquisite enjoyment, and such brilliant fancies as to transcend all real and healthy impressions received in the sober and waking state. Although the effect of opium is universally and invariably, though in different degrees, agreeable, soothing, stimulating, elevating, the intensity of the action, and the

mode in which sensibility and imagination are affected, greatly vary; but, whether it soothes or stimulates, is the poison imbibed by the nervous tissue, creating changes therein, incompatible with pain, or is the poison or its influence—and it would be difficult in such a juxta-position to define this term—conveyed along that tissue to the brain, as the centre of perception, or to the will, which may direct attention, whatever that may be, to the source of suffering, structural or moral, as the case may be, and may not this influence act in all instances upon sensibility, or whatever constitutes the sentient Ego itself, for of the exercise of such influence upon supposed molecular changes we know absolutely nothing? These questions are greatly complicated by the fact that both morphia and Indian hemp seem to transmit from the central consciousness, and to localise in different and distant spots, certain sensations, in the former case itchings, and in the latter case feelings of weight, increased size, &c. It has been stated that the most difficult problem to be dealt with is the nature and consequences of the psychical operation of the drug. I have very recently conversed with a person who has taken two to three ounces of laudanum a day for twenty-four years, sometimes with, but more generally without, the perturbing adjuncts of stimulants and chloroform. His mind is intelligent, but not emotional or fanciful, and the analysis of his experiences is plain, prosaic, and practical. Sought in early years as a relief from toothache, what proved a remedy became a gratification, as imparting calmness, passiveness, agreeable indolence, and what was conceived to be a keen appreciation of certain external impressions, such as music. It is quite obvious, however, that this intense sensibility in his case, as in that of many others, was entirely subjective, and depended, not upon the concord of sweet sounds, but upon the abnormal condition of consciousness. When De Quincey, during his “opium debauch,” visited the opera, it was the fumes and the fancies arising from his potations, and not the harmony and lengthened sweetness long drawn out—the drug, and not the drama—which caused the “thrilling,” “shivering” unrest and divine afflatus which, as he affirms, crowded his paradise. Acting under such an erroneous belief, it has come to our knowledge that a public speaker who was to make his *début* in the debate on the Reform Bill had recourse to his usual potion, but, a cunning adversary having delayed his opportunity of addressing the House, he utterly broke down in oratory, memory, and self-possession, either because of the potency, or the waning potency, of the drug; and that a clergyman, trusting in the pulpit to what had been a faithful support under other circumstances, became

confused, incoherent, and unintelligible. The only positive assertion of the exaltation of creative artistic power which we have met with is in a description of the success of the opium-smoking fan-painters of Swatow, but this testimony applies only to three members of a numerous craft, and does not connect the beauty of the design with the state of exhilaration or phantasia.* Among the first and least fantastic pictures drawn by De Quincey, the most gifted and successful painter of such delights, is the following:—“In an hour what a revulsion, what a resurrection from its lowest depths of the inner spirit, what an apocalypse of the world within me! That my pains had vanished was now a trifle in my eyes; this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed. Here was a panacea for all human woes; here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered; happiness might be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket; portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint bottle, and peace of mind could be sent down by the mail.” The second stage of these ecstasies may be suggested by the following passage:—“O just and righteous opium! that to the chancery of dreams summonest, for the triumphs of despairing innocence, false witnesses, and confoundest perjury; and dost reverse the sentence of unrighteous judges; thou buildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles, beyond the splendours of Babylon and Hekatompylos; and, from the anarchy of ‘dreaming sleep’ callest into sunny light the faces of long-buried beauties, and the blessed household countenances, cleansed from the ‘dishonours of the grave.’ Thou only givest these gifts to men; and thou hast the keys of Paradise, O just, subtle, and mighty opium.” At a more advanced period his impressions are thus expressed: “I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. Thousands of years I lived, and was buried in stone coffins with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and was laid, confounded with all unutterable abortions, amongst reeds and Nilotic weeds.” “I ran into Pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms.” † Apart from

* *The Straits of Malacca, Indo-China, and China; or, Ten Years' Travels, Adventures, and Residence Abroad.* By J. Thomson, F.R.G.S. London, 1875.

† De Quincey, *Selections, Grave and Gay*, pp. 115, 213, 268.

the rhapsody which accompanies these descriptions, they contain nothing but what the luxuriant imagination of the poet might have suggested; the immensities or immeasurabilities of time, the immobility or disinclination to move, have all been conceived by commonplace participants in such dreams; but the struggles, the agonies, and the remorse, real or affected, which succeed, connect this account with the history of Coleridge. To this I would refer not for gorgeous or grotesque phantasmata, but in order to introduce other unhealthy mental manifestations, which appear to arise from long-continued narcotism. The most startling of these are (1) the total abolition of natural ties and affections, his estrangement from and indifference to his family, his lavish expenditure of all his means upon secret indulgence; (2) his pretended penitence, piety, reformation, while he adhered to his indulgence, deceived his physicians, friends, guardians, craved protection in an asylum, and felt so humiliated as to prefer "annihilation to heaven"; (3) his disregard of truthfulness, honesty, sincerity, and his inability to exert his will in any other direction, or for any other purpose except the gratification of his morbid appetite, an infirmity which he has most graphically defined as "an utter impotence of volition." In many of these impairments or vitiations, De Quincey and the less distinguished crowd of inebriates, in various degrees, participated. In depicting an opium-smoker and his resort in Singapore, Dr. Little says: As he entered, his looks were the picture of misery; his eyes were sunk, his gait slouched, his step trembling and his voice quivering, with a sallow cast of countenance, and a dull, unimpressive eye. He who runs might read that he is an opium-smoker, and, if he could read still deeper and dive below appearances, he would pronounce him an opium sufferer; but, soon after replenishing his pipe several times, enjoying during the intervals the waking repose, agreeable sensations, and misty reveries, following the inhalations which have filled and been retained as long as possible in his chest, he sinks into the perfect bliss or complete oblivion which he has desired; but, after a glazing of the eye, relaxation of the features, and deeper and deeper inspirations, and a disturbed sleep, he awakes to a consciousness of his real position and misery. Languor, lassitude, loathing of food, aching of the limbs, gloom, and indefinable wretchedness succeed, and are only mitigated by new and, perhaps, increased indulgence. This unfortunate returns to his neglected home either to tempt its inmates to join in his orgies or to obtain means for their repetition. In order to accomplish this object the sacrifice of prudence, property, respectability, and honesty is made. Of 40 prisoners in the House of Correction at Singapore, 35 were

opium-smokers; 17 of these, with 18s. a month wages, spent 24s. on opium; one, with 12s. a month wages, spent 24s., theft supplying the difference. Stimulants in Europe lead to crimes against the person, opium to crimes against property; stimulants to violence, opium to depression, cunning, fraud. In Singapore and Penang, of 22 opium-smokers 19 were condemned for offences against property, and only 3 for offences against the person. Opium-smokers constitute 80 per cent. of those confined in the House of Correction, Singapore, for vagrancy and police misdemeanours, but only 40, or at most 50 per cent., of those in prison for larceny, highway robbery, burglary, and other similar offences requiring boldness and enterprise. These facts have been obtained from a highly coloured and eloquent description of a demoralisation involving nearly one-fifth of a population, only semi-civilised it is true, but otherwise industrious and intelligent.* They have been confirmed by all travellers in the same region, and one of the most recent of these gives as a solution of inexplicable conduct, "True, they smoke opium, they lie without restraint, and whenever opportunity offers are dishonest, cunning, treacherous."† They differ in degree, but unfortunately not in kind, from the characteristics of our indigenous gluttons and epicures. Coleridge's untruthfulness and disregard of the duties due to himself and others were notorious. He lavished funds contributed by the generosity of friends for his own support, in purchasing his sensual gratification, and he pretended to sentiments and resolutions altogether incompatible with his conduct and degrading objects. Of those infected with the same contagion whom I have known, all except one, and he was a moderate inebriate, have been untrustworthy, especially in reference to their ruling passion; given to romancing, exaggeration, wide and wild assertions or absolute falsehood, and have plunged into debt and difficulties in defiance of prudence—even physical necessities. While I cannot accept the penitential whinings of these persons as genuine, I believe in their sufferings and recognise in the exhaustion, the prostration of mind and body, the sensation of falling to pieces, of sinking to the centre of the earth, the despair of reaching relief by any other means; as a reliable exposition of their feelings, and as the only palliation of their infatuation. I knew a domestic servant who expended the whole of her wages on laudanum; a theological and hard-working weaver who, although he did not ruin, impoverished those around by his devotion to the drug; and others, belonging even

* "On the Habitual Use of Opium." By Robert Little, Esq., Surgeon, Singapore. Abridged from *Journal of the Eastern Archipelago* for January 1848.

† Thomson, *ut supra*, p. 17.

to the affluent classes, who have stolen in order to indulge. This dulling, deadening, or extinction of the promptings and principles of conscience affords further countenance to the theory that the opiate influence, by whatever road it may travel, reaches primarily and directly, without dimming or disturbing the intellectual functions of the brain, the moral sense, the godlike attribute of our nature, and renders it expedient that such an infraction or weakening of responsibility should be recognised and estimated whenever crimes or offences against law have been committed by the habitual opium-taker. If the state of drunkenness disannuls a contract, liberating from engagements involving money or marriage, the confused and perverted notions of right and wrong in narcotic inebriation should be admitted as an element in the consideration of juries and judges.

As might have been expected, the narcotic produces very dissimilar mental disturbances in different races, although the excitement still involves chiefly the lower propensities and passions. The Malays of Malaysia, addicted to opium and betel, are described as indolent, lazy, passionate, given to gambling; but the idiosyncrasies are such as to be roused into frantic fury by the drug, displayed in that homicidal impulse and blood-thirst which has been called "running a muck."* The selfishness which narrows the mind to a single craving, reducing the personality to a sort of living Nerbudda, and benumbs our highest impulses and motives, extends to those of mixed origin, the affections of parents and children, the stirrings of ambition, and even the attractions of mirth and enjoyment. The sensation of hunger is either obliterated or deprived of its urgency and of the relish with which its suggestions are attended to, and, for long periods, opium-eaters, like dram-drinkers, seem to subsist upon their stimulus, or to live upon themselves; but, ordinarily, the appetite returns; and, although the majority appear attenuated, withered, and, unless under the immediate spell of the toxicant, haggard, yet in many, digestion, nutrition, and all the functions upon which the preservation of health depends are re-established, and the frame becomes rounded, robust, and even obese. This accommodation, or rather the compromise between a normal condition and the presence of a poison, may go on for half a lifetime, and is compatible with various routine duties, with literary, even public, labours. Perhaps the most striking illustrations of this reconciliation of the majesty and inveteracy of habit are afforded by persistence in the indulgence, in despite of the continuance of pain, and when sleep can no longer be commanded nor courted, and, lastly, by the ineradicability of the craving when it has failed

* Figuier, *The Human Race*, p. 366. London, 1872.

to realise any of the objects by which it was fostered. The reformation of De Quincey, however, and of Coleridge, who is said to have survived his compulsory abstinence twenty years, and the cure of less illustrious devotees, either abruptly or gradually, or by moral impressions, show that the fiend may be mastered. Under certain circumstances it is possible that even excess in such an indulgence may not materially shorten life, although it entails many physical ailments and infirmities, and periodic exhaustion and misery. Dr. O'Shaughnessy says that "the longevity of opium-eaters is, in many parts of the East, of proverbial notoriety.* The experience of Burnes in Lahore and McPherson in Canton corroborates this opinion, but Dr. Little feels convinced that in Singapore opium-smoking destroys life rapidly, and that through such instrumentality, and from other causes to be speedily mentioned, the population would be greatly diminished or become extinct, were it not recruited and supported by constant immigration from the mainland and other countries." Sir Robert Christison, in his most interesting monograph "On the Effects of Opium Eating," † gives a table which was misinterpreted as implying that the duration of life was not affected by the prolonged abuse of the narcotic, but he now entertains a very different opinion. An abridgment of the contents of this table must be introduced as bearing upon the psychology of the subject, so far as the duration of the life of the mind is concerned.

1. A young lady, initiated by her nurse when ten years old, took laudanum largely for fifteen years with impunity.
2. A licentious female took one drachm solid opium daily for ten years, and died of phthisis, aged 43.
3. A littérateur took nine ounces occasionally, ultimately reduced to nine drachms, and was alive when 45 years old.
4. A lady took excessive doses for twenty years; died aged 50.
5. A lady took three ounces daily for many years; remained healthy at 50.
6. A lady, aged 60, has taken the drug for twenty years, and is healthy.
7. A charwoman who took two ounces of laudanum daily died at 60.
8. A littérateur took sometimes twenty-six ounces daily, that is of laudanum three parts, alcohol one part, for 45 years; healthy at 60.
9. A lady took half an ounce of laudanum daily for nearly forty years, and was tolerably healthy at 70.
10. An old woman took four drachms of laudanum for forty years; died healthy at 80.

Besides many of whom I have received information, within the last forty years there have fallen under my own notice, for longer or shorter periods, twenty-two cases of

* *The Bengal Dispensatory and Companion to the Pharmacopœia, chiefly compiled from the works of Roxburgh, &c. &c. &c.* Calcutta, 1842.

† "Cases and Observations in Medical Jurisprudence." *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. xxxvii. p. 123.

confirmed opium indulgence. I am ignorant of the fate of two of these, six are alive, four in impaired health, fourteen have died, twelve in the meridian of life, and from causes apparently unconnected with their vice, except in two instances, which were traced to suicide or recourse to monster doses of the tincture.

Sterility and impotence are believed to be results of this practice, and to assist in the diminution of the population of Singapore; and the extinction of the reproductive propensity, and of those tendencies which lead to and preserve the social and family compact, must operate in the same direction. While there are individuals who have traced back their emancipation from habits of intoxication to opiates and hypnotics, there are many more who have sought in stimulants an adjuvant or correlative force in the production of suspended sensibility and semi-unconsciousness. It is probable that narcotism, less than alcoholism, arouses the propensities and the passions, and that it presents a greater seduction to intellectual men than to those of grosser temperament. There is a list before me of distinguished opium-eaters, including W. Wilberforce, Dean Is. Milner, the first Lord Erskine, Mr. Addington, &c. The "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" are said to have proved most suggestive and destructive to the educated class. Stimulants appear to be more potent in the enfeeblement of judgment; in lighting up the passions, and in dulling the senses, than narcotics. I have known examples of anæsthesia, of touch, taste, smell, in opiophages, and of hyperæsthesia, but more frequently of perversion of hearing and vision. In many of these the evidence of the latter state indicated delusion, or that partial delirium which is felt by all those who have taken opium as a medicine in the transition from waking to sleeping, and who fail to distinguish between external impressions and the suggestions of the partially regulated fancy. A noteworthy illustration of this fell under my own observation. A popular lecturer upon science had occasion to illustrate some proposition by a diagram, and he drew, or conceived that he drew, upon the black-board at his side the required figure. He had made a mere scratch with the chalk; but seeing distinctly in his own consciousness, subjectively, the lines which he had designed for the eyes of the spectators, he went on to demonstrate what his inner eye alone saw, revealing the condition which had been previously concealed by rapid and high-sounding declamation. If we suppose that this lecturer projected to and upon the black surface what he demonstrated and what his mental eye saw, but what no other eye could see, he had acquired by the

aid of ebriation what Goethe claimed to possess by the exercise of his will, and what those under the excitation of the Artificial Alienation of Haschisch experience, although they are fully convinced that they neither see nor hear the external impressions which impart such vividness and beauty to their conceptions. From two persons who had swallowed large doses of *Cannabis Indica*, I have received vivid pictures of their sensations: in the one a phantasm of Noel Paton's painting of "The Midsummer Night's Dream" was visible at the distance of some yards for several hours, and, subsequently, he was affected with Amnesia, forgetting the words of the Lord's prayer, and even the first section of a sentence which he was in the act of uttering. The narrator was blind. In the other, a feeling of what was described as *specific levity*, as if every step and movement would project the body into the upper air, was added. Moreau, in his monograph* on the *Cannabis Indica*, mentions illusions as to the annihilation of space and time, and the tendency to minimise external objects, as characteristic of its operations. The revelations of Mahomet must have been, as the dreams and delusions of the Assassins certainly were, inspired by haschisch.

It is opportune here to direct attention to the continuance or immutability of the purely psychical creations of opiophages. Notwithstanding the apparently kaleidoscopic changes in the images presented to De Quincey, there was an interminable succession of the same temples, Malay faces, and so on; and we have encountered more obscure observers who were incessantly haunted by an opening door and going into a street on a winter's night; who for years were about to leave by a coach, and to go up for a University examination; and who ever saw the same motto or sign inscribed upon the same portico. This stationariness or immobility of idea may be an analogue of, or in correlation with, that concentration upon a single series of sensations of mere passive physical enjoyment, and of that muscular inactivity or indisposition to movement, which constitute the Elysium of those who depend for happiness upon the drug. It is certain that rest, repose, reverie, constitute the Utopia which is desired and sometimes secured. It is equally certain that the stability of position, the horizontality, and the suspension of muscular action which are thus produced and encouraged, are often followed by diseases and disturbances of mobility. Almost all opiophages, even the wretched pauper who craves an eleemosynary draught at the counter of the apothecary, are subject to tremors. Coleridge, when he visited Miss Hannah More, could not, when

* *Du Haschisch et de l'Aliénation Mentale.*

unassisted, carry a glass of wine to his lips, and yet he was at the same time lecturing to large audiences, and in strains of great eloquence, in Bristol. Of those who have come under my own care or knowledge, a very large proportion have lost control of the muscles, three have had epileptiform attacks, two were paralysed in one arm, and all, with one exception, had an unsteady and ill-balanced gait. It may be that these phenomena are all symptoms of the impaired or impotent volition which has been previously alluded to, whether the will be ineffectively applied to a change of purpose or a change of position, to the abandonment of a habit, or to the commencement of new instincts and actions; but it is, at all events, evident that they are abnormal, independent of physical changes, for De Quincey, Coleridge, and certain others with whom we have come more immediately into contact, have reformed, and that they occur independently altogether of mental diseases and distempers strictly so called. A distinguished author has claimed for opium, in addition to its physiological effects, that, when somnolency is warded off, the faculties become clear, the ideas brilliant, precise, and under control, the power of application more intense, the conversational energies improved, and the muscular movements facilitated. All these are the indications which follow renovated energy, an abundant meal, a moderate quantity of generous wine, or joyous and enlivening company, and there is inexpugnable proof that such manifestations are never called forth in the hebeté, the stupid, the illiterate, and the taciturn. Were there any evidence of a continued excitement or tax upon the intellectual powers, or of deep-seated agitation of the emotions, in place of a mechanical exercise and monotony of these, we might expect, conceiving always the supposed enormous breadth of opium consumption, that it would assume the foremost rank among the causes of insanity and imbecility; yet, of about 10,000 inmates of asylums of the etiology of whose mental disturbance reliable information could be obtained, not above four can be traced to such an origin. A superintendent of a large institution has written to me that he never knew an instance of any mental affection which could be referred specifically to narcotism. In my own practice, of the twenty-two cases before cited, five were committed to asylums, two voluntarily, in order to escape temptation, one as labouring under dipsomania, being then addicted to brandy, one as the victim of dormant moral insanity, complicated with paralysis of one arm, and one as maniacal following a convulsive attack; but, with these exceptions, I cannot recall the history of a single patient who, either wittingly or involuntarily, had been deprived of reason by opium.

It is consistent with the scope of this enquiry to insist upon facts which are incidentally adverted to in the preceding pages.

1. The pain, which is assuaged by the local application of opium, is not a mere exaltation of the sensation of touch, as neuralgia, heat, and the prick of a needle appear to be all transmitted along the same nerve and nearly at the same time; cannot be placed in the same category as hardness, weight, &c.; and is not, in relation to consciousness, more an external sensation than the grief or remorse which are mitigated by the same means.

2. That the power of opium to suspend or permanently to enfeeble volition and conscience cannot be fairly referred to its agency upon the cerebral structure, or upon any localised psychical power.

3. That the suspension or enfeeblement of these conditions, and of the propensities and affections, while the intellectual capacities remain unimpaired, indicates the existence of a plurality of mental faculties, independent in their action, scope, and durability.—If the juice of the poppy can gradually alter or subvert our moral nature, apart altogether from disease or delirium, there must be a more intimate relation between the Anodyne and Sensibility and Consciousness than between these and Cerebral Substance, with which other facts appear to show that they are connected.