

## THE OPIUM HABIT.

### SOME EXTRAORDINARY STORIES OF THE EXTRAVAGANT USE OF THE DRUG IN VIRGINIA.

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The opium-eating in this vicinity still goes on; and as some cities and some sections have a reputation for the number of drunkards they generate, so Staunton has the name of being the great opium city of this part of the country. And it is deplorable to observe how the evil has increased. At a conference of druggists, held day before yesterday, it was reported that the increase in 1877 over 1876 was 95 per cent.; that 1876 over the preceding year was 64 per cent., and that 1875 over the preceding year was 50 per cent. The evil is like an endemic. It is in the atmosphere. It seizes a person, never to let loose. A man sees another using the terrible drug, and before he is aware of it he is eating opium himself. When I telegraphed, three weeks ago, about the sensation that was created here by certain developments, not half had been told. It is true that there have been no deaths equal to that of the lady who dropped dead from disappointment because she could not get her opium; but the young man who swalled 15 grains of morphine at a drug-store counter, three or four weeks ago, and lived, took 20 grains at one pop since, and died. He was a young Jew, and had only been a victim to the vice a few years. As I intimated before, the asylums here—the lunatic, inebriate, and others—consume a great deal of morphine in a legitimate way, but what they use is only a drop in the bucket.

Nearly 100 pounds of opium a week. That is what the druggists reported, which is pretty heavy for a city of 8,000 or 10,000. A large quantity of the truck sold in Staunton is bought by country people, for the craving for it all down the valley is as strong, if not stronger, than it is in the city. Your correspondent has just visited all of the apothecaries here, and the tales that they tell are fearful. "See that handsomely-dressed English lady passing on the other side of the street?" "Yes." "Well, she is one of our best customers. She commenced to take morphine about two years ago. She used to send a servant for quarter-grain doses; now she uses four-grain doses." "Have you many such customers as she is?" asked the writer. "Oh, yes. Let me see, [Mr. Allen counting on his fingers,] we have 15 regular lady customers that I think of at this moment, who take over two grains of morphine at a time, and 12 men who take between two and six grain doses at a time." "You think the evil here is on the increase?" "My goodness! Yes." Your correspondent found Mr. Tyree waiting on a bevy of dashing girls. There were four of them, and they seemed to be "sweet sixteens." When they left the store Mr. Tyree said: "There they go; they are some of your opium-eaters." "What! Those pretty things?" "Why, yes; they commenced to use the dangerous stuff only a few months ago; now they each spend \$6 a week for it. It is sad," he continued, "but there is no stopping them after they once begin it." At Mr. John Benner's I was informed that two of the eight leading ministers of the city used opium; that one of them took it in the shape of laudanum. But the most startling statement made by any of the apothecaries was by one (he requested me not to mention his name) who looked at his prescription list of last year, and found that he had sold 79,593 doses of morphine during the year.

Mr. Forman said to the writer, "You have no idea what means many ladies use to get opium without their families knowing it." "Are most of your opium customers ladies?" I asked. "Yes; I have about 40 regular lady customers, and about 20 or 25 male customers. I have seen married women come to the door and send a servant in with the money; they wouldn't come in themselves for fear they would meet some one who would tell. Sometimes they buy enough at once to last for two or three months. I found one lady buying so much opium that I thought it would be an act of charity to tell her husband. I did tell him, and he said, 'I know she uses it, but let her have all she wants; I can't stop her.'" Mr. Forman continued: "I collected a bill of \$125 of a prominent citizen a few days ago. It was for opium sold to his wife, who died a month or two ago. I was afraid he would refuse to pay it, but he didn't say a word. He settled without grumbling." The prescription clerk at Wayt & Brother's said that one of their customers was a young lawyer who drank a quart of laudanum a week.

Another was a book-keeper who drank a gallon of laudanum in three weeks. I called upon Dr. B. P. Reese at his office. He is a man of 45, and is one of our leading physicians. He told me that he had been trying to get some legislation passed on opium for over a year. The member from this district had promised to prepare a bill for the House of Delegates, levying a heavy tax on opium, but he had not yet presented it. Dr. Reese thought the druggists were wrong to sell opium. He said he never prescribed it except in very exceptional cases. Dr. Murphy thought the bell-punch used in bar-rooms, which levies a tax of 2½ cents a drink, had driven many poor people to use opium. Dr. Dilkes attributes the spread of the opium evil to the fact that all of the pulmonic remedies contain a large share of opium.

Dr. Taylor agreed with the druggists that the evil was on the increase not only in Staunton, but all along the valley. He thought the preachers ought to preach against it. "But then," he observed, "one of the parsons himself uses opium to excess." All the junk-dealers and pawnbrokers have much to tell. "I believe she would sell the last rag off'n her back," said old Lloyd, "but what she would have opium." This remark was addressed to a small, ragged child who had just brought the junk-dealer a nice shawl. It seems that the girl was a frequent visitor at Lloyd's, and came to sell things for a lady who was once wealthy, but who had been reduced to penury by her extravagant craving for opium. The junk-dealer said that she used to send silk dresses to the pawnbrokers, but now she had come down to selling things the pawnbrokers would not take. Isaac Harris, a pawnbroker, told the writer that most of his watches and rings had been left by young gentlemen who were well-known opium-eaters.

"Something must be done," said Mr. Markland, an elder of the church. "The evil is one of the saddest I ever beheld. The church doesn't seem to be any safeguard, for I believe that half the church members in town are addicted to the deplorable habit in question." At the meeting of citizens held some days ago a resolution was passed requiring druggists not to sell opium unless on a doctor's prescription, but the druggists said they would have to sell it unless there was some law passed against it.

Harrisonburg is a small city down the valley. The evil is as great in proportion to the size of the place as it is here. Mr. Baker, one of the druggists of the town, was in Staunton a day or two ago, and in conversation with the writer remarked: "I don't believe there are 20 people in Harrisonburg who are free from the use of opium. Harrisonburg used to be a great place for bar-rooms, but now I believe the apothecaries beat them." The reports from Woodstock, a town in the valley, 50 miles from Staunton, give similar accounts. Dr. Hanson, a well-known M. D., says that he believes there is something in the morphine of the Shenandoah Valley that creates the craving for the evil drug. Mr. Albert Rogers, who lives at Winchester, says that the farmers in his vicinity have recently become terribly addicted to opium eating. He says there were three Yankees who removed to the Winchester neighborhood. About a year ago they went to farming. Neither of them had ever tasted opium. Now they each eat a pound a month. There is no telling when this evil will end. The general feeling seems to be that the only way to stop it is to force legislation. Opium ought not to be allowed to come into the valley. But the trouble is that so many people use it that it will be a hard matter to find enough with clean skirts to carry public sentiment against it.