

Drugs in Relation to Prohibition

(By P. McA. Carrick.)

NOTE: In view of the overwhelming importance of the subject of drugs, and its relation to the application of Prohibition and also of the proposed action by the Vancouver Kiwanis Club, the B. C. M. welcomes Mr. Carrick's statement of the case as a contribution towards practical consideration of this social problem.

As with the preceding article on "The Prohibition Muddle in British Columbia," this magazine does not necessarily endorse the article as a whole. In questions of such public interest we believe in letting writers state their cases in their own way. For when there are points of difference regarding the forms and methods of progress or reformation, good alone should follow from keeping an open mind and giving a fair field to those with whom we may differ, provided we believe they are sincere in their interest in the common weal. —(Ed. B. C. M.)

The general public are inclined to look upon the use of alcoholic stimulants and the use of narcotic drugs for other than medicinal purposes as two separate and distinct problems.

Only since the advent of prohibition has it come to be suggested that the two questions are related, in that possibly prohibition of the use of alcohol as a beverage has caused or may cause an increase in the use of habit-forming drugs.

In reality the two questions are one and indivisible and should be so considered and treated.

When we come to consider even a few of the many substances that are used by the various peoples of the world as stimulants or narcotics and take into account the fact that substances that are used by one race of people simply as stimulants, when used by other races are indisputably dangerous narcotics, we see that the two questions are so intermixed as to be inseparable.

It is an indisputable fact that the great majority of human beings of all races show an instinctive desire for some form of stimulation over and above natural sustenance.

There seems to be an almost universal desire for something that will enable the human body to carry on during periods of stress or exhaustion, or at other times to produce a feeling of physical and mental well-being. It is also undeniable that nature seems to provide for this want in nearly all lands and climates, and where the form of stimulant naturally provided is adhered to little or no evil arises from its use. It is only when we find exotic stimulants or what, for want of a better term we might call unnatural stimulants come into use that great evil arises.

Southern Europe is made up very largely of countries where the grape is native and grows luxuriantly, and where the making of wine has been the universal custom from time immemorial.

We do not hear of much evil arising in France or Italy from the use of the native wines, but when a Frenchman becomes addicted to the use of absinthe he becomes a dangerous and generally a useless citizen.

The natives of some of the South American states use the leaves of the *Erythroxylon* Coca very extensively. They can cover long distances on foot and can go for many hours without food with little loss of physical energy if they have a plentiful supply of Coca leaves and they suffer no harm from their use, nor is there any marked reaction or depression when the stimulating effect of the Coca has passed.

On the other hand if a member of any of the European races uses the alkaloid obtained from the same Coca leaves or its salts regularly, the result is after a time almost invariably insanity and death.

Some of the races of Eastern Europe and many of the

Asiatic races use opium freely in the same manner yet they suffer no harm from its use nor do they experience any depression when deprived of the drug.

On the other hand the Western European who becomes addicted to the use of opium or morphine becomes an absolute wreck physically and mentally if the habit is persisted in.

Other Oriental races use Hashish or Indian Hemp and seem to suffer no evil effects. Some time ago an article was published in the *British Pharmaceutical Journal* describing the effects of Indian hemp. It was written by an English chemist who had experimented with the drug on himself. The result, as described, was to make him practically insane while the effect of the drug lasted and its continual use would, in his opinion, have made him permanently so.

Some of the peoples of North-western Europe use sulphuric ether alone or mixed with alcohol. Whether it is due to racial idiosyncrasy or to climatic conditions, we cannot tell, but they do not seem to suffer any great damage even from such a terrible habit. About twenty years ago ether-drinking became common in the North of Ireland and the results were so appalling that special legislation had to be passed in the parliament of Great Britain to deal with the evil and ever since ether is classed so far as Ireland is concerned as one of the most dangerous poisons known.

Such instances which go to show that so far as stimulants or narcotics are concerned, what is "one man's meat is another man's poison," might be multiplied indefinitely.

About fifteen years ago a strong effort was made in Great Britain to bring about what would have been one of the greatest temperance reforms in history. It was proposed to prohibit the sale for beverage purposes of any whiskey other than that distilled in a pot still from whole malted barley. This reform was killed because, being a real temperance movement, the extreme teetotal party refused to support it and besides the whole weight of the enormously wealthy raw-grain spirit industry was pitted against it.

So far as the mixture of races which goes to make up the non-Oriental population of Canada is concerned it would be found that if the use of alcohol was confined to sound, genuine wines, pot still malt whiskey and liquors brewed from malt and hops, only very little evil would ensue.

In Scotland the use of whiskey and malt liquors is almost universal and has been so for centuries. Would any sane man say that the population of the rural districts of Scotland is a decadent race. In the highlands of Scotland, and in the agricultural and pastoral sections of the lowlands, the use of alcohol is confined almost entirely to native ales and malt whiskey. Where this is the case the evils of drinking are practically non-existent.

In the great industrial centres there is no questioning the fact that the evil is a great menace to the well-being of the people but there the conditions are different. What is most largely used is so-called blended whiskey which consists for the most part of raw-grain whiskey distilled in the Coffey apparatus or still more deleterious Berlin potatoe spirit. During the anti-prohibition period in British Columbia there is no questioning the fact that a great deal of evil arose from the use of alcohol, but this was largely to be accounted for by the disgraceful quality of the drink sold over the bars. In fact even in the wine stores it was almost impossible to procure a fine malt whiskey.

To any practical person the idea of absolutely prohibiting the use of stimulants is a chimera. The proposed bone-dry conditions would require one half of the population to be employed watching the other half. There is no doubt that if it were attempted to impose a bone-dry condition in this province, it is not the harmless and healthful form of stimulants that would be offered for sale clandestinely. One ounce of cocaine, or morphine or their salts would go farther